

# **Interviewing Myths**

## **How To Avoid The 4 Worst Hiring Problems**

You have an interview scheduled for this afternoon. You prepare by scanning the resume for two or three minutes before the person comes into your office. You're not worried because you will "know" if this is the right person.

The candidate walks into your office, strides across the room, looks you in the eye, and with a firm handshake introduces herself. Nice start you're thinking. She is upbeat, outgoing and can obviously create an impression with a prospect. You start thinking; I wonder what it is going to take to get this person.

But let's not jump to a conclusion too quickly, so you pull out your pen and say, "So sell me this pen." Reject the first statement out of her mouth and see how she handles objections. And most important, see if she knows how to ask for the order.

This all too familiar scenario plays out daily when sales managers are making critical sales rep hiring decisions. And many of the mistakes made are caused by one of the greatest myths associated with choosing people, the belief that interview behavior is a good predictor of job performance. This is just one of the many interviewing myths that lower your probability of making good hiring decisions.

Interviewing myths have been perpetuated through the years for a number of reasons. The first, and I believe the scariest, is simply ignorance. So few people have been taught how to interview and choose people that the default is to do what was done to you or what you have always done.

The second reason these myths continue to haunt is that most interviewers are driven by ego. There is a certain rush you get when you know you get to control the fate of the person sitting across the table. Not always a conscious thought, it does sneak into your subconscious during the process. This leads to interviewers playing games with candidates.

Finally, the reason myths, misconceptions and poor practices have perpetuated over the years is because of the “hand-me-down” principle. Shortly after you were first promoted to a sales management position, you needed to hire a new salesperson. You had never been taught how to do it correctly. So you did what any intelligent person would do in that situation ... you did what was done to you.

You thought back to all the times you were interviewed. You assumed that if it was done to you it must be right. And, you repeated the process.

Over the years as the process gets repeated and passed down from generation to generation, it takes on a life of its own. “Everyone does it this way” and “that’s how we have always done it” become the mantras. As a result, poor practices become standard procedure.

As I was typing this article on a flight, the gentleman in the next seat leaned over and started asking me questions. He is the president of a medical imaging equipment company that is expanding rapidly. He told me he had built his company from scratch and was very proud of the people he had hired.

He went on to tell me how he has been right about 80% of the time. I asked him how much more money he would have in his pocket right now if his percentage was even higher?

You see, although he was naturally quite good at choosing people, no one had ever taught him a specific process that would help him get even better. And, think about the people who are NOT naturally good at it (most of your management team). How much would a proven process help them?

Let’s look at four very common interviewing myths and misconceptions and see how they might be sabotaging your ability to choose great salespeople.

### **MYTH # 1 PUTTING YOURSELF IN A POSITION FOR WHICH YOU ARE NOT QUALIFIED**

This one problem is at the root of most of the bad advice and misinformation you will receive on the subject. Almost all of the popular systems and experts on hiring advise you to ask questions that require you to interpret or

“figure out” the answer. That requires you to get into the candidate’s head and that is not a place you want to be.

None of us are trained to figure people out or analyze a person’s thoughts or intentions. This is an area best left to trained experts. There is a reason it takes years and years of education and training to become a psychologist. And even they have trouble reading people correctly.

Let’s look at how some of the myths, misconceptions and so-called expert advice is setting you up to fail.

One very popular author tells you to ask the candidate what he will hear if he calls your references. The theory is that the person will provide you with some deep insight because of the threat of the reference. Who knows how a person will react to this question? And more importantly, how are you supposed to figure out what the answer means?

Another trainer says you only need to ask one question: (Doesn’t this sound ridiculous even before I share the question?) “Can you describe your most significant accomplishment?” He goes on to say that from the answer you will gain insight into performance, potential, vision and leadership.

Would you really want to figure all that out from one question? And by the way, a perfect answer to the questions is, “yes”. It is a yes-no question after all.

Finally, there are quite a few systems that advocate putting the candidate into difficult situations and seeing how they react. Unfortunately, this requires you to interpret reactions. Certainly not a position you want or need to be in and definitely not a situation for which you are trained.

Any advice you get on the subject of recruiting and hiring needs to be tested against this very simple filter: “Do I need special insight or skills to follow this advice?” Do not place yourself in a position for which you are not qualified.

## **MYTH #2 INTERVIEW BEHAVIOR EQUALS JOB PERFORMANCE**

How often do you walk into an interview thinking, "I'll know it when I see it!"? Down deep, don't you believe you're good at reading people? Tell the truth. Because if you do, your walking into a mine field.

Believing that how a person acts in an interview predicts how they will act on the job is a recipe for disaster. Interview behavior may be real or may be worthy of an Academy Award. Guess wrong and you are in big trouble.

Let me show you how this works. Energy level is an example of a requirement important for good sales reps. Everyone wants to hire a sales rep who is upbeat and outgoing. Energy level deserves special emphasis during the interview. But, don't you think every candidate today is coached to be upbeat, to try to take control of the interview, to look you in the eye and so forth.

Will that energy in the interview translate to energy and more importantly - success on the job? A question I like to ask my clients is, "Are you hiring talent or are you hiring interview behavior?"

Selling to committees is another skill required of many sales reps. So, many interviewers have the candidate interview in front of three or four people at the same time to see how they handle the one on many situation. Heck, if they can't sell to a committee in an interview, how are they going to sell to a committee in the field?

The problem here and the reason this is not an effective technique, is you are making an assumption that how they handle the interview committee is how they will handle the prospect committee. And, you are betting your sales success on that assumption.

You are just guessing. Instead, project behavior into the future based on a proven model like the behavioral model. (Past behavior predicts future behavior)

A sales rep who has sold to committees is familiar with the process and knows the rules and intricacies of being successful in that situation. But, an interview is a situation the person doesn't face very often and has rules that

are far less clear. The interview “test situation” doesn't translate well to the real world.

