



THE SCIENCE OF

Candidate Selection

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If I had a goal for today's session, it would be to inspire you to become the best interviewer you are able to be. When we interview well, we hire the right people, it goes terrifically, and it's a huge gain on both sides. It's expensive when it doesn't go right, for both the company and the individual.

Consider interviewing as an opportunity to get to know people, to get to hear their story. In today's world, I think that is pretty important.

So where does candidate selection start? At SSCA, we start by looking for four basic things:

1. How well do people select themselves in?
 - a. In other words, do they take responsibility to select themselves *into* the company? Hiring is a two-way street. The company does 50% of the process and the candidate does the other 50%.
2. Are there any obvious signs of distress, other than plain nervousness that comes with interviewing?
3. Do they know what they are saying "yes" to?
 - a. At the end of the day, this is one of the most important questions.
4. What we can do as a company to help them be successful?

Environment

- Please, when they walk in your building, treat them as if they are coming into your home as guests for dinner on a Saturday night. Welcome them. Have our time together be the best 30 minutes, 90 minutes, or 4 hours of their day (or even their week).
- Be transparent. Be open. Be friendly. Your goal is to put them at ease, to establish a rapport. Dan Collett, one of the SSCA partners, likes to say, "If you want to hire a Mercedes, you have to be a Mercedes."
- Please be present, totally present for this person for this amount of time. You are making a serious decision for this person and for the company. Be completely present. Introduce them to people as you walk past them. Create the Mercedes environment, as Dan likes to say.
- Let them know that you are a notetaker at the start and take notes. The notes you're looking to take are many, but an important aspect of your notes is the keywords you want to ask about later.
- Show up as healthy. Show up as caring. Show up as present, open, caring. You're glad they're there. Put them at ease. They're terrified.

Skills & Techniques

- Over the years, we have encountered some incredibly talented interviewers. You start to see a theme among the best. They have one trait above all else: listening. What do they listen for? Keywords.

- The best interviewers have a particular skill called **“drill-down.”** They listen for keywords and follow-up on them by asking more questions. If there is one thing you get from this webinar, we would like this to be the one thing.
 - For example, I recently interviewed someone who said that their experience in a company was *wonderful*. I've interviewed someone who referred to their boss as having *grit*. One person referred to their former organization as *pressure-packed*. These are sample keywords; drill-down on them later.
- The best interviewers take notes. They write down the keywords so they can drill-down later in the conversation. Drill-down doesn't have to be immediate. In fact, it's better to wait. It's easy to return to them by saying, “You know, a few minutes ago, you mentioned it was pressure-packed. What did you mean by that?”
- The best interviewers have a plan. The best companies prepare well. The internal people work to agree on what they want, what they really want for the role. What are the must-haves? What are the like-to-haves? Even to the degree of temperament, traits, and competencies. The goal is to have alignment before posting the role, before interviewing, and definitely before deciding.
 - Some examples of competencies include interpersonal skills, team orientation, coachability, and technical expertise.
- Preparation also includes decision-making. How will you, as an organization, make the decision? The *how* and the *who* are the primary two questions around decision-making. There must be internal alignment around who will be making the decision.
 - Some companies will have one decision-maker at the end of the day, e.g. the hiring manager. Other times, we see decision is reached by consensus. The majority wins, though perhaps one person doesn't agree. By the way, it is important that the person in disagreement feels that they've had their say.
- One of our partners, Susan Peirce, is a phenomenal interviewer. First, she establishes a rapport. Then, she simply asks, “Can you tell me a little bit about your life?” It gives such opportunity to drill-down. And three hours later the interview is complete. We highly recommend this technique.

Questions (for the interviewer to consider)

- How well are they selecting themselves in? Are they taking responsibility to do so? Did they investigate the company? Some of the corresponding people in the company?
- How's their energy?
- Here's a big one: Do you feel as if they are living in the present? Do you feel as though they are conscious and aware? Do they really hear your questions?
 - When people “select themselves in” well, they answer the question you asked. They make a point of answering the questions you ask as opposed to answering questions you don't ask.

