



The Career College Information Source

The Two Big Lies

By Tom Foster, Author, Hiring Talent, Decoding Levels of Work in the Behavioral Interview

The Two Big Lies

By Tom Foster, Author, Hiring Talent, Decoding Levels of Work in the Behavioral Interview

Paula sat down at her desk piled with paper. Today she was determined to make her way to the bottom of the stack. Until she was interrupted.

"Paula, there is someone here to see you. He says he has an appointment," rang the words from the intercom. Glancing at the calendar on her computer screen, she closed her eyes, the best of intentions dashed. She had scheduled this interview late last Friday, but it had slipped her mind. The stark reality of the appointment on her screen prompted a deep breath and a quick search for the right resume on the pile.

"Show him to the conference room. Give him a cup of coffee. Tell him I will be right there," she replied. There was a hole on Paula's team. And, when she filled this position, she had instructions and budget to add one more to the headcount. Resume in hand, she entered the conference room to engage in a dance with a predictable outcome.

"Welcome, Sam," Paula said with a practiced smile. "I am glad you could come in today. We really need someone to fill this role and your resume looks like you have the right qualifications. Tell me a little bit about yourself."

Sam's response was also practiced, and while he droned, Paula

took the opportunity to scan the resume looking for a place to start. Leaping off the page was gold. Sam had worked at Paula's alma mater, though she graduated 20 years ago. "Interesting," she thought out loud. "Your resume says you spent time in my old stomping grounds."

Sam nodded in agreement and this interview was off to the races. Paula had a short list of written questions that she checked off, making notes on the resume, but the small talk loomed large. Because they had familiar things to chat about, the conversation

Resume in hand, she entered the conference room to engage in a dance with a predictable outcome.

went easy. Paula peeked at her watch. She liked this candidate and they were only fifteen minutes into the interview. Paula might be able to wrap this up and get back to the stack of stuff on her desk.

"Would you like to take a look at our offices?" Paula signaled that the conversation was coming to a close. "This is truly a great place to work. We have a really good team, I am sure you will like them."

It was not much of a tour. Paula dragged the willing candidate through

a spacious lobby, high vaulted ceilings, down the hall into an upscale cubicle farm. She was thinking how quickly she connected with the candidate. The experience on the resume described the same work

Sam stared back, without flinching as he prepared to tell the two big lies. "Yes, I can. And yes, I will."

routines as Paula's team. "You guys have the identical phone system that we used," Sam observed. That cinched it.

"You know, your resume says that you are currently between jobs, so you could start right away, right?"

Sam nodded while Paula focused on his face. "And you are up to the job, you believe you can handle this?" she continued, looking for a trace of uneasiness.

Sam stared back, without flinching as he prepared to tell the two big lies. "Yes, I can. And yes, I will."

What could go wrong?

- Why does the interviewer miss important information?
- Why does the interviewer rely on impressions rather than facts?
- Why is the hiring decision made too quickly?
- Why is candidate selection influenced by bias and stereotypes?
- Why does the interviewer lose control in the interview?

- Why do most hiring managers underestimate the complexity of work in the role?

We leave the hiring manager to twist in the wind

Paula has the title of admissions director. She schedules the admissions team to make sure there is proper coverage to handle leads coming off the Internet. Those leads are expensive, not one can go to waste. In addition to scheduling and coordinating, she is also the coach. She privately listens to the phone calls of her admissions counselors and suggests different ways to handle inquiries. Paula is accountable for the output of her team. They have to make their start numbers. Paula has a hole on her team and room for one more. Paula's manager made things very clear, "fill the empty seats. We have work to do around here."

While Paula is clearly the supervisor of her team, she is barely qualified to make an effective hiring decision. She underestimates the complexity of the role of an admissions counselor. Her interview training consists only of recollections in her own job hunting experience. Somewhere, in a book, she remembers, ask open-ended questions.

With an empty seat in the cubicle farm, Paula has to cover the shortfall



TOM FOSTER, is the author of "Hiring Talent, Decoding Levels of Work in the Behavioral Interview." He regularly consults with CEOs in the US and Canada on organizational structure, managerial roles and hiring practices. This includes learning institutions from K-12 to university level programs.

