

Recruit right, or pay a big price for wrong choice

By Ronesh Puri

The rarest ability is the ability to recognise ability. It is never easy to gauge a candidate's ability through an interview of a couple of hours. Unfortunately, even though interviews do not really reveal everything about a candidate, they are still used universally to gauge ability as nothing better has been discovered yet. Therefore, it is fairly certain that interviews will continue to be relied upon for decades.

In spite of an increasing number of sophisticated psychometric tools, these are not the answer as their results are dependent on the respondent answering questions truthfully. This does not happen as candidates are smart and give appropriate non-contradictory responses. With mis-hiring increasing and now accounting for over 50% in the top 100 organisations of the world, the stakes are high for improving interviewing techniques, especially as mis-hiring costs an organisation more than 26 times a candidate's package.

Here are some Dos and Don'ts for interviews...

Meet candidates more than once: It is critical for an interviewer to understand a candidate's DNA and what s/he is like as a human being, as the softer side is important too. Therefore, it is prudent to meet the candidate more than once. In the first interaction, understand the candidate's DNA, and in the second interaction focus on the competencies. For a CEO position, in fact have three interactions — it will help in the third interaction if you focus on what the plan of action the candidate has if you hire him/her.

Ask for examples: Candidates love to talk about their past in glowing terms and their endeavour would be to present themselves in the best light. Therefore, expect exaggeration as well as the candidate stating what the interviewer wants to hear. Therefore, it is important that an interviewer strives to ascertain the truth. To get to the truth, it will help if we focus on the following: (a) How the results were achieved? (b) What was the strategy? (c) How were the roadblocks overcome? (d) What was the candidate's individual contribution? Then, we should ask the candidate to give examples on which we can probe deeper.

Focus on gauging key drivers of a candidate: Actions of every human being are governed consciously and subconsciously by what are the key drivers of an individual. Understanding these will reveal a lot about the candidate, which often helps us gauge what actions the candidate is likely to take at a job.

Understand what candidate is not good at: More than strengths, it is really important to understand what a candidate is not good at. Also, discerning weaknesses is not easy as candidates will try to hide them. However, as every candidate is likely to be not good at a minimum of half a dozen things, it is important to know some of them as forewarned is forearmed. Also, it will help you provide a support system to help the candidate succeed. We must realise that every human being has more than nine weaknesses. So, however great the candidate is, understanding that everyone will have his/her share of idiosyncrasies is important. Therefore, it will help to focus on this, as it will give us a far sharper perspective about a candidate. While on this, do probe the failures of the candidate and do understand the learnings from them.

Don't focus only on the past too much: Often, we tend to spend a majority of the interview on the past and what the candidate did at every assignment. It is indeed important, but do realise that it is not everything as the experience is the past and our interests are more determined by the future. The past is dated, as it then was a different world with far less complexity. Do understand about the candidate from the past, but it is more important to co-relate it with the future and what we want achieved.

Finally, we must understand that the purpose of the interview is to understand the DNA of a candidate, what are the candidate's key drivers in life and career, what the candidate is truly passionate about and what are the strengths as well as areas of improvement.

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