- “Now that you know this organization, you’ve met people, heard the requirements of the job, how do you fit?” This is the most important “selecting-in” question.
- See how discerning they are, how thoughtful they are. Does this job make sense for the trajectory of their life or career as they view it?
- To what degree are they self-aware? We have found that people who are more self-aware are also more coachable, more open to feedback.
- **When you have a swing and a miss, the experience can be very valuable. You planned, you prepared, you got the stakeholders involved, you did everything right and still missed. You must do a post-mortem and discuss it What did you miss? What happened? The learning and responsibility-taking that comes from a post-mortem is huge, so please do them.**
- I also want to know why people leave companies, if somebody selected themselves poorly into a company. If you see a four-month experience at their last place, say to them, “I guess this wasn’t your best experience.” They’ll acknowledge it. If they blame the company, it’s not a good sign; it’s distress. If they say, “Yeah, I missed it. I swung and missed,” then ask them to say more about it. You want to see if they are going to take responsibility for selecting themselves in.

Sample Interview Questions

- Screening Interviews: Perhaps choose +/- 5 of the following questions:
 - How did you hear about this position?
 - What do you know about our organization?
 - What would you like us to know about you?
 - Why do you want to work for us?
 - What can you do that someone else cannot?
 - What do you look for in a job?
 - What are you good at professionally? What are you not so good at professionally?
 - How would your last boss rate your performance? How would your boss’s boss rate your performance?
 - From what you’ve seen in the description of this job, how’s it fit for you? What might be the least attractive part of the job?
- What feedback have you received in your life? How’d it go? What feedback worked for you and what didn’t? How do you best like to receive feedback?
- What have you developed about yourself? What are you continuing to develop in yourself?
 - Unfortunately, many senior people have stopped growing a long time ago. We want to hire people who make an effort to continue growing. As we know, there is no neutral: We are either growing or dying.
- What have you learned about yourself in the last few years?

- This is a great question. The answer will demonstrate how self-aware they can be.
- If someone mentions they've had a mentor, ask them what the mentor did for them. How did they grow? How did they learn? What worked? What didn't work?
- What worked on your most recent job? What didn't work? What was your experience with your boss? Your boss's boss? What did you appreciate about your boss? What was the culture like? What did the company value? What about those values didn't work for you?
 - This is a big one: The **most recent experience leaves the biggest imprint. This gives you nothing but opportunities to drill down.**
 - When you ask people what they liked about their former company, you may be surprised how many people say, "the people." Drill-down on that. "Yes. What do you mean?" They may say "relationships." We know that relationships are critical and important to getting work done, but they cannot come at the expense of the achievement goal so keep this in mind when evaluating their drive to attain goals.
- What have been the speedbumps in your life? What did you do about it? What happened?
 - We want people to have speedbumps. What a great drill-down opportunity when they have speedbumps!
- **Pairs!** The exercise goes quickly and people tend to enjoy it. Examples:
 - People or results?
 - Operational Excellence or Customer Intimacy?
 - Work or family?
 - Short-term or long-term?
 - Today or tomorrow?
 - Results or effectiveness?
 - Lead people or manage projects?
- [For the 2nd/3rd/4th Interviewer] What have you learned so far? What have you heard so far? What doesn't sound so good to you so far?
- Where is your discretionary energy going?
 - I always like to ask people about their hobbies, what they are doing when they're not working. It often gives an indication about work ethic and balance in life.
- What about you would you like to improve?
- If we were to go interview your peers or people who reported to you, what would they say about you? What really worked for them? And what would they say about you that may not be so positive?
 - You'll find out by drilling-down whether they have a passion for leading people.

- How do you define winning? When in life have you taken on a challenge? What was that challenge?
 - This will help you determine their Achievement Drive/Motivation.

