



NOT KNOWING WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR

One of the important messages in the Talent War is that no company, industry, or CEO has a death grip on talent. Who is your choice? The manager working for a great company who is not going anywhere? Or the guy from an also-ran operation who is brilliant, motivated, and an impressive strategic thinker? The latter is obviously your candidate, and, just as obviously, you're going to have to work very hard to find him or her.

What you see is not always what you get. How about someone who just got fired? At first blush, that is negative. But if you make an effort to find out the real story of why he or she got the sack – his/her boss was threatened by their talent and vision and squeezed them out – they may be the person you're looking for. (Henry Ford II fired Lee Iacocca, who went on to do just fine running Chrysler). How often do CEOs bring in an heir apparent and then sabotage them? Strong leaders' inability to admit that there is anyone out there talented enough to replace them is a staple of business school case studies. Picking up a world-class manager who's just been pushed from a corner office could be a wonderful opportunity.

Professional interviewers soon learn that evaluating executives is a relative and situational undertaking. The good news is that you can find all sorts of gems in struggling companies. Moreover, how attractive your company is to an outsider is equally relative. You might think you are struggling more than ever, while from the standpoint of someone from another company that is in real trouble, your company might appear to be the perfect opportunity. In a competitive Talent War, you will have to find talent in unexpected places.

But your job is not over once you hire exceptional people. Your next challenge is to hold on to your talent.

At BWC Executive Group, I use a variety of interviewing questions and techniques to develop a thorough understanding of a candidate. The list below summarizes several questions developed specifically for interviewing an executive-level candidate to gain insight into his or her personal experiences and qualities. As you use these questions look for responses that highlight how the individual has behaved in previous circumstances. Past behavior is the best



predictor of future behavior, and, as the interviewer, you want to know how the candidate will act to meet challenges within your own organization.

1. How political or bureaucratic is your current organization, and how do you solve problems in this environment? What actions do you take?
2. How do you communicate a vision to a large group of people and keep them focused on execution? What techniques do you use?
3. How do you build or change the image of a company?
4. What do you think about your job? Where do you spend your time?
5. What have been your most critical decisions, and what was your thought process behind them? What information did you look for? What did you do that didn't work?
6. When you move into a new job, how do you evaluate your key people and decide how to build your team?
7. What was the biggest surprise in your first general manager's role? How did you handle the situation?
8. Compare your past two roles. What was different about each? What did you do differently as a result of these different situations? How would you translate this experience into future assignments?
9. What kind of interactions have you had with the board of directors?
10. How do you approach your start in a new role? What do you look for? What actions do you take?
11. Good CEOs develop their team effectively. How do you develop people into larger roles? How do you mentor your staff?
12. Who is the best person that ever worked for you? Why do you feel this way about him or her?
13. When you find bright people in your organization, how do you keep them motivated and committed to the company?

The following is a list of questions I refer to as "tough questions." Here you're looking to get deeper into the candidate's self-knowledge; that second phase of the interview is the real challenge. With an excellent setup of the specific company situation, these questions also develop insight into a candidate's capabilities. As you use these questions, look for responses highlighting how the individual has behaved in previous circumstances. Again, past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior.



1. What is your management style, and how would you rate yourself as a manager?
2. How would you describe your personality?
3. What do you look for when you hire people?
4. Have you ever had to fire people? What were the reasons, and how did you handle the situation?
5. What do you think is the most difficult aspect of being a manager?
6. In your current position, what features do you like the most? The least?
7. What were your most significant accomplishments in your last position? In your career?
8. Give me an example of a serious conflict you had with someone, and how you resolved it?
9. What are the important trends or cutting-edge issues in your industry?
10. What qualities or skills make a good manager?
11. What do you think of your former boss?
12. Describe a situation in which your work was criticized?
13. Tell me about one of your failures and how you handled it.
14. What are your strong points?
15. What are your weaknesses?
16. What would your boss say if I asked him/her about your strengths and weaknesses?
17. What misconceptions do others have about you?
18. Where do you see yourself in five years?
19. If you could start your career over again, what would you do differently?
20. How would you define success, and how successful do you feel you've been so far in your career?
21. How do you stay current with what is going on in the marketplace (new technologies, etc.)?
22. Describe a difficult decision you had to make. What were the results of the decision?
23. If you were to make a move, what would it take (in terms of compensation or responsibility)?



24. Tell me about a time you were faced with a difficult ethical dilemma and how you dealt with it.
25. How long will it take you to make a meaningful contribution to our organization?
26. Give me an example of how you provided leadership and direction under complicated circumstances. (This one should be no problem for a talented executive with COVID19)
27. Give me an example of how you helped a subordinate develop personal and professional skills? Where else do you think you could have helped this individual? If you were to improve this person's skills as an executive in just one important way to make them more effective, what would that be? (This is one of my favorite questions to ask anyone in a leadership position. The reason, leaders are only as strong as those that are underneath them).
28. What do you expect out of the position and your association with our company?
29. What would be the first thing you'd do in this new job? What would you change about this company?