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Job Interviews Are Broken. There's a Way to Fix Them.

Instead of focusing on credentials, let's give candidates
the chance to showcase their will and skill to learn.

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Human Resources / Recruitment / Conducting Job Interviews

Take-Aways

- Improve job interviews at your company by asking candidates about behavior rather than timeworn questions with easily feigned answers.
- Structured interviews can cut down the effects of implicit biases in your hiring process.
- Request a work sample to focus on the quality of someone's work, rather than how smooth of a talker they are.
- Prioritize new hires who are enthusiastic and motivated to learn over those with seemingly ideal credentials.

Recommendation

Often, job interviews are futile. Candidates fudge their answers and oversell their qualifications. Managers ask the wrong questions and subconsciously rely on biases. With expert insight and a sense of humor, organizational psychologist Adam Grant walks you through common roadblocks that keep you from hiring the perfect candidate. His examples will encourage you to rethink your job interview process, and build a creative and collaborative team.

Summary

Improve job interviews at your company by asking candidates about behavior rather than timeworn questions with easily feigned answers.

Soon after the math major showed up to the office, author Adam Grant was ready to dismiss him. Someone whose hobby was building robots and who didn't look Grant in the eyes during the interview obviously couldn't be the right fit for the open sales position. However, how could Grant really know? Even expert recruiters reject outstanding candidates within traditional selection processes. And even Walt Disney faced rejection before becoming the champion of cartoons.

“For decades, managers have bet on the wrong people – and rejected the right ones.”

The typical job interview doesn't give managers an accurate picture on who will succeed in the workplace. Asking about someone's "weaknesses" is an invitation for the respondent to lie. Prattling on about "working too hard and caring too much" is a classic way to dodge the question. Instead, have candidates describe how they handled a sticky situation in the past. Better yet, ask theoretical questions that explore how they approach problems, conflicts and leadership at work.

“Past behavior can help us anticipate future behavior.”

Some interviewers demand people solve purposely nonsensical problems to see how they respond. Yet, an interviewee's answer to something like, "How many paper clips would fit in Yankee Stadium?" says nothing about their potential.

Structured interviews can cut down the effects of implicit biases in your hiring process.

Often people hire those applicants who remind them of themselves. At banks and law firms, managers tend to be partial to candidates with the same hobbies or alma mater. People in a wide range of industries are 50% more likely to call back candidates with names that sound like they belong to white people than applicants with African-American-sounding names: – even when they have the same résumés: "Allison and Matthew" have a better shot at the job than "Lakisha and Jamal." Candidates who are pregnant, overweight or have birthmarks also face an uphill battle, albeit to a lesser degree. One study showed people assume men with shaved heads are better leaders than those with longer or thinning hair.

“Structured interviews can double or even triple managers’ accuracy in predicting job performance.”

Make interviews fairer and more accurate by using the same list of standardized questions for everyone. Pose these questions to your current team so you can compare candidates’ answers to those of your top performers.

Request a work sample to focus on the quality of someone’s work, rather than how smooth of a talker they are.

Comedian Chris Rock once said, “When you meet somebody for the first time, you’re not meeting them. You’re meeting their representative.” Everyone is trying to look their best at interviews. Nine in ten college seniors admit to exaggerating their qualifications in an attempt to get hired. Inspect a work sample to avoid deception. Assessing past performance, past projects or asking applicants to work on a task that is similar to the job they’ll do can clarify their abilities and attitude.

“My favorite antidote to faking is to focus less on what candidates say, and more on what they do.”

Lead chef David Chang of the acclaimed restaurant Momofuku watches for applicants who are driven and curious, rather than flawless, as they prepare an omelet. Blind auditions have helped orchestras reduce their bias in judging talent.

Prioritize new hires who are enthusiastic and motivated to learn over those with seemingly ideal credentials.

Job interviews should elevate team players, creative problem-solvers and constant learners, rather than those who seem perfect on paper, but lack drive.

“We’re not just hiring people to do a job today – we’re hiring them to make their team and their organization better tomorrow.”

Grant’s intuition would have led him to dismiss the math major who averted his eyes during an interview. But when Grant asked him to do a sales pitch for a rotten apple, he spontaneously crafted a strong, creative and persuasive pitch. He got the job and became “the best salesperson [Grant] ever hired.”

About the Author

Adam Grant is an organizational psychologist at the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School and the best-selling author of *Originals*, a book about nonconformist thinking.



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