Determining Fit

- Brad from SSCA likes to find out the answers to three questions:
 - Can the candidate do the job without training? A little orientation of course, but not training.
 - Can the candidate **love the job?**
 - One of the competencies for senior people is “the influence game.” Does the candidate like to drive change? Do they like to bring influence how things get done? Or perhaps they prefer to do the things themselves? If relevant, can they love working in a matrix environment? How about leading people? Can they love that? And, of course, what is it about leading people that they love?
 - Can the candidate put up with the boss’s *BS*? Can they put up with the fact that the boss talks too much and tends to pontificate? That the boss may be slightly over-controlling or, when in distress, might micromanage too much?
 - This is a great opportunity for the interviewer to be transparent and vulnerable. It’s a great way to share your weaknesses and ask them openly if it’s something they feel they can live with. It’s an opportunity for you to tell people about yourself when you are not your best.
- The last question and most important about fit: How do the requirements of this position fit with the trajectory of your life and career? (Give them time to think.)
- An anecdote about fit ... Our experience with large company people interviewing into small companies is significant. I don’t know that I’ve ever seen a large company executive be successful in a small company. But it’s so seductive because you look at their background, they’ve done *everything*, and it looks like they could imprint it right on top of this small company they want to join. The bad news is that they’ve had more support in their 20 years at IBM than they will ever have at the small company. So, it is not typically a good fit and we would recommend avoiding it.
- A couple comments about hiring the top, C-Suite people: Culture fit becomes much more about are they an Operationally Excellent¹ person trying to fit into a Customer Intimacy² company? Is there fit in terms of the value disciplines of the company and the executive, their manner, their wishes, their style.

¹ McDonald’s is an example of an Operationally Excellent company culture. There is a process and an order to the company and brand.

² Home Depot is an example of a Customer Intimate company culture. The entire shopping experience is catered to each customer’s unique wants.

- With top people, we want to know if they've really done the job before. For example, if one of the must-have competencies is to drive change, have they done it before? Where and how? Do they know the strategy of the company where they're interviewing? How will they carry it out?
- Take them to dinner with their significant other. You'd be surprised how much we can find out about from their significant other.
- I highly recommend doing "Pairs" with the C-Suite folks.
- In our organization and within many of our client systems, we like to use assessment instruments. We highly encourage their use in the hiring process. If you could only use one for all people, it would likely be the Meyers Briggs.³

Distress & Red Flags

- Any negative talk is a drill-down opportunity. If you hear negative talk, someone is in distress. Any blame, defense, justification, know that it's distress and drill-down. Don't accept it as a final statement. It requires a drill-down.
- Cynicism (and some versions of sarcasm) is a true red flag. Avoid someone who demonstrates cynicism in their interview.
- It's a big yellow flag for someone to be overly glib in their interview. They may not be very self-aware. They're probably intelligent, but they're not putting their best face forward so it's a yellow flag.
- The main thing is that, in spite of distress, are they inquisitive? If they are not inquisitive about you, the boss, the job, or the culture, then they are relying upon the company to make the decision for them. They are not "selecting themselves in."
- If you see someone bristle at the use of assessment instruments or the debrief of them (which is nothing but factual), it's a red flag.
- If you see someone bristle at a more in-depth, touchy-feely question, it's a red flag. We would recommend you stay away from them.

Decision-Making

- When you finally decide, please do this. Ask everyone involved in the process of evaluating the candidate to write down what percent chance do they give the person of being successful. If someone says 80%, that means there's a 20% chance of failure. Have a conversation about the 80/20. Don't forget, during preparation, you've already decided *how* to make the final decision.

³ SSCA offers a five-panel package of assessments when evaluating candidates. These include the TAT, KTI, MBTI, FIRO-B, and CPI 260. We typically offer the assessments in conjunction with an interview and a debrief with the hiring manager.

- A story about Phil ... Phil was excellent at interviewing. He developed a reputation for it at his company. Everybody at the company, regardless of the department or the role, wanted Phil to interview their candidates. He only needed 15 minutes to interview the person. At a certain point, Phil negotiated with the company that if the candidate was still with the company a year later, he would be paid \$1,000. Well, Phil retired a very rich man. His 15-minute interview was essentially one question: what you're saying yes to. Think about it for a minute. Candidates have interviewed around the building, have talked multiple people, have learned about the job. At the end of the day, Phil's question is about aligning expectations (what the candidate sees coming into the role and what it actually is).
 - Phil's words: "I understand you are interested in this position and we are interested in you. You've had a chance to learn all about the position and the company and its values. You've gotten to know all the people you're going to be working with, especially your hiring manager and your boss's boss. My question is, how do you fit? Given the requirements of the role and the trajectory of your career, how do you fit? What are you really saying yes to?" Phil would then just listen for the remaining 13 minutes of the interview and make his recommendation.
 - This question has to be the last question, no matter who asks it. You have to ask people what they are saying yes to and align their understanding and expectations with what's really going to happen.

