

Interviewing from the Company Perspective

Note: This document was prepared by Mr. M. Hoover. He is a Public Relations Executive working for a global Japanese corporation. He kindly agreed to give a presentation on the above topic at one of GaiPro's workshops. We would like to thank Mr. Hoover once again for his enlightening presentation and hands-on advice.

“Knowledge is Power” and that is why you need to “Understand the Interviewer’s Mind.”

Objective: Provide a base set of criteria that are considered in evaluation of the applicant. A criteria that is legally acceptable and based on a set of human common denominators that influence the employer’s impression. Obviously this will shift depending on the age, cultural background, and industry.

I. General Criteria

Basics

- *Can you do the job?*

The key point to remember is that in the corporate world, time is of the essence and ultimately the main question on their mind above and beyond qualifications is does this person have present or inherent ability.

- *Can you mesh with the corporate culture?*

Office corporate cultures form over many years due to the melding of various personalities and the employer must consider whether or not a person can fit in with the family.

Professional

- *Confirming – skill set and bio facts*

The resume is the doorway to confirming if the skill set is present. At this stage verification of the resume’s match with reality is vital.

- *Base knowledge*

Especially at a Japanese company where positions can require a broad range of skills, the employer needs to confirm whether or not the person can be trained to provide more value for the company outside of the advertised position.

Personal

The minute your resume appears in the hands of the prospective employer, your evaluation begins and it will not end until the contract is signed. That means that in a natural way, you have to control as much as possible the determining factors that an employer may consciously or unconsciously consider in making their decision.

- *Clean, neat appearance*

This may be common sense, but unfortunately 'clean' and 'neat' or 'attractive' are quite subjective concepts. I recommend being immaculate and look as good as possible. In Japanese society especially you should be buttoned down and everything in order. The visual impression in the first 30 seconds is the point at which the most powerful information is conveyed and unfortunately conclusions assumed. Make a good impression and the employer will move to justify their illogically preconceived decision, make a bad impression and the mind of the employer will naturally move towards facts that confirm their preconceived notions of your personality. Look at industry standards that match the position that you are applying for. Banking has a certain look and feel, a Japanese company color preference tends to be refined and subtle, as apposed to abrasive and loud. Again each industry and the position will affect the variables.

- *Prepared*

Presenting an atmosphere of preparedness will be conveyed without words and if you do not do your homework, try to act that way as much as possible. Preparation includes not only research on the company and position, but also knowing exactly where the office is and the name of the person conducting the interview.

- *On time*

Obviously a given, but again a relative term for some people. I recommend personally getting there an hour ahead of the interview, confirming the location and office, and then perhaps going to a café to prepare for the possible Q&A that the interview may cover. You will look better to the employer if you not only answer questions concisely and correctly, but also ask questions that show interest, knowledge and value of the company. For most people this means calculating question scenarios and then memorizing the key points to those answers. The reason you should come to an interview an hour ahead of time is because you need to review your interview strategy and information. Know your answers and you will look good to the employer. Being prepared should also convey an air of confidence. Never underestimate the unspoken communications, as they are much louder and powerful than many imagine.

- *Attentive*

An employer obviously is searching for a member of their team that is engaging to talk to and interested in the company as well as the position. Act engaged and stay completely in tune with the moment.

- *Overall presentation*

This is the whole package, from your dress and arrival, to the actual questions you ask and the questions you do not ask. This is a presentation and an employer wants you to ultimately be able to act independently. This means that the overall impression should convey confidence.

- *How questions are addressed*

Approach and interaction is important. The employer should out of courtesy be given the first chance to ask questions and drive the interview. Taking control of the interview may not be preferable for the employer. However, when you are given the stage, you then need to show what you can drive.

- *No notes*

In my opinion placing notes on the table is completely acceptable, but it should be used as only a prompt with key points that you may like to be reminded of. However, notes should never break the flow of the interview. An interview is a human to human interface and feeling the rhythm of the interviewer's speed and engaging them in your conversation is most important.

- *Engaging communications*

Public speaking and conversation is an art that is not easily mastered, however you can create engaging conversation by asking questions at the right time, confirming issues that may be stated with emphasis, or showing passion for your work. This is more engaging for the employer and brings you to life as a candidate.

