

Interviewing Finalist Candidates: How the Hiring Executive Should Prepare

By

John B. McHugh

© 2002 by John B. McHugh

Introduction

Your interview with the candidate must work hand-in-hand with the candidate's resume. As you will read later, what appears on the candidate's resume and in cover letters must be evaluated as you prepare for your interview. Use the interview as an opportunity to probe the applicant's credentials as stated in the resume. You will learn in this McHugh paper how to prepare a combination of directive and nondirective questions as you study a candidate's resume.

Your job as the hiring executive is to interview all of the finalists. Interviewing candidates is far from a science, and it is an imperfect process. Yet interviewing is an important, perhaps critical, tool in the recruiting process.

Assumptions about the Recruiting Process

My assumptions about the recruiting process are as follows:

- The more long-winded and obtuse a cover letter, the more likely the candidate is not qualified for the position.
- All resumes are inflated to an extent. All candidates pad their accomplishments and present their experience and credentials in the best possible light. The inflation of accomplishment is only a matter of degree.
- In most instances, the majority of the numbers contained in the resume are unverifiable. For example, how do you verify statements such as "I increased sales by 250 % to \$12 million in a two-year period"? Ask, "Do these numbers sound reasonable? Is the entire resume bloated with unreasonable numbers?"
- The more inflated the resume, the less likely that this candidate is a good risk.
- Smart candidates tell you what you want to hear. This is basic salesmanship, but be sensitive to this behavior dynamic during the interview process. Carefully filter everything a candidate tells you.
- If a candidate exhibits a consistent pattern of less-than-direct answers and long-winded, evasive answers, then this candidate is not right for you.
- Top candidates always acknowledge what they don't know in an answer.

Develop an Interview Strategy

For every hour of an interview, spend at least 1.5 to 2.0 hours planning an interview strategy. How does one strategize an employment interview?

John B. McHugh

414-351-3056

j.b.mchugh@att.net

www.johnbmchugh.com

First, ask yourself, "What do I want to accomplish in this interview? What specific duties of the position are of critical importance?" Then, move on to the resume and look for the matches between the candidate's experience and the needs of the position. Next, develop specific questions to probe what is stated on the resume.

Your Goals as the Hiring Executive during This Initial Interview

Your interview goals will depend on your interviewing strategy. However, there are certain things you want to accomplish in a "quasi-finalist" interview. Put another way, you always want to come away from the interview with answers to the following questions:

- What do I feel about this candidate personally? What is our chemistry?
- How will my colleagues relate to this candidate? Peers? Subordinates? Higher-placed executives? Volunteers? Authors? Customers? Vendors?
- Does the candidate answer questions directly and succinctly?
- Does the candidate dance around the questions? Does the candidate obfuscate habitually? Can the candidate quickly organize his/her thoughts in a logical, cogent manner?
- Does the candidate say, "I don't know"?
- Does the candidate smile? Have a sense of humor?

Directive and Nondirective Questions

Questions asked in an employment interview can be directive and nondirective. Use both types in interviewing executive employee candidates.

Directive questions are prepared in advance and are based on the job requirements. Directive questions demand a content answer, an answer that can be written down in two or three sentences. Candidates can be compared more easily if they each have answered an identical set of directive questions.

Examples of directive questions are:

- Will you relocate for this position?
- Are you willing to travel?
- What successes are you most proud of? Why?
- Have you managed managers? What were the titles of the managers you managed?
- What specific examples of new products have you created in your career, and how have they performed?
- What major failures have you experienced professionally?

Nondirective questions are aimed at how an answer was arrived at, namely, the mental processes used by the candidate to reach an answer. Nondirective questions reveal the candidate's habits of thinking. Nondirective questions enable you to judge the candidate's quality of thinking, logical processes, and ability to conceptualize and organize his/her thoughts. Examples of nondirective questions are:

John B. McHugh
414-351-3056
j.b.mchugh@att.net
www.johnbmchugh.com

- How would you think working in a nonprofit organization would be different from working in a commercial (for-profit) enterprise?
- What are the respective roles of creativity and innovation in the new product development process?
- How will technology affect product development in the publishing business over the next five years?

