

Performance Matters

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To Interview or Not Interview



Interviewing candidates remains one of the most popular methods to evaluate employees for selection and promotion. I can't tell you how many times I've heard managers say, "I can just tell...." The unfortunate truth is that most of them cannot.

I have to admit that I too can fall prey to this way of thinking and have on many occasions been fooled by a candidate's interpersonal skills into thinking that the person has high potential. Then, when I look at the test scores and simulation results, I find that my impressions were more wrong than right.

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While interpersonal skills are definitely a component of a person's potential, being able to impress people interpersonally does not tell you if they can make good business decisions, influence people, or if they will be properly motivated or not. Interpersonal skills are only one piece of the skill set that professionals and leaders need in order to be successful.

What we can and can't tell from an interview

The answer to this question all depends on how you conduct an interview. In a traditional, "unstructured" interview where you go

over someone's résumé, develop rapport, figure out if you like the same restaurants or not, etc., you are really only discovering if you like the person and if they have some minimal qualifications.

To learn about the person's job-related skills, ask targeted questions, or test them. I'll discuss more about this issue in later newsletters, but suffice it to say that if you want to know whether someone will show up for work on time, ask them something like the following:

How many times have you been late to work in the last year?

Don't sit there talking about your favorite restaurant, and then at the end of the interview ask something like, "Do you think you can show up for work on time?" You will **ALWAYS** get a resounding yes to this question, whereas the former question will give you specific information that tells you if the person will be timely or not.

You want to gather relevant information—and not useless information about restaurant tastes. Also, give careful attention to whether you can evaluate various skills in the interview. If you want to measure a person's intelligence and problem solving ability, use a test. Don't try to evaluate that in an interview.

Developing specific questions is also important—and often is not easy. As I mentioned above, you can't just ask someone if they will show up for work; you have to phrase the question in a way that gives you useful information. [PA](#)

To Get the Most Out of Interviews:

- 1 Identify the key skills and abilities that the person will need to possess in order to be successful. Then figure out whether you can evaluate these in an interview.
- 2 Develop specific questions before the interview starts.
- 3 Develop an answer key that identifies what a weak, average, and strong answer looks like.
- 4 Ask the same questions of each candidate and don't be afraid to wait for a candidate's answers or probe if you need more information in order to make a decision.

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