Things to Avoid

- We tend to hire in our own image. Be careful of that.
- Please know your **unconscious bias**. This is a big one because we bring it to the game and then we *project* it on the other person.
- Please **do not interpret** what other people say. Do not read into what they're saying. Note the words they are saying as keywords and drill-down on them. Don't assume you know what they mean. Drill-down.
- It's almost impossible to know a candidate in just one interview. Please, interview multiple times. Yamaha Music, who does it the best, have an incredibly long interview cycle. They interview with multiple interviewers and a panel discussion, then they bring the candidate to SSCA and we give them a battery of assessment instruments. At this point, the hiring success rate is very high.

I've been in HR for over 15 years and I try my best to create a good environment for the interviewer because they are nervous. One of the challenges we have is that different interviewers have very different experiences of the candidate during their separate interviews, almost like the candidate is an entirely different person. Do you have any tips and tricks for how we set up our environment so that we can see the "same person" in each interview?

In my experience, a person walks in the door, they announce themselves, and then they get marched to the location where they are going to interview. Creating the environment starts from the moment they walk in the door. All of life is an assessment center. How do they treat people? I'd definitely walk them through the office. Walk them through to the coffee room. Spend some time there. I like to say to people, "Our job here is to get the best you and that means the relaxed you. We value vulnerability. We, the interviewers, are going to be as vulnerable as possible and we want you to feel like you can just be you. That has a little bit of magic for people, in my experience. In other words, let them know what you're wanting and expecting for them. Say to them that it's our job to do everything possible to increase the probability of success. We are here to represent our company, but we're also representative of you. Let them wander the building and introduce them to people. Treat them like you've invited them over for dinner on a Saturday night. You're just going to offer them coffee instead of wine.

We are interviewing a guy tomorrow. I'm driving him around town. I'm picking him up at the Westin, taking him to various locations. He's in the car with me. What does the conversation look like, the initial conversation?

To be honest, I would play off *him* a little bit. So, I would want him to speak first, if at all possible, then play off what he says. Right off the bat, I would let him know how pleased we are that he's taking a look at our organization. We want to communicate to him that we are not there as an evaluator; we're there as a partner, to figure this out together. Thank him for all the energy he's put in to getting here (traveling, etc.). Let him know that we take this seriously. What we mean by "seriously" is that we want to get to know him and we appreciate him coming. But, first off, I'd be sure he's talking first and play off him. If you find someone who is very Thinker⁴-oriented, they want to know what's coming. So if they are very Thinker-oriented, very neck-up kind of people, then you'll want to say, "Would you like to know what the process will be today?" Do it as a question, not a telling. It puts people at ease.

⁴ A reference to one of the psychological models SSCA uses, connected to the KTI assessment instrument and the patterns/preferences of personality and communication therein.

The word “interpretation” triggered me. In my past life, I was a regional sales manager hiring outside territory salespeople, in their own territory, covering 3-4 states. In one year, I had 13 interviews for a 10-position team. I kind of felt like I was just going through the motions. So I wanted to ask, how do you prevent yourself from falling into following your interpretation? I had this thing in my mind when I interviewed somebody, that this day is the best they would be, it would be downhill from here. How do you get yourself outside of having pre-set interpretations?

