

Motivation- Based Interviewing

A revolutionary
approach to interviewing
and hiring
the best

Carol Quinn

Copyright © 2002 by Carol Quinn
All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission of the author.

Motivation-Based Interviewing
A Revolutionary Approach to Interviewing and Hiring

Formerly titled: *Don't Hire Anyone Without Me!*

ISBN: 978-0-9720872-7-8 (E-book)
ISBN: 978-0-9720872-5-4 (Soft cover)

Order this book, and others, online at
www.HABooks.com

Edited by:
Diane Sears, DiVerseMedia
www.di-verse-media.com

Cover design by:
1106 Design
www.1106Design.com

Published by HABooks
Orlando, FL

*There's no way you can have consistent
success without great players.
No one can win without great material.
But not everyone can win with material.*

—JOHN WOODEN

CONTENTS


Introduction	7
Part I: Hiring Attitude	11
Chapter 1: Hiring	13
Chapter 2: Attitude	22
Part II: Motivation	29
Chapter 3: Understanding Motivation	31
Chapter 4: Locus of Control	38
Chapter 5: Passion: the Selfish Boss	46
Chapter 6: Collaboration	58
Part III: Gathering Applicant Information	69
Chapter 7: <i>How</i> to Gather	71
Chapter 8: <i>What</i> to Gather	82
Part IV: Putting It All Together	103
Chapter 9: Assessing Locus of Control	105
Chapter 10: Assessing the Selfish Boss	128
Chapter 11: To Hire or Not to Hire— That is the Question	144
Chapter 12: Taking Hiring to the Next Level	164
Index	183
About the Author	189

INTRODUCTION

For most people in the corporate world, hiring is just one responsibility of many. For me, it's different. Hiring is my passion, without a doubt. I knew it in college when I had that monotone professor for Personnel Management 101. You know the type. All we saw was the back of his head, because the entire class time consisted of him writing on the chalkboard. To make matters worse, the textbook was dry and had no pictures. All the students complained to each other that this class was a "sleeper." I aced that class. I found the material absolutely stimulating.

From there I went to work for an employment agency. A year later, I opened my own agency. Over the years, I attended every workshop and seminar I could to learn more about hiring. I became familiar with behavior-based interviewing, competency-based selection, targeted selection, and other techniques. The workshops and seminars promised that if I followed the prescribed process, I would hire great employees. But you know what? They didn't always work. Something still seemed lacking in the process. It was hit and miss.

Later, during my years working in Corporate America, a company hired me to revamp its management selection process.



A secretary who was promoted to be the company's first official recruiter had developed the existing process. In between the old process being dismantled and the new one being implemented, I became the entire interview process. This meant that I was the only interviewer and the sole decision-maker to determine whether or not an applicant would be hired.

What an exciting challenge this was for me! It would be one thing if these applicants were being hired to work for me, but they weren't. The first time their bosses would meet them was when they showed up for work. Needless to say, this was not your normal selection process, but it was at least an improvement over the old one. And if my hires were good, there would be a lot of praise to reap. On the other hand, if the supervisors were not satisfied with their new hires' performance, I would become the perfect scapegoat.

Well, the good news (and one of the reasons I can write this book) is that the hires were better, turnover dropped, and the cost per hire decreased. One of the best benefits for me personally, and that which had offered the greatest learning opportunity, was the chance to track the ongoing performance of these hires. I could compare an applicant's pre-hire interview with his or her post-hire performance.

Guess what? Those who interviewed the best and even those who had the most skills and work experience were not always the ones who performed in the top 20 percent. And within the group of high performers, there were those who were not the most skilled or the most experienced at the time of their hire. Some of the better job performers hadn't even interviewed well but were hired anyway.

What *exactly* was it that the high achievers had in common that was missing in others, even in those possessing great skills?

The question of this missing piece burned within me for quite a while. During many interviews, it taunted me. I couldn't

settle for the interview process the way it was. I wanted to know how to consistently hire well. What was missing? Time passed as I worked in a playground of opportunity, conducting hundreds, maybe thousands, of interviews, day in and day out.

Then, the missing piece started to reveal itself. I began to realize that interviewers are not accurately measuring the applicant's motivation to do a specific job. Most applicants say, "Yes! Yes!" when asked during the interview whether they are motivated—because, at the time, they are motivated to get the job. Sometimes they say anything just to get their foot in the door. But that motivation often disappears after people are hired.

As it turns out, the employee who possesses the best skills to do the job is not always the best person to hire. Knowing what I know today, I'd put my money on the person with the most motivation instead.