Both directive and nondirective questions are important in your interview. Generally, the higher the position, the more importance you should give to nondirective questions. As you prepare for an interview, include both types of questions.

Other Thoughts on the Interview and Hiring Process

As you interview the candidate, listen carefully to the candidate's questions about your organization. With Web sites making available a wealth of information, a candidate should be able to develop a series of penetrating questions about a prospective employer.

Ask yourself, "How perceptive are the candidate's questions? How much depth is in the questions? Has the candidate talked to other knowledgeable people about the organization?" Thoughtful candidate questions are always a good sign.

Acknowledge the fact that all employment candidates should be treated with respect and courtesy. Let the candidates interviewed know when you expect to reach a decision. Keep the candidates updated if there are delays in the hiring process. Thank all candidates for their time and interest in your organization.

Documenting Your Interview

Immediately write down your impressions. This is vital. Document how you view this candidate as a potential hire for your organization. As you write, think of yourself as a newspaper reporter stressing the accurate and objective recording of your impressions of the candidate.

- Don't censor yourself.
- Trust your instincts and intuition about this person.
- Be as precise as possible in recording what you observed during this interview.

When you get to the finalist stage, you might be considering five or six well-qualified candidates. The candidates you interviewed will likely blur together in your mind. Distinct impressions are needed to refresh your memory. Sometimes there is a hiatus in the recruiting process. You may not get back to recruiting for a month because of some other organization priority. You need interview documentation to be able to pick up where you left off.

Acknowledgements

John B. McHugh
414-351-3056
j.b.mchugh@att.net
www.johnbmchugh.com

I wish to thank the following individuals who reviewed the manuscript: Scott Henry, ASM International; Bev Kolz, Simon & Kolz; Edmund Leonard, Rojas Inc.; and Robert Rainer, AICPA.

Other McHugh Publications of Interest

Visit my www.johnbmchugh.com for a large selection of free McHugh publications on various aspects of publishing management. Of related topical interest to this paper is *Recruiting A Publishing Executive for a Nonprofit Organization: Tips and Techniques (A-5)*.

About John B. McHugh, Publishing Consultant and Executive Recruiter

McHugh, a 30-year veteran of the publishing business, is a successful publishing consultant. He is the author of the *McHugh Publishing Management Series*—50 practical publications on all aspects of publications management.

McHugh is an experienced association-publishing executive. For seven years, he was Publisher and Director of Programs at the American Society for Quality, a 120,000 member professional association based in Milwaukee, WI. For a two-year period, McHugh served as the Interim Publisher at the Project Management Institute, a Newtown Square, PA. based, 100,000 member professional association.

In the private sector, McHugh has worked for Houghton Mifflin and Wadsworth. For a four-year period, McHugh owned and operated his own book publishing company.

McHugh Specialties

• Association Publishing	• Journals/Periodicals
• Book Publishing	• Organization Design/Structure
• Copyrights and Permissions	• RFP (Request for Proposal) Preparation
• Contracts/Publishing Agreements	• Publishing Management Audits
• Executive Recruiting	• Start Ups: Books, Journals, Magazines

In addition to providing management consulting services, McHugh can provide custom developed, in-house training seminars to meet your specific needs. He is fully qualified to serve your organization as an interim publishing executive.

Call John B. McHugh now at 414-351-3056 or e-mail j.b.mchugh@att.net to ask any questions or discuss your consulting needs. Visit www.johnbmchugh.com to review a large number of his free publications.

John B. McHugh
414-351-3056

j.b.mchugh@att.net

www.johnbmchugh.com

John B. McHugh
414-351-3056
j.b.mchugh@att.net
www.johnbmchugh.com