

# Detecting Cultural Fit

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**I**t is probably no surprise that most companies rate recruiting for "cultural fit" as an essential part of the hiring process. The frustrations of "culture clash" are familiar to all of us: No chemistry, not a good fit, incompatible leadership styles, wrong values, etc. A bad fit results in poor morale, low productivity and costly employee turnover. A good fit won't always guarantee success but a bad fit will practically guarantee failure.

Do you rely mostly on "gut feel" when assessing a candidate for culture? Many employers do, and this suggests that while organizations may be using