He is a board member at a large non-profit university in Florida. His unique approach to

levels of work, based on the research of the late Dr. Elliott Jaques, opens new insights to match decision making and problem solving to the capability of candidates. You can follow his blog at hiringtalent.com.

Contact Information:

Tom Foster
Foster Learning Corporation
PO Box 5099
Lighthouse Point, FL 33074
Email: tfoster@fosterlearning.org
Website: www.hiringtalent.com

in work. When does she need someone to fill this role? Yesterday would be good.

Paula's manager asks about the role description. Paula points to HR, saying there must be one in a three-ring binder, somewhere. As a substitute, she suggests using the job posting published on the recruiting site. She has no time to sit down and think about what is really required for success in the role. She needs someone by yesterday.

Why does the interviewer miss important information?

Important information is missed in the interview because it was never defined. Most role descriptions contain a loose list of tasks and activities. This list is disorganized and rarely identifies the accountabilities in the role. The level of work is underestimated or not defined. Because the role description is so poorly organized, it is rarely used as the basis for interview questions. Important information, necessary for the hiring decision, is seldom uncovered in the interview.

Why does the interviewer rely on impressions rather than facts?

In the first few minutes of the interview, massive amounts of non-verbal data stream into the brain of the interviewer. These impressions, powerful and mostly unconscious, cannot be stopped. The facts required to make the hiring decision are absent from most of the questions asked. As the interview wanders, there is little to counter-balance these first impressions, so, at the end of the conversation, impressions carry the weight in the decision.

Why is the hiring decision made too

quickly?

Often, the hiring decision is made in the first three minutes of the interview. The non-verbal data surrounding the candidate's dress, hairstyle, posture, tone of voice, pace and breathing is captured at lightning speed. The receptors compiling this data work much faster than the logical brain. The logical brain must form questions and receive responsive facts to do its work. It is slower. The logical brain attempts to organize and make sense of candidate responses. Because the interview questions come from a disorganized role description, or are unrelated to the role description, the first three minutes win.

Why is candidate selection influenced by bias and stereotypes?

Human survival is based on stereotypes. We all know what a happy face looks like, a sad face, a reflective face, an inquisitive face, a scared face. The face that we see, we mirror.

A person yawns, we yawn. A person smiles, we smile. We see terror, our face mirrors those same facial muscles, triggering an instant neural response. We do not have to see the dinosaur, we only have to see our friend's face of terror. It is a survival thing. And we do not have to outrun the dinosaur, we only have to outrun our friend.

This science is called neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) and is deeply embedded in the way we learn about life. Infants learn through mimic behavior and so do adults. Stereotypes allow humans to instantly determine and respond to danger. We immediately take evasive action while we wait for the logical brain to

Often, the hiring decision is made in the first three minutes of the interview.

catch up, ask questions and temper our decision based on facts. Our stereotypes are reinforced and refined through adulthood. We depend on them even when they are wrong. And, in the interview, the hiring manager rarely asks enough questions to counter the influence of a stereotype.

Why does the interviewer lose control in the interview?

The interviewer loses control the instant that questions stop and explanations begin. The interview exists for a very specific purpose. The hiring manager needs to extract the right data from the candidate to make an effective hiring decision. Any time spent outside of inquiry runs counter to the purpose of the interview. There will be plenty of time to explain what

Paula's manager has the perspective to understand what is really required for success in the admissions role, and plays a very specific part in the hiring process.

a great place this is, but only to those candidates who make the short list.

In the interview, there is a person asking questions and a person responding. Who controls the conversation? When Paula stopped asking questions and started talking, control shifted and the interview went off purpose. The good news is, the interviewer can immediately regain control by simply asking another question. But, Paula started talking, explaining and offering an office tour because she *ran out* of questions.

Most hiring managers underestimate the complexity of work in the role?

Most problems related to the first three minutes of the interview can be overcome with a focus on an organized role description. But, even an organized role description can undermine the hiring decision unless

the level of work is clearly identified. Identifying the level of work helps to understand the complexity of the role. In every role, there is a defined level of problem solving and a defined level of decision making. Every team member, supervisor and manager intuitively understands that each role works on a different level of problems and decisions. Until the level of work is accurately identified, there is no way the right person can be identified in the hiring process.

