



"Practical Problem-Solving Advice for Publishers"

Optimal Interviewing Strategy for Recruiting: A McHugh Select

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Quick Read

Early in my executive career, my boss told me, "Recruiting is one of the most important things you do for the organization as a manager." He also counseled, "Take your time and be deliberate so that you are thorough in the recruiting process." Over the years, I have come to learn the wisdom of that advice.

Contents: Interview Goals; What You Want to Learn from an Interview; and Twelve New Questions to Ask

Interview Goals

The recruiting interview is an important part of the hiring process, arguably the most important factor. So I suggest you develop an interview strategy. How do you develop an interview strategy?

First, ask yourself, "What do I want to accomplish in this interview?" "What specific duties of the position are of critical importance?" Then, move on to the resume and look for the matches between the candidate's experience and the position requirements. Next, develop specific questions to probe into the information on the resume.

Tip: Check the candidate's LinkedIn™ page. **You will** sometimes find extensive background information on the individual's accomplishments and work experience not found on the resume. From this additional background information you can write specific questions that relate to the position requirements.

For example, in one recruiting assignment that I handled, a candidate wrote on his LinkedIn page that he "as an independent contractor had written engineering white papers for firms X and Y." This position required a background in engineering writing. I wrote questions delving into the candidate's work for these firms and getting him to elaborate on this writing experience.

What You Want to Learn from an Interview

Here's what you want to learn from an interview with a finalist candidate: What do I feel about this candidate personally? What is our chemistry?

- How will my work colleagues relate to this candidate? Peers? Subordinates? Higher-placed executives? Volunteers? Authors? Customers? Vendors?
- Based on the previous question, is there an organizational fit?
- Does the candidate answer questions directly and succinctly?
- Does the candidate dance around the questions? Does the candidate obfuscate habitually?
- Can the candidate quickly organize his/her thoughts in a logical, cogent manner?
- Does the candidate say, "I don't know"?
- Is the candidate prepared? Does the candidate ask questions about the job, and the organization?
- Does the candidate smile? Have a sense of humor?

Twelve New Questions to Ask

Interviewers usually ask questions such as "What are your strengths and weaknesses?" "Why did you leave X company?" "Where do you want to be in five years?"

Nothing is wrong with those boilerplate questions, except every interviewee rehearses and can give an answer they think you want to hear. Why not be creative and ask questions that delve into what you really want to know about a candidate?

Consider adding questions that candidates rarely prepare for, yet the answers provide insights into the candidate that are deep and revealing. For example:

1. How would your friends describe you in college? How would your first set of work colleagues describe you? Describe yourself now. *Look for growth and maturity.*
2. Have you ever had a detractor in your career? No names. Why was that person a detractor? What was it about the relationship that didn't work? *No detractors? Be careful, as the person with no detractors does not exist.*
3. Have you ever had to fire someone? How did you fire them? What was the experience like? *Firing is one of the toughest tasks for leaders. Does this person have empathy?*
4. How would you describe yourself in three words outside the work environment? What do you consider to be your natural strengths? *Many find this a difficult question to answer on short notice. I look for self-confidence and a positive self-image.*
5. What do you do without any effort that your peers struggle with and can't even match? *This question is always a tough one to answer because we are conditioned to subdue boasting so as not to be thought of as egotistical. My experience is that most accomplished people have big egos.*
6. What is natural for you? *This question reveals two things: how reflective is this candidate and, how self-aware is the candidate?*
7. Everyone in life has gone through good, bad, and ugly. How did you manage the worst part? What did you learn? *This question probes what was learned from success and failure. Everyone has failures.*

8. Tell me about a time when you gave your team an assignment and it didn't go well. What was the process? What did you learn from that experience? *Everyone will boast about their successes in team leadership. What about those leadership assignments that didn't go well? You want to learn how self-critical this individual is.*
9. How curious are you? Cite an example of your curiosity. *My experience is that curiosity is the basis of formulating questions, and hypothesis building, which leads to discovery and positive change. For example, the most famous inventors, such as Thomas Edison, Alexander Graham Bell, and the Wright brothers, were all noted for their curiosity.*
10. How willingly do you accept "business as usual" and how willing are you to question the status quo? *Successful organizations need people who challenge the status quo and will bring positive change.*
11. How creative are you? Cite an example of your creativity? *This is again a question that shows how self-aware the candidate is. Creativity is an important part of innovation.*
12. Outside the headlines, what were some of the most interesting things you've noted in the last couple of weeks, and tell me why and what you did about it? *If the interview bogs down, this is an optional question that can add some life to your dialogue.*

Idiosyncratic Nature of Recruiting

Recruiting people who will succeed over the long-term is an imperfect art. No one formula exists that guarantees you will be right on every new hire. However, my experience is that careful interview preparation is the one key element of success. You will increase your chances of success in hiring the top candidate if you add some of these 12 atypical questions to your interview.

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John B. McHugh is an experienced executive recruiter with a specialty in commercial and nonprofit publishing, including college, business, technical, professional, religious, and association publications. He has written extensively about the field of effective

publishing management, drawing on his expertise as a successful executive of both book and journal programs.

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About John B. McHugh

Practical Problem-Solving Advice for Publishers

John B. "Jack" McHugh is a 40-year veteran of the publishing business. Jack has worked as an executive for Houghton Mifflin, Wadsworth, and Saint Mary's Press. Jack is also an experienced association publishing executive. For seven years, he was Publisher and Director of Programs at the American Society for Quality and for a two-year period, he served as the Interim Publisher at the Project Management Institute. Jack's specialties include association/nonprofit publishing, book publishing, executive recruiting, journal publishing, rights and permissions, organizational design, and startups. He serves as an advisor to the Friends of Kletzsch Park in Glendale WI <http://goo.gl/6PhtU4>. Jack is the manager of two LinkedIn™ groups, Association and Nonprofit Publishing and The Self-Employment Forum.

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