- *Personality traits conveyed*

The employer is listening to the content of your answers, but more importantly they are gauging your personality type. The employer needs to estimate if your personality will fit the job and the corporate culture. The way you speak, posture, voice strength, eye contact, direct answers or indirect answers, your clothes, nervousness, all convey much more than we can ever imagine to an employer. If you are aware of negative traits or habits you have in conversing with people, you should specifically work on toning them down and practicing conveying the image of who you want to be. An employer does not want an unnatural show, but the kinds of answers, dress, posture, and speech patterns really define who you are in a first meeting. If you have bad habits, those will be used against you in the evaluation. If you don't understand where you are weak, get a completely honest opinion from someone you can trust to say truth.

Impressed if:

I cannot speak for everyone, however I can provide some things that impress me about an individual. I do not have a check list during interviews, but if these qualities or traits come shining through, I remember them.

- *Conveys honesty, enthusiasm, team player qualities*

I am going to spend more time with the new employee than I spend with my own family for possibly many years. For this reason, in my interview process I would like see these qualities expressed subtly in the interview. I am not a fan of directly listing off "perfect employee traits," but the way a person speaks about their past and asks questions about the job and the company can very clearly convey these traits.

- *Knows company*

This doesn't have to be hard facts and figures, but it does make a positive impression if you have a basic understanding of the company.

- *Knows field of expertise*

The reality about expertise and experience is that you have inside knowledge about that field. It may be wise to get some of the basics behind the façade of a field or at least have them on your list of points to cover. The draw backs of a field and the benefits of a field are going to be the same irrespective of the employer. The question that you want to confirm is to what degree these characteristics of the field prevail in this specific company. Questions like these are also valuable because they force the employer to consider the degree to which they will honestly answer the question. In this way, knowing your field of expertise is one way to convey your experience and to learn more about the employer. This is a refined way to show indirectly that you know your work.

- *Knows industry*

Similar to the item above, industry strong points and challenges will have common denominators irrespective of the employer. However, each company may relate to these standard issues differently. Nevertheless as above, knowledge shows familiarity and experience and should be conveyed. Again, not as merely simple statements, such as, "I am very knowledgeable about the industry." That is a given we hope as you are applying for the job, but more importantly the statement as such does not verify facts or your experience. As a potential employer, I want you to show your knowledge and prove your sophistication with regard to the industry. Therefore, a comment for a PR related position, where publication or website production was involved, could be for example: "It seems that many companies are going off-shore for ascertaining production resources. Could you provide a bit more information on your policy? How do you like to produce projects and do you prefer to micro or macro manage your teams?" The answer should tell you about the company policy and give you a glimpse into how you would be working in the new position.

This question right away shows that the applicant is familiar with the industry trends in PR/Marketing project production, and then uses that question to learn more information about the potential employer. He is asking in simple terms how do you manage projects and will I have more control in a macro-management scenario or less in a micro-management situation. As an employer, I believe that these types of questions benefit both sides, employer and employee because they force the interviewer to become real and start shifting to actual office-situations which show the true nature of the job at hand.

- *Knows position*

A candidate impresses me if they understand the standard 'assumed' requirements of the position and then they confirm that they are in fact the standards the employer abides by. Obviously if they ask a question that reveals something that would never be included in the position, it shows that something is wrong. On the other hand, if they

state honesty that they are inexperienced, but express an eagerness to learn and take on challenges, as an employer I am impressed and would shift to determine whether or not they have the base skills to learn the position.

Bias:

- *Needs to respect and even better like the interviewee*

Although perhaps this should not be said, it is a fact of human nature that some people are liked right away while others are not. If there is the possibility of making the mood a bit more relaxed in a professional manner, or picking up on how casual or formal the interviewer would like to be, this may allow the interviewer to like you better. Of course, we are talking about the possibility of a variety of ages and backgrounds and obviously in a situation where we do not know about the interviewer, the best policy would be one of professionalism and seriousness. This should not be an overriding concern, but perhaps keep in the back of your mind that the small things sometimes make a difference.

II. Recruitment Process and the Interviewer's State of Mind

Objective: To show how the interviewer's mind shifts and what they are thinking throughout the entire process of recruitment. Each phase will be briefly introduced along with a look at the interviewer's perspective.

Recruitment Phases

- *Launch – Advertising – Executive Search Firm and/or Media*

Phase: First the interviewer must determine which way to contact candidates. Obviously the Executive Search Firm is the best way. It saves a great deal of time, provides a guarantee, and also allows the employer to skip the initial media process which is not easy.

Interviewer: At this stage the mind of the employer may be characterized by an urgency to find the right person and of course excitement that the company and quality of their department will improve with a new employee. For large successful companies, time and resources are more important than money.