Here's another example. You want closers, so how better to determine if they can close than to see if they close you in the interview. Throw a couple of objections at them, "I like your background Mary but frankly I don't think you know enough about our marketplace." Then see how she handles the situation.

I have had Sales Executives tell me that if the candidate doesn't try to close them in the interview, they will never close on the job. They test to see if she asks for the order at the end of the interview?

The candidate is going to try to figure which game you are playing and since they don't play the interview game often the person might guess wrong. Then what? Do you really think a candidate could possibly have a long successful history of sales without asking for the order at some point?

The interview is not familiar ground, for you or the candidate. You are both guessing about the rules. And neither of you are as prepared as you normally would be for a sales call. It is a terrible assumption to think the person handles sales calls the way they are handling the interview.

Many people are nervous in an interview, mostly because they don't know what to expect. This differs from a sales call, where most sales people are not nervous because they know what to expect. You can prepare for a sales call but how do you prepare for an interview?

It's much too difficult to determine during an interview if what you are seeing is natural behavior or just an act. Think of an interview as "prom night", everyone is going to be on their best behavior. When you ask the candidate if they know how to close, do you really expect them to say, "No, but if you hire me I will try real hard"?

The best way to determine if the person has sufficient energy, can sell to a committee or close, is to find out how they have done it in past situations that most closely resemble your environment. Then explore as many examples as possible and look for patterns.

Their past behavior is proof of how they handle these situations and is definitely the best predictor of what they will do when they come to work for you. Assumptions are only going to get you in trouble.

### **MYTH # 3 OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS ARE BEST**

Most of what you read or hear about interviewing tells you to ask open-ended questions. The reason given is that an open-ended question gets the person talking. But, what good does it do you to get them talking if what they are talking about doesn't give you information that helps you predict whether or not they will be successful on your job? Having a candidate talk for the sake of talking is a waste of your time.

Here are three reasons open-ended questions are not your best option:

First, you lose control of the interview. Controlling an interview simply means controlling the agenda. If you ask, "So tell me about using technology to sell" the candidate now chooses the direction and composition of the conversation. The candidate should only have the option of telling you exactly what they did and how they did it. An open-ended question gives them the option to tell just about anything they want.

Second, answers to open-ended questions may not give you quality information. The person might answer the previous question with an in-depth discussion of how a company can implement a sales-force automation system. Although it can sound impressive, have you learned anything about their sales practices? You need specific answers about what the person actually did.

You don't want a lot of theory, opinion or conjecture!

Third, open-ended questions put the candidate under pressure. When you ask about using technology to sell, the person's thought process includes a quick and concentrated scan of the options they think will sound good to you. This just puts the person under undue stress and creates anxiety which only lowers the quality of data you get.

Also, the open-ended question gives them the opportunity to give you the "book" answer. You have to wonder if you are getting real information or just what the person thinks you want to hear?

How do you fix open-ended questions? Ask closed-ended questions. Closed-ended questions are defined as questions that have only one answer. Instead of, "Tell me about using technology to sell." instead ask "How did you use your SFA system to shorten your sales cycle?"

Side Note: Before you get up in arms about yes-no questions being closed ended, they are. But they are not the definition of the category. Any question that has only one answer is a closed-ended question. "How many deals did you close last month?" "What percentage did you increase sales last year?" "How did you overcome the price objection at ABC?" These are all examples of closed-ended questions.

You will get the information you need by focusing your questions. Closed-ended questions lead to better information and also make it easier for the person to answer by eliminating the guesswork.

#### **MYTH # 4 GUT-FEEL MAKES GREAT DECISIONS**

You certainly wouldn't ignore your gut-feel. When you don't feel right about a person, you pass. And, if you hit it off with someone quickly, you start formulating the offer in your head. The longer you spend in the business world and the more successful you are, the better your instincts and feelings get.

Your instincts are certainly valuable and never to be ignored but if you supplement them with a proven process and objective data, your decisions will improve.

When your gut-feel radar goes off, either positive or negative ask, "What did the person do or say to make me feel this way?" Then probe the event that triggered the feeling.

When the person makes a strong, positive first impression, rather than assuming they know how to establish rapport with a prospect, ask for examples of how they have established rapport with prospects in the past. This approach gives you the information to confirm or reject your feeling.

Try to always have objective data available to support your decisions.

## **BONUS MYTH # 5      YOU SHOULD EVALUATE CANDIDATES AGAINST EACH OTHER**

After interviewing a candidate you really like him but, you think you should see some other candidates first. A typical thought is, "I wonder if there is another person out there who might be better?" There is! But, how long will it take you to find that person? And, once you find that person, don't you have to repeat the same question? How much longer will that take?

Where does the game end?

I am not advocating making rush decisions or making your decisions in a vacuum. But, if you have a good profile, have asked good questions in the interview and evaluated properly, you only need to compare candidates against your standard, not against each other.

Too often, you interview three candidates and choose the best of the three. But, what if the best of the three still doesn't meet your requirements? You end up hiring the best of the worst.

Deciding who you are going to put out on the street to represent your organization in a sales role is never an easy decision. These decisions are going to affect your financial as well as your mental health and should never be taken lightly. A solid structured process void of games, gimmicks and tricks will definitely improve your probability of making good decisions.

Over the past 25+ years, Barry Shamis has worked with some of the most powerful sales organizations in the world. His recruiting and hiring model is being used by more than 70,000 Sales Managers, Sales Executives and Business Owners all across the globe. You can get a free copy of his book "Hiring Made Easy" at <http://www.SelectingWinners.com>