First things first

Paula is appropriately designated as the hiring manager, but she needs support and coaching from *her* manager. Paula's manager is the manager-once-removed (MOR) to the open position. Paula's manager has the perspective to understand what is really required for success in the admissions role, and plays a very specific part in the hiring process.

The manager-once-removed is the quarterback. Paula, as the hiring manager, is the understudy. It is the role of the MOR to field a qualified talent pool. Paula still makes the hire, but from a qualified talent pool.

Why the MOR?

- The MOR has more clarity related to what is required for success in the role.
- The MOR has more patience for

Level of work	
III	Manager (MOR)
II	Admissions Director (Hiring Manager)
I	Admissions Counselor (Candidate)

the required elements of the hiring process.

- Ultimately, the MOR is accountable for the decision made by the hiring manager.

What is a manager, anyway?

A manager is that person held accountable for the output of other people. When a ship runs aground at night because the night watchman falls asleep, who do we fire? It is the captain we hold accountable. Why? By definition, a manager is accountable for the output of the team.

Game changer

The hiring manager is about to make a hiring decision. This could be a great decision or a poor decision. Who do we hold accountable for the quality of the decision made by the hiring manager? It is the hiring manager's manager, the MOR. This changes everything. Most MORs leave the hiring manager to twist in the wind. Good luck, they say. But when the MOR is held to account for the output of the hiring manager, everything shifts.

The time frame for the hiring manager is small. The hiring manager often has to cover the work of the open role. Yesterday would be a good day to hire. The hiring manager will shortcut every step in the process, from a role description to written interview questions.

The time frame for the MOR is longer. The MOR does not feel the day to day pressure of the missing role. The right day to hire, is the day the right candidate is identified. The MOR will make certain that appropriate preparation is complete. Why? Because the MOR is accountable for the output of the

process.

This one small adjustment, enlisting the active participation of the MOR, is a game changer.

The role description

If Paula had her way, she would use a five year old job description recovered from a rusty file cabinet in HR. The role

description is the central document that defines the level of work, the key areas of responsibility, the tasks and accountability in each key area. Paula is not alone in her wish to shortcut this step. Ninety percent of all hires are completed without a defined role description. If the level of work is not accurately defined, if the level of decision making and problem solving is not accurately defined, the right person will never be hired.

Two problems

Most role descriptions are a simple elongated list of tasks and activities. There are two problems –

- Tasks and activities are not organized.
- Level of work is not defined.

Organization

The list of tasks in most role descriptions is dizzying. All these things to do, with no priority or organization. Yet, on closer inspection, we can see that some tasks go with each other and some do not. If we carve out the ones that go together, put them to the side, we can see in the remainder, more tasks that go together. And, if we carve those out, and put them to the side, we can see more tasks that go together. When we finish grouping the

If the level of work is not accurately defined, if the level of decision making and problem solving is not accurately defined, the right person will never be hired.

Properties in Levels of Work					
Level of Work	Longest Time Span Goals	Typical Managerial Role	Function	Tools	Problem Solving
S – V	5-10 Years	Business unit president, CEO	Creates relevant strategic vision in the market	Financial models, market studies	External analysis
S – IV	2-5 Years	Executive manager, vice-president	Integrates multiple systems and subsystems	System metrics	Systems analysis
S – III	1-2 Years	Campus director manager	Creates single serial system, monitors system, improves system	Flow charts, sequence, planning	Root cause analysis, comparative analysis
S – II	3-12 Months	Admissions director supervisor coordinator project manager	Makes sure production gets done, implements the production system	Schedules, checklists, meetings	Experience, procedure manuals, best practices
S – I	1 Day-3 Months	Admissions counselor, clerical, production technician	Production work	Forms, equipment, real tools	Defined decision trees or trial and error

tasks that go together and separating the ones that do not, we will end up with five to ten groups of tasks, or Key Result Areas (KRAs).

This simple grouping of tasks provides a structure to the role description that becomes helpful in understanding the key areas of responsibility. This structure will also help us organize interview questions.

