

Only 5 Questions to Determine Top Talent

As a way of helping our clients, we often participate with them in interviews. It is not uncommon for clients to ask us to interview candidates they have surfaced on their own. Over my 20+ years as a recruiter, I have participated in hundreds and maybe thousands of interviews. The one thing they all have in common is many of the same questions are asked over and over again. When I ask the client why they asked that question the answers vary from “couldn’t think of anything else and I need to fill time” to “that question was asked of me when I interviewed.” The interesting thing about these questions is they rarely have anything to do with the candidate’s ability to perform in the job or how they would perform in my client’s company culture. They are often through away questions.

Companies want to hire the best and the brightest, however, the interviewing process and questions rarely identify the characteristics of a top performer. The interviewer assumes that if they did it before and were successful they will be successful in our company. The interviewer misses the point that the candidate needs to be able to adapt those past accomplishments to their company’s culture and their company’s resources. **Just because someone was a great performer in their last company, doesn’t mean they are the right person for your company.**

We have identified 5 characteristics that all top performers possess and 5 questions you can ask in an interview to determine if these characteristics are present and if they can adapt them to your company. These 5 are: top performers have high initiative, they execute, they have the ability to motivate others; they have a track record of delivering comparable results and they can adapt that performance to your environment.

The question to ask are:

- 1) Give me an example of where you have demonstrated initiative?** Top performers take initiative, they don’t wait for it to come to them. Top performers will step up to the plate and be ready to perform. Taking initiative is second nature to them.
- 2) Give me an example of when you executed a project flawlessly?** Failure to execute is one of the top reasons people fail. The ability to get the job done regardless of obstacles that come up along the way is a key trait of top performers. This doesn’t mean perfect results, just that they didn’t get distracted and lose sight of deadlines, budget, conflicts, etc.

The third question deals with leadership.

- 3) Tell me about your biggest team accomplishment in a difficult time or situation?** Top performers get the job done by utilizing the talents of others. No

one can do it all. Top performers know this and leading a team is something they are good at. We are all good leaders in good times. The best leaders are able to motivate people even when circumstances aren't good. Also, ask for an example of leading cross functional teams.

The last two questions begin to test the candidate's ability to get the job done. Comparable accomplishments are important to the candidate's success in your company. These accomplishments must be similar in scope and size.

4) One of our critical objectives is (explain a critical problem they will address in this position.) Can you describe your most comparable accomplishment? A track record of delivering similar accomplishments over an extended period of time is a critical component of a top performer. Top performance is not a one time event. You want to insure the person you hire has a track record of accomplishments similar in scope to what defines success in your position.

The final question deals with the candidate's ability to adapt these experiences to your environment and culture.

5) How would you go about implementing (pick a project important to this position) in our company? Things rarely go as planned. Top performers must be able to adapt to different circumstances. Change is a given. What counts is - can they change - with the change. They must be able to adapt their past accomplishments to your environment, culture management style and to your company's resources. If they can't then regardless of everything else they won't be successful in your company.

Find a candidate that can demonstrate these 5 characteristics and you are well on your way to hiring a top performer.