- *1st – screening process – Resumes/cover letter – 50 applicants*

Phase: Perhaps a smaller firm or when times are not good, a company may choose to use traditional media and place an ad in a newspaper or on a website. If this is the case, the company will have to process a large number of candidates before they get to selecting you for the interview stage.

Interviewer: The employer at this stage is perhaps a bit frustrated and with so many applicants is more likely to discard a resume for small reasons. This is why the cover letter and the resume have to be perfect and have distinction to stand out from the pack. Impatience would characterize the employer as they are at the beginning of a long journey.

- *2nd – Interview 1 – 10 applicants*

Phase: Selection is reviewed by perhaps a couple levels of management and the final 10 are decided on.

Interviewer: The employer needs to first verify whether or not the resume information is accurate. An Executive Firm can sometimes provide screening and thus lighten the burden of the employer, but ultimately the employer needs to verify the match with skills

and the match with corporate culture. Both are of course extremely important. The employer at this stage is characterized by an urgency, but obviously finds some comfort with a large selection of candidates to choose from. The mood is basically positive and more relaxed. The employer feels that the odds are in their favor. They also have to sell their company and the position as much as you have to sell yourself.

- *3rd - Interview 2 (by phone by superior abroad) - 5 applicants*

Phase: Larger companies obviously are global entities and therefore management and interviews are taking place through technology. This can at times benefit the candidate and at other be a detriment. Again you can practice to use technology to your advantage.

Interviewer: The superior abroad is coming to this interview feeling positive about the candidate because the applicants have already been screened by many, and in a sense 'recommended' by workers in the organization. In this way the candidates are still competing, but they are gaining leverage and thus should take that leverage to become more confident. The superior conducting the interview comes to the process fresh as they many times are not involved in the early stages of the interview process and will want to confirm your skills, but more importantly who you are. Again, they want to know if you are going to fit in with their management style, corporate underlying currents, and quite simply can they trust you, especially if they are not going to be in the same office. The basis of international relationships is trust.

- *4th - Interview 3 – 3 applicants*

Phase: Coming down to the wire with the last 3 and at this stage people involved in the process probably have a favorite. At this point it is important to understand the time lapse between interviews, because a company is going to want to interview their favorite first. If you wait for an extended period of time, they may have already moved into the offer and negotiation stage before contacting you.

Interviewer: At this stage the employer is starting to shift from 'you want to work for me' to 'I would like you to work for this company.' The shift here is important as it may bring more selling of the position and the company back into the interview. Remember the employer may also understand that human resources are plentiful, however really valuable resources are limited. This again places urgency increasingly on the employer, as they most likely have invested a great deal of time in the search and want to get the best candidate possible. The tide is starting to turn and the successful candidate has a chance to become more powerful.

- *5th - Offer 1 – 1 applicant with 2 still on hold*

Phase: The company may give three equal interviews and gauge salary expectations at sometime during the process. An Executive Search Firm can be very helpful at this stage in providing information, such as salary expectations, to the employer. This allows the employer and the candidate to take reality checks and makes sure that everyone is in sync before both make a final decision.

Interviewer: The employer at this stage is characterized by excitement as they think they have found the right candidate. At this point, considering that the employer wants a candidate, there is also the feeling that the candidate may go somewhere else. If you can buy a bit of time, it will increase the urgency on the side of the employer. They may imagine that you are considering other offers. This is very difficult and will of course depend on your circumstances and how much you would like to risk at this stage.

- *6th - Negotiations*

Phase: This process is best of course if both sides in the same ballpark range with regard to the package and compensation. Again, if you can hold off on making a decision right away, it can sometime work to your advantage. All employers should give you time to think over the offer. I presume it is safest to determine your target before entering the negotiations, and then seeing if you can go a bit higher. Remember that you are the most powerful before you sign the contract.

Interviewer: The interviewer's mind has not changed; they merely want to finalize the deal. They also do not want to negotiate too hard as they may be spending about 40 – 50 hours a week together and want to get the relationship off on the right foot. The main negotiator is striving to strike a balance between making you feel valuable, paying the market rate, and of course leaving room for you to grow for the long term.

- *7th - Signing Contract – Bring on board*

Phase: The day that everyone has awaited has arrived! Both the new employee and employer can relax and start to get into more of the specifics of orientation.

Interviewer: The interviewer may feel relief, satisfaction, and a responsibility to now come through on whatever statements or promises were made during the long interview process. A smart employer knows that the real process of integration is about to begin and they need to plant the seeds create a valuable member of their team. They have the burden to invest the time and resources to bring them into the corporate culture properly. This though leads to another topic for another workshop.

Wishing you all the best in your job search!

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