

TALEXES

TALENT SOLUTIONS

ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS
A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF THE INTERVIEW

ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

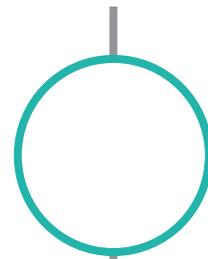
A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF THE INTERVIEW

The clock on the wall seems to be crawling along in the quiet reception area as the nervous candidate rehearses his responses, waiting for the door to be opened, to shake hands and to sit and be interviewed. We've all found ourselves in his shoes. But how many of us give as much thought to the candidates we interview? Why don't managers nervously rehearse questions, wringing their hands as they ponder the best way to deliver each one? What can we do to ensure that our interviews draw the necessary amount of information from the prospect without overwhelming them or giving them the wrong impression?

THE QUESTION OF ANSWERS

It can be difficult to garner the correct information from a candidate using traditional interview methods, and asking for answers that can be attained from a resume or application wastes time without determining whether the candidate would be capable of the position. There are several important factors that you should be looking for when interviewing anyone, but they can all be reduced to three aspects:





PREPARATION

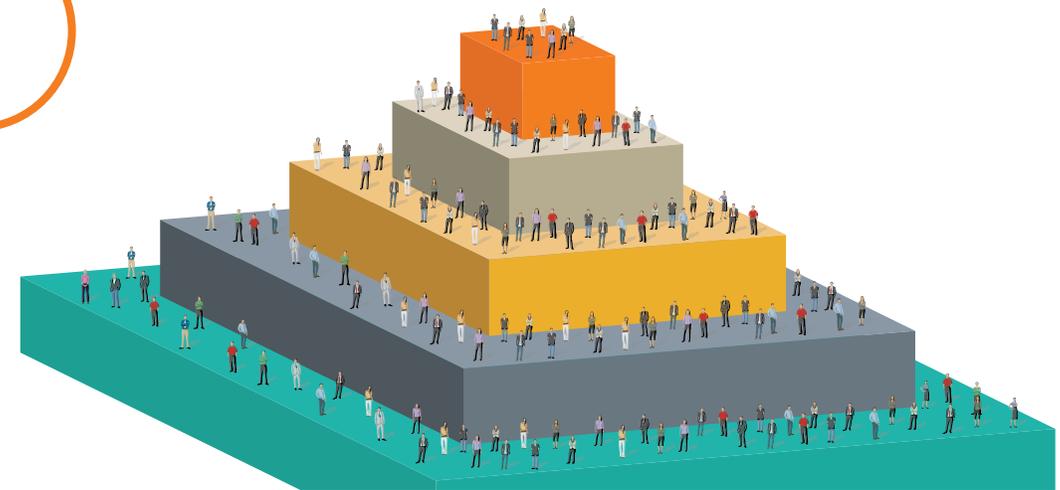
When a candidate applies for a position within a company, it is important that they know enough about it to ensure familiarity with the company's business practices and organizational culture. When you ask him or her why they would like to work for your organization in particular, you are looking for something more than "I need a job". Be careful about phrasing these questions, as it is easy to lead a candidate to an answer if you are looking for something specific. Asking "What do you think of our Mid-Level Leadership programs?" will coax the candidate to answer positively and express interest. Asking "What about our company attracted you to apply?" will require knowledge about the details of your business that will indicate the level of preparation the candidate brought to the interview. A quality hire will be able to tell you what they feel your company can do for their career.



"What about our company attracted you to apply?"