Level of work

Level of work helps us understand the level of problems that must be solved and the level of decisions that must be made in the role. Level of work was first accurately described in the exhaustive research of Elliott Jaquesⁱ in his centerpiece book "Requisite Organization." Jaques,

ⁱ Elliott Jaques (1917-2003) authored 23 books on organizational structure and human capability including "Requisite Organization", 2nd edition revised, Cason, Hall, 2006.

a clinical psychologist, was most interested in the way that companies and institutions organize themselves to accomplish work. As he observed the way that groups self-organize, he documented five distinct levels of work for most organizations and seven levels of work for the largest organizations.

In this model, Paula is operating in a Stratum II (S-II) level of work role where she is implementing the admission system created by her manager. She is in a coordinating and coaching role, to make sure the work of the admissions team is completed according to established methods, in the appropriate sequence, in compliance with system constraints. Paula will use schedules and checklists to make sure that all leads are being followed and tracked, resulting in applications for academic

starts.

Paula's manager is accountable for creating the system, defining the methodology and sequence. In smaller institutions, Paula's manager might be the campus director. In Paula's hiring process, this is the MOR, the quarterback for the hiring process.

The admissions counselor that Paula is trying to hire is likely a high S-I role. It is possible that the admissions cycle, from first inquiry to start, will exceed one to two months. The admissions counselor will have to manage the uncertainty embedded in a process that requires student interest, documented academic qualifications and financial packaging. There are a number of variables that must be anticipated and accurately resolved. In this case, Paula has grossly underestimated what is required in the role related to problem solving and decision making. From the date of hire, Paula will be pulled into the weeds as the new hire struggles to perform. If the level of work is not accurately defined, the right person will never be identified.

How many questions

Most of the problems created in the interview can be avoided by appropriate preparation. There are no tricks or traps to this process, but there is hard work. Again, this is work that Paula will avoid.

Most hiring managers enter the interview with no prepared questions. The rest have jotted down only two or three, at most a dozen questions. Without a solid bank of interview questions, the decision will be left to first impressions, stereotypes and likeability. The interviewer needs data and lots of it. That is why an organized role description is so

important.

If the average role description for an S-I role can be divided into 5-6 Key Result Areas (KRAs), ten questions per KRA is adequate. That would be 50-60 written questions. At first blush, if you did the math, you likely pushed back. If the role description is disorganized, it might seem unreasonable. But, if the role description is organized into KRAs, it is a piece of cake.

Building the question

If one example KRA for an admissions counselor is building rapport with prospective applicants, here are the steps to build the questions.

- What is the critical role requirement?
- What data do we need about the candidate.
- What circumstance would illustrate the data we need to know?
- What questions would we ask?

Building rapport

- The critical role requirement is to build rapid rapport with the prospective applicant over the telephone.
- The data we need - has the candidate successfully built rapid rapport with someone over the telephone.
- Tell me about a time when you had to speak to someone, over the telephone to build a relationship to influence a decision.
- Questions
 1. What was the situation?
 2. What was the decision you were

Without a solid bank of interview questions, the decision will be left to first impressions, stereotypes and likeability. The interviewer needs data and lots of it.

- trying to influence?
3. What were the logistics of the decision?
 4. How well did you know the person? What questions did you ask to get to know them better?
 5. How much time did you have to influence the decision?
 6. Did you contact the person more than once?
 7. How did you open the conversation?
 8. How did you find out if the person was interested?
 9. What questions did the person ask about the decision?
 10. How did you respond?

In this situation, the candidate will quickly reveal the reality of their

If you had 150 discreet pieces of data about a candidate and their behavior related to critical role requirements, would your first impression (good or bad) carry that much weight?

experience. Paula may have liked the candidate. The candidate may have worked in a similar department using the same phone system. But, we will never know their experience related to our critical role requirements unless we ask the right questions. We will never ask the right questions or enough questions, unless we have prepared them from the role description.

What piece of paper is in your hand?

If you watched Paula in the interview, specifically looked at the piece of paper in her hand during the conversation, what did you see? Most inexperienced interviewers work off the resume. Wrong piece of paper.