PART I

Hiring Attitude

HIRING


Motivating employees is always a hot topic in the business world. As supervisors, we're continuously trying to come up with ways to prod workers to take action, produce more results, and achieve higher goals. We spend countless hours seeking ways to make workers want to perform better. We throw incentives, threats, and rewards their way even if we believe none of these should be required for employees to do the job they were hired to do. Incentives were created to motivate the unmotivated. It is not necessary to motivate the motivated.

Have you ever noticed that the word *motivation* is often preceded by the word *self*? One would think you could just say a person is motivated or isn't. But somewhere along the line, someone attached the word *self* to the word *motivation* to make a distinction.

When you talk about motivation, you aren't automatically talking about *the ability to put oneself into motion*. Not at all. This is where many interviewers go astray. They think all they have to do is assess whether or not an applicant is motivated.

So go ahead and ask an applicant about motivation. Ask him, on a scale of one to 10, how much effort he puts into his work or how important he thinks initiative is.

Or how about an applicant who can talk in detail about the steps she took to finish a tough project. Do you assume she is motivated because she finished the project? The project got done, and that's what counts, right? What if the boss told her prior to the project, "If you miss this project



deadline the way you have missed so many others, you'll be fired"? What if the boss constantly had to check up on her progress and push her when she lagged behind? What if this employee argued with her boss, saying the deadline was impossible, there was no way it could all get done, and the boss was being unfair? And what if the employee seemed to spend too much time on the phone or on long breaks? The project finally got finished and barely on time. But during a job interview, this person can brag about how she finished a tough project.

Only talking about the success of the project and conveniently leaving out the details about the boss's push, this applicant probably appears to have been self-motivated. But she wasn't. She had trouble with the "self" part.

If you misdiagnose self-motivation during an interview, you can become the proud supervisor of a new employee who will require your assistance for motivation to do the job. Too many of these people get through the interview process and are hired. These are your low performers. They are the people you *don't* want to hire.

Motivation deals with a combination of influences such as attitude, interest, and environment. Working environments absolutely have an effect on motivation, sometimes for the better and, unfortunately, sometimes for the worse. External motivators such as contests, commissions, employment perks, and discipline/punishment measures are not a replacement for self-motivation. I personally believe they were created to reduce the impact of bad hiring. However, these programs do not fix or change a bad hire.

Prevention is your best bet when it comes to bad hires. The best way to create a motivated staff is to hire motivated people. And hiring highly self-motivated employees begins with assessing them correctly.

MOTIVATION:

THE MISSING PIECE OF THE HIRING PUZZLE

Understanding motivation means tapping into the source of the energy employees invest in their work. Accurate motivation assessment does not always match with what the applicant says or implies during the interview.

Knowing that motivation assessment is the key to hiring well is not a new insight. Determining that this assessment is the reason for most hit-and-miss hiring results, and realizing exactly how to improve it, however, are new ways of thinking.

Imagine how exciting this discovery was to me, a person whose passion is hiring. I understand that most interviewers just want to hire well and don't want to devote their careers to studying interviewing techniques. But for me, discovering the significance of motivation as it relates to the hiring process was akin to being a scientist and finding a cure to a disease—okay, maybe not quite that dramatic, but exciting just the same.

After this discovery, the next step for me was to add specific improvements to the interview process in order to see whether applicants could be selected better. What bothered me for a long time was how simple these changes were. Something that worked this well, and improved hiring this much, should be complicated. After all, if it were easy, we would have figured it out a long time ago, right? That turned out, not to be the case at all.

I came to terms with it being easy, and now it was time to pass along this knowledge to others. It was time to teach it to people who wanted to learn how to hire well but didn't necessarily share my passion for the thrill of the hiring process. This actually became a lot of fun. In so many ways, this information is common sense, and people are so hungry for it. The light comes on in people's heads when they are learning this information. They think of people they know (and even themselves) as examples that reinforce what they are learning.

The beauty of my interviewing method, Motivation-Based Interviewing, is its simplicity. If you're an interviewer, you don't have to throw out your interviewing style or change your process. You can begin using Motivation-Based Interviewing during your next hiring opportunity and see its benefits instantly.

At a recent on-site workshop, an attendee at the director level came up afterward to thank me. He said he had been interviewing for 19 years and admitted he'd never really felt confident that he knew what he was doing when it came to hiring. He said he wasn't terrible at it, but he'd had his share of hiring mistakes. He finally felt he received the training that would help him hire better. He said that he wished

he'd had the opportunity to learn this information much sooner.

HOW WELL IS HIRING REALLY BEING DONE?

When we analyze our hiring effectiveness, all we are able to do is examine the performance of those applicants we have hired. We have no way of comparing the performance of the applicants we hired against those we did not hire. In truth, we really don't know whether the best applicant was hired. All we know is how the applicant who *was* hired is performing.