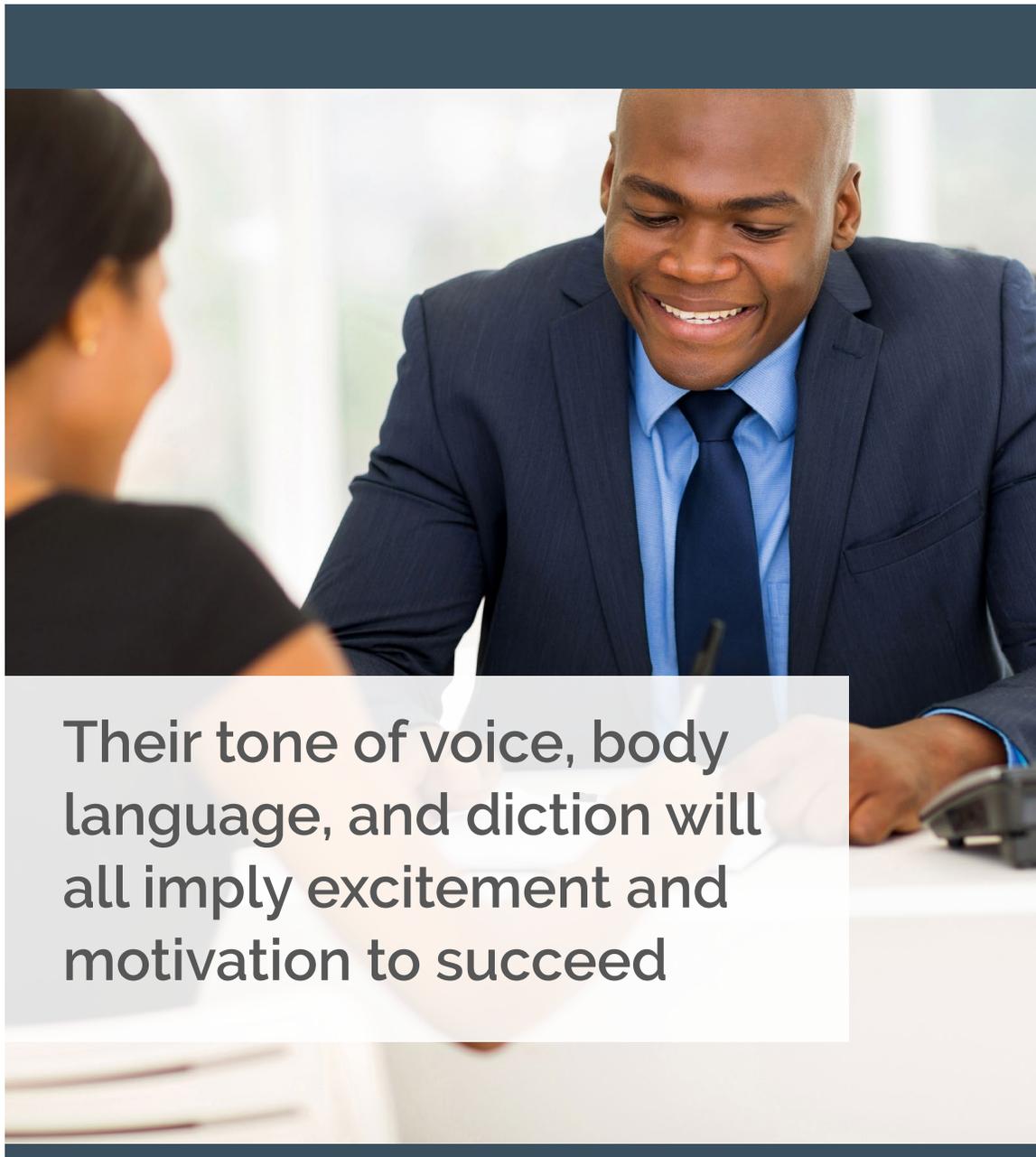
AMBITION

Every applicant executed some form of planning to end up in your office. But if the candidate cannot answer clearly when you ask about their short- and long-term goals, it is a likely indication that they have not taken the time to prepare a plan for their future. This could indicate that their interest in your company is temporary or lacks gravity. That is not to say someone without a clear plan should not be hired. You are looking for clarity of communication and conviction. Often, college graduates do not know exactly how the next few years of their lives will play out, but if they are firm in their resolutions and clearly communicate what they would like to accomplish (even if they do not know exactly how), they are aware of the benchmarks they have set for themselves and are in the process of creating a method as to how to reach them. Ask questions like "What is your end goal after the next few years and what have you done to prepare for the changes you intend to make?" If the candidate has a thorough plan, they will be able to give you specific answers.



Below are examples of the various responses you may receive from different candidates.

- » **College Graduate** - "I'm looking for an entry-level IT position from which I can advance within the company and gain experience that will eventually help me start my own IT firm."
- » **Experienced Employee** - "I hope to be promoted to an executive position within the next two years. I have completed the Executive Leadership Training Program through my current employer and intend to host a seminar next month."
- » **Veteran Employee** - "I intend to stay with my next company for at least five years, and am planning to complete my Ph.D. dissertation in Human Resource Management by May of next year."



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ENTHUSIASM

It is clear when you speak to a person that is passionate about something. Their tone of voice, body language, and diction will all imply excitement and motivation to succeed. Look for these qualities in a candidate. When asked why they chose a particular career field or line of work, they will often reply with "It's my passion". Not everyone you hire will have a long-standing connection to a career, but looking for someone who is genuinely enthusiastic about a position can help mitigate motivation problems in the future. Avoid candidates who lack inflection or animation, or tell you they're "just looking for a job." This could mean their interest in your company is superficial and that they will leave the moment a better opportunity arises. Listen for varied tone of voice, anecdotes about aspects of the job they enjoy, words like "love," "fulfilled," and "gratification", and compliments about the way their previous company handled the more difficult aspects of the position.