The experience on the resume may or may not be related to any of the critical role requirements in Paula's open position. Worse still, asking open ended questions about the

resume allows the candidate to make up stuff they think the interviewer wants to hear. Listening to the candidate's story leaves room for puffery and fabrication. It is time consuming and counter-productive.

If, however, the interviewer has 50-60 prepared questions, each carefully crafted to extract a distinct piece of data related to a critical role requirement, the information gathered during the interview will dramatically improve the quality of the hiring decision.

So much for first impressions

The reality, for each written question, it is likely the interviewer will ask 1-2 clarifying questions, so a list of 50 written questions can easily generate 150 actual questions. If you had 150 discreet pieces of data about a candidate and their behavior related to critical role requirements, would your first impression (good or bad) carry that much weight? What would happen to the quality of your hiring decisions? No tricks, no traps, just fundamental managerial work.

Three steps

- The manager-once-removed is a critical role in the hiring process.
- The role description is the central document that defines the level of work, the key result areas and the accountability in each KRA.
- Compiling a bank of close-ended questions, ten for each KRA, will dramatically improve the data collected from each candidate?

Career Education REVIEW

www.careereducationreview.net

GET INFORMATION THAT MATTERS

Are you spending valuable time sifting through emails and media sources searching for information that will help you and your school be more successful? Career Education Review (CER) is an easy way to staying informed about the career education sector.

CER keeps career education leaders and managers up-to-date on best practices, emerging technologies, enrollment and new program ideas, news and events. Today, top leaders, like you, subscribe to CER as a way to stay informed and competitive.

WHY SUBSCRIBE

"Career Education Review is the real thing – information on career schools and programs assembled and written by individuals who have lived and know the sector. It is a vital source of important information anyone involved in career education needs to have."

-Henry Herzing, Ph.D.(hc), MBA, MSEE, President, Herzing College, Co-Founder and Chancellor Emeritus, Herzing University

SUBSCRIBE TODAY AND TAKE ADVANTAGE OF:

- ✓ Original articles written by career education leaders
- ✓ Exclusive interviews with key higher education players
- ✓ Articles and best practices in admissions, academics, faculty development, retention, marketing, alumni, career services, placement etc.
- ✓ Articles and webinars by education attorneys on compliance, legal issues, government regulations
- ✓ Monthly Washington news brief

**Subscribe online at www.careereducationreview.net/subscribe/
OR contact Jenny Faubert at 920-264-0199 or jfaubert@careereducationreview.net**

Career Education Review
2221 South Webster Avenue, Suite A #255
Green Bay, WI 54301
Phone: 920-264-0199 | Fax: 920-659-7797

Email: jfaubert@careereducationreview.net | Website: www.careereducationreview.net

Career Education

REVIEW

www.careereducationreview.net

- ✓ **LEADER INSIGHTS**
- ✓ **FEEDBACK FROM CAREER
EDUCATION EXPERTS**
- ✓ **HIGH QUALITY CONTENT**
- ✓ **FREE WEBINARS**

WHY SUBSCRIBE

"Career Education Review serves as the leading publication to get useful news as well as powerful resources that our campus leaders can use to optimize operational effectiveness and more importantly, student success. This is the reason we feel it's critical all of our campus directors receive CER!" - Jeanne Herrmann, Chief Operating Officer, Globe University/Minnesota School of Business

YES! Sign us up for an annual subscription to the Career Education Review at a cost of \$329.00. Scan and email completed form to jfaubert@careereducationreview.net. The form can also be faxed or mailed to the information below. Or subscribe online at www.careereducationreview.net/subscribe

Name: _____ Title: _____

School/Organization: _____

Shipping Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Method of Payment: ☐ Check ☐ Credit Card Total: _____

Charge to: ☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard ☐ American Express

Card Holder Name: _____

Card Number: _____

Expiration Date: _____ Security Code: _____

Billing Address (if different than shipping): _____

Signature: _____

Career Education Review
2221 South Webster Avenue, Suite A #255
Green Bay, WI 54301
Phone: 920-264-0199 | Fax: 920-659-7797
Email: jfaubert@careereducationreview.net | Website: www.careereducationreview.net