

Can We Trust This Applicant?

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This article is for anyone who is ever involved in interviewing potential new employees.

For the past several years, I have served as an alumni mentor for students at my alma mater, Georgia Tech. Last week, the primary topic of conversation was “interviewing.” As you can imagine, interviewing for their first permanent full-time employment is a big deal for students.

Everyone already knows that interviewers are interested in the skills that the candidate has to offer. The students’ initial concerns are of how best to describe the academic abilities they’ve gained in their schooling. After all, they’ve recently worked to highlight them in their first formal resume.

Interviewing is a skill in itself. A good interview response tells a story. The candidate establishes a contextual situation, explains the action that he or she took, and describes the resulting outcome.

I encourage the students to comb through their experiences for powerful stories they might tell about how they’ve applied their skills. That’s more helpful for the interviewer than merely naming academic courses. The interviewer has far richer material from which to ask penetrating follow-up questions. The interview becomes more like an intriguing dialogue than a question and answer session.

Once the students grasp this concept, I then encourage them to develop engaging stories that demonstrate their willingness to serve others and their commitment to keeping their promises.

Why focus on those two particular additional characteristics? Aside from being able to do the work, these two areas contribute to building healthy relationships. All success in business, internally with team members and externally with customers and suppliers, is built on healthy relationships.

Despite extensive training programs, few interviewers understand their ultimate objective. Their mission is to identify individuals who can be trusted with some significant responsibility within their organization. In its simplest form, we “trust” individuals who can effectively do the work required (abilities), gladly serve their colleagues and their organization’s customers (honorable motive), and consistently handle their commitments, even if the going gets tough (reliability).

Competence, a service orientation, and reliability are the three basic elements of trust. All three have to be present and routinely evident for a person to be highly trusted. These three characteristics are very hard to assess without knowing a person for a long time. However, that’s the task of a person conducting a sixty-minute interview. (For more insight on this concept of trust, visit my website (see below) and scroll down to the article entitled “Are You Worthy of Trust?”)

Consider looking at the questions you currently ask in your interviews. Does each one give the candidate opportunity to describe his or her reliability, honorable motive to serve, as well as skilled capabilities? You do yourself and your organization a disservice if you concentrate solely on the past functional and technical skill areas of the applicant.

If you are looking for future leaders who you can trust to quickly become role models in your organization, take a fresh look at the questions you are asking in your interviews.

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