The goal is to get off auto-pilot. In the interview process, we want to get the candidate speaking first. And then we tell them what the job is, then we see whether or not they fit. So get them talking first. That will get you off auto-pilot. Remember Susan’s question, which I love, it’s so simple. “Can you tell us about you?” Then look to drill-down on their keywords. It will bring you to the present. It brings you off of auto-pilot. If we don’t drill-down on their keywords, it means we are interpreting. It means we’re allowing our internal “home movie” to play when we hear their words. If we want to avoid that, we have to drill-down. And, by the way, it’s not only happening to you in interviews, it’s happening to you in life. Practice listening and drilling-down with friends, loved ones. Political discussions are a perfect place to try it. When you hear people say, “This one’s an idiot,” you can respond by drilling-down. “Okay, you think he’s an idiot? Say some more.”

I have a question related to key indicators and red flags. How do you evaluate body language in an interview? Are there any red flags or things that stand out?

One thing I didn’t mention is that we don’t believe in being combative. The one place we get close to being combative is when people start to talk too much. I call it “having the proclivity to palaver” or they start answering questions that haven’t been asked. It’s kind of like swinging after the bell (boxing). That is the one place where we would put our hand up and say, “Are you aware of your proclivity for palavering?” We had this with a gentleman recently. You could see it from a body language standpoint. You could see that he would start answering a question, then he would hit a second gear. So, in the interview, I said to him, “You know, you answer the question well. But are you aware that you hit a second gear, you just continue talking? I want to bring it to your attention, may I?”

Another example: If you are seeing a person incredibly comfortable and they’re just ... there. They relax back into their chair, then put their hands up behind their head, it is a dead tipoff that they are feeling insecure. So, you want to say, “Oooh, I think I said something that might have triggered you. What was it?” And then they’ll come back in and say something. You don’t *call* them insecure, but their body language is a tipoff.

Another example: I had an interview with someone the other day and, at a certain point, he asked, “Do you mind if I lean forward now?” He actually said that. Wow, how cool was that? He goes, “Let me lean forward because, around this, I have passion.” And I said, “Well I appreciate the body change.” That told us a whole lot about him. When I gave feedback

about him, I told them that if they see him lean forward like this, the dude has passion for what he's talking about.

Yeah, be aware of body language. When people walk in and they have a smile on their face and they're trying to put on their best, then all of a sudden they go serious, their body language changes. Notice when you see them go from an open, fun, affable face to a serious look. Say to them, "Are you aware that you just changed your face? You just became very serious. There was something that caused it. What was it? Because, don't forget, you and I are jointly trying to increase the probability of success that you're a good hire. What triggered you there?" You know what? They'll tell you. It may be the most vulnerable they'll be that week or even that year. Don't interpret it; ask about it.

"This is probably the best they're going to be, on interview day." That put me in a mindset of, well gosh, what if someone is nervous or has other distress in their life at that time? How can you determine what is an appropriate amount of distress for interview day and how can you tell what is distress that is deeper than that and more problematic for the long-term?

Well, that's really the importance of having multiple interviews. You bring a person in and you say, "You're going to spend 4 hours getting to know us. You're going to be speaking to Lisa, LeAnn, and Erin. You're talking to me first so what can you tell me about yourself?" If you're the first interviewer, you may notice a person pretty stiff and won't know if they're nervous or not. Go back and talk to them again after the final interview. You get to say, "Okay, what did you learn?" I mean, how cool is that question? I guarantee you, at that point, they won't be nervous. You'll see a very different person and then you'll know that they were nervous in the first interview. Something to note: If they come in nervous, it is likely it's because of them initially. If they stay nervous, that's because of us. We are not creating a safe environment for them. Consider: What do people like? Help them meet their needs.

Pre-Screening: Are there any recommendations or statistics on how to advertise an open position? Is it good to offer a lot of details about the position, including benefit packages, or is it better to keep it kind of light and just ask for a resume?

May I just refer you to Yamaha Music? I would like you to look them up on LinkedIn. What they provide is perfect. By the way, asking for salary requirements *is* something for the first interview. A doorway? Sometimes, when people say they were a babysitter or paperboy in their past, I like to say, "What'd you make?" They'll answer something small from those days. And I like to ask, "And how are you doing today?" In this way, you can track a whole salaried career. "How much did you make in that job?" "Oh, I was a commissioned salesperson. The best I did was ___." I like to get salary on the table early.