Interview Methodology

With these questions, the information you will be able to garner will pertain directly to the specific job for which the candidate is applying. This is perfectly fine for some positions, but leaves much to be desired. What if the candidate would be a better fit in a different vacancy? What if he or she does not answer you honestly? Are these questions sufficient to gain an adequate understanding of the candidate's ability to perform the job? When you hire someone on the basis of an interview alone, you are afforded only a few minutes of his or her time. You gain an understanding of the way they conduct themselves in a professional setting within a limited timeframe. The candidate has time to prepare and, in some cases, rehearse. The interview is as vital to the hiring of an employee as any other pre-hire protocols but, as we will see, is not the only option to acquire useful information about a given prospect.



The Oxford Bibliography states that “Interview methodology is perhaps the oldest of all the social science methodologies”, going on to say the practice of asking questions to garner information about a potential hire has been in use since the social sciences have existed. But the people being interviewed have evolved. Their needs, habits, preferences, personalities and culture have undergone massive reworking. And yet the interview remains the same. How can your business hope to increase the scope of your interviews to encompass the growing needs of the workforce of today?



In a 2003 research study published in *The Journal of Applied Psychology*, Robert P. Tett and Dawn D. Burnett of the University of Tulsa propose a personality-based job performance analysis that takes context into consideration. They explore the correlation between certain personality factors and various positions, and emphasize the correlation between specific traits and specific jobs. They conclude that “personality based selection systems

are likely to benefit from greater attention to the psychological processes by which traits are expressed in job performance.” Put simply, they discovered that not only does personality factor into an employee’s performance, but that the way their traits are expressed can be directly correlated to the type of job that is appropriate for them. For example, an extrovert may be reserved in a solitary job, or an employee who would otherwise make an effort to go above and beyond may find themselves stifled in a job he or she does not enjoy. Many researchers have corroborated this hypothesis, confirming that personality traits and behavioral habits correlate directly to an employee’s work ethic and capabilities. Meeting with a candidate for an hour will not derive any information about the intricacies of their personality, what makes them “tick” so to speak. And the task of gleaning this information from a candidate within the time allotted is next to impossible, which can leave many businesses feeling stuck when their new hires don’t perform to expectations. But what else could they have done?

Fifty years ago, the answer would have simply been “nothing”. But recent breakthroughs have equipped us with tools to aid in the hiring process. Options like drug screening and background checks help to acquire information some candidates prefer not to share, but will do little to inform you of your candidate’s personality. Then, we would have had to use our best judgment to gain an understanding of the prospect in the limited time we had with them. Now, we are able to utilize assessments to compile unbiased, objective information that can be used to determine whether a candidate will fit within the position. Not only will the assessments provide useful information about a candidate’s skillset (will they fulfill the requirements of the job?), they will help you gain insight into their habits and traits (will they excel at the job?). In an article for Forbes’ online presence, Lisa Quast provides some helpful tips about implementing assessments within your company.

Today's Problems Tomorrow's Solutions

- » Choose the right tests and certify validity and reliability
- » Ensure tests meet all EEO guidelines
- » Conduct thorough research if purchasing tests from outside companies
- » Avoid test questions of an overly personal nature or that are considered offensive
- » Do not rely solely on test results to choose candidates

Quast goes on to say “Employers can increase the likelihood of hiring high-quality candidates by using pre-employment tests to help screen and select the best candidates for jobs. Administered correctly, pre-employment testing can help companies save time and cost in the selection process, decrease turnover, increase productivity, and improve morale.” By implementing assessments in your company, you can share in these results, reducing turnover and resulting in a happier, more engaged workforce.



We’ve seen that interviews are vital to the hiring process, as they give the candidate a first impression of the company and initiate communication between hirer and prospect. But, as research has indicated, interviews cannot be depended upon solely for the acquisition of a candidate. The need for information about a candidate’s ability to perform and succeed has mandated that a form of personality testing be required to accurately depict an employee’s fit within a position. This research has fostered a new breed of employment screening, the assessment. With assessments, information can be compiled that transcends the face-to-face interaction of the interview and provides a depth of knowledge about the candidate that no other tool can provide, resulting in more qualified, longer-term hires. When your company hires more effectively, your workforce becomes more efficient, more motivated and more productive. And it all started with a few questions.

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