Whether you have your own war stories or have heard the stories of others, hiring mistakes can make you cringe. I have trouble accepting that a bad hire was the best of the applicants and that the ones turned down were even worse or that the interviewer was even skillful enough to pick up on information that would have warned of the impending problem and knowingly hired the poor performer instead of passing. The truth is, bad hires can be prevented.

So often, interviewers lack the know-how to regulate the applicant information they collect during the interview. Unaware, they accept information that is unreliable for predicting future job performance.

That's why Motivation-Based Interviewing is so important. Your success as a manager depends on your staff's ability to perform the job well, achieve results, and meet goals. So why would you want anyone on your team but a high performer?

There are no substitutes for hiring well. Companies can't afford to continue to ignore the importance of educating interviewers on accurately selecting only the best employees. Perhaps you want to rebut and say that in a labor market with low unemployment, where most of the employable are already working, you are lucky just to fill your job openings. During such times, you may have the perception that the real problem is not about the selection process, but more often about having a limited pool of applicants to choose from.

Even in a labor market with high unemployment and ample applicants, determining the best job performer isn't necessarily easier. As the number of applicants for a given job increases, it can be more difficult to distinguish the interview-savvy applicants from the genuine high performers.

Blaming any labor market sidesteps the core problem. Employers are always struggling to keep positions filled due to turnover, and the highly competitive business world never slows down. Those who are employed still keep their eyes open for new or better job opportunities. Hiring high performers is less about the national unemployment rate and really about how to attract those who are ready for a new opportunity and are reentering the job market.

One of my favorite ways to reach quality applicants, which is often missed, is a good in-house referral program. This works well for most types of jobs and is very cost effective. It turns all of your employees into recruiters and reaches their friends, neighbors, acquaintances, and more. You will get a lot of mileage from a referral program if it's done correctly. Of course, you can't forget about being able to accurately identify which of the referrals are a good hire, because not all are.

You should never have to give in by settling for less than the best. Hiring undermotivated employees, skilled or unskilled, and then trying to increase their motivation level makes no business sense. Providing skills training post-hire to those employees who are highly motivated will yield a great return on investment in any labor market.

HIRE WELL...OR WHAT?

How do you make sure you hire the best people? In the Hire Authority workshop *Interviewer Training for Hiring High Performers*, more than 80 percent of the attendees admit that even though they have hiring authority, they have had no formal training on selecting the best employees. Those who did receive some training learned only about the legal dos and don'ts of hiring or some interviewing basics.

Unfortunately, even hands-on interviewing experience doesn't teach interviewers enough. In fact, many interviewers have learned incorrect information about how to identify top performers. This comes with a price tag. The result is either poor hiring or less-effective hiring, and it shows up in your workplace through poor morale, low productivity, absenteeism, high turnover, or other sticky management issues.

One of the most common misconceptions in hiring is that skill level equates to job performance level—that is the better the skills, the better the job performance. A lack of the perfect skill set is not an indicator

that a person is unmotivated or not a high achiever. Even though skill assessment is important, it is not the most crucial criteria in hiring. Requiring applicants to have the perfect skill set for the job opening at the time of the interview can often mean turning away high achievers.

Skills are useless without the initiative to apply them. The world is filled with people who lack the initiative or motivation to do what it takes to make use of their potential. Some skilled employees may lack motivation; likewise, some unskilled or under-skilled employees may be highly driven to achieve. Hiring well is more than measuring skills. If you rely on skills as the determining factor for hiring, the result can be an employee job performance that ranges from very good to very bad. Skills and motivation go hand in hand, but they are different *and must be assessed separately*.

THE EVOLVING INTERVIEWER

Interviewing and employee selection are steadily evolving and improving. And we still are not finished learning. It was not that long ago that industrial psychologists introduced behavior-based interviewing into employee selection, tremendously improving hiring. Behavior-based interviewing works on the principle that past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior.

The problem with behavior-based interviewing is that it assumes all behaviors are consistent, that they never vary. It infers that every past behavior will repeat in the same way in the future, that every behavior is constant. Behaviors are not quite that consistent. Some people may display certain behaviors only when they think can get away with them. People may be on their best behavior or their worst. This behavior may be something they exhibit often or hardly ever. And all of these factors vary among people.

An example of inconsistent behavior, behavior that occurs only occasionally, merely provides clues for future behavior that is likely to be infrequent. The applicant's normal, everyday behavior is still yet to be determined.

Here's an analogy that may help: Imagine every example of past behavior that an applicant will share with you during the interview as either a green ball or a blue ball. The green balls are symbolic of the applicant's occasional or inconsistent behavior only. The blue ones

represent the applicant's most common everyday behavior. The blue ones are most important because they signify behavior that it is likely to continue occurring on a regular basis—in other words, a person's predominant behavior.

If we want to predict how the applicant will perform day to day as a norm, we must be able to see these green and blue balls and not be colorblind to them. Interviewers go astray because they can't see a difference, or they don't know that a difference exists. They assume all examples of behavior will mirror future performance exactly. Without knowing it, they use the information from a green ball to form their hiring decisions. Because this information is much less reliable for predicting future job performance, hiring is inconsistent.

Behavior-based interviewing requires that actual past behaviors are used. This is good because real examples are better than hypothetical responses. But it still doesn't tell us how to distinguish between the consistency of behavior, what behavior is predominant, or how to see the color of the example. Although behavior-based interviewing is more effective than hiring strictly from "gut feelings," it's still not enough to gauge a person's future job performance the way it's currently used.

Pre-employment testing, another advancement in hiring, was designed to assist interviewers in identifying high performers. Not 100-percent accurate, testing is a tool designed only to aid the interviewer, not to replace him in making a judgment about an applicant's rightness for the job. The spotlight is on the interviewer's skill level in selecting the best employees and how that skill level can be approved. To hire well, you as an interviewer must determine the applicant's predominant behavior. If the time you spend interviewing an applicant does not help you accurately predict his future job performance, and do it consistently, then each minute you spend interviewing is a waste of your time.

UNDERSTANDING THE INTERVIEW RELATIONSHIP

To understand why past behavior examples are not enough for predicting future behavior, you must understand the interaction that occurs between the interviewer and the applicant during the interview process. The relationship is a game of control over the job offer.

Initially, the interviewer has the control and the applicant wants it. To win, the applicant must receive an offer (but does not have to accept it).

This somewhat interdependent game is called *The Interview Relationship* and it automatically exists between every interviewer and applicant. Let's face it: No applicant wants to be rejected. The applicant is forced into the role of marketing himself by accentuating his positives and minimizing his negatives. To make matters more challenging, the interviewer has a limited time period to gather relevant information in order to make a good hiring decision. Interviewers see only the tip of the iceberg within this time. Untrained interviewers do not usually add value to this scenario. Instead of encouraging open dialogue, they stifle it. If an interviewer shows the wrong type of response, the applicant clams up or amends his story to get a more approving response.

Some interviewers, without ever knowing it, set up their applicants or themselves to fail by their handling of the interview. For instance, an interviewer who talks too much or gives away too much information early on may unwittingly be clueing in the applicant to what the interviewer would like to hear.

Applicants go to interviews on their best behavior and with their guard up, revealing only a small piece of who they are. The applicants are reading books and Web sites offering advice and tips on how to get a job. They use prepared answers and particular examples of past behavior that show off only successes, often without ever revealing any less-than-stellar behavior until after they are hired.

A close friend recently shared with me several experiences she had as an applicant with the popular interview question, "Tell me about your weaknesses." She said the first time she was asked this question, she answered it honestly, spilling damaging information about herself. Later, after reading articles on how to land a job and after gaining additional interviewing experience, she learned to provide answers that actually diverted attention away from her weaknesses. Instead of mentioning that she usually runs late, she stated she is a workaholic who sometimes has trouble juggling everything she is trying to accomplish. She further added comments about how she has improved herself by finding better ways to get more done, all a prepared marketing strategy

to avoid divulging her actual weaknesses.

This same friend recently forwarded the Web address of a popular online recruiting company that supplies free information on how to ace interviews. It included all the common interview questions, plus the type of answer the interviewer is seeking. In addition, it listed interview dos and don'ts and suggested questions for the applicant to ask the interviewer. The advice was right on target for what the applicant should do.

The applicants are learning more about getting a job than the interviewers are learning about hiring well.

Being interview-savvy, applicants share examples of their best and brightest behaviors, their best success stories, and their not-so-bad weaknesses. You, as an interviewer, need to determine whether these examples are of an applicant's everyday behavior. But how? Some interviewers have figured out that all high performers, those employees who perform in the top 20 percent, share certain behavioral characteristics and attitudes. Some interviewers try to determine whether their applicants possess these particular traits. Common traits such as initiative, motivation, persistence, a positive attitude, and problem-solving skills are sought in the applicants' responses and behavior examples.

There is a problem with this. The interviewing misconception is that if you find these traits at all present in an applicant, the applicant is a high performer. But these behaviors that are common to high performers are not exclusive to high performers; they're just more abundant or predominant in them. The concept is on the right track, but there is more to assessing high achievers. Remember: Every applicant is either a high performer or pretending to be one. You should not blindly accept every past behavior example as being that of everyday behavior, because it might be an exception to the norm. It could trick you into incorrect judgments favoring the applicant. In other words, that great example of initiative that your applicant just provided could mean he always takes initiative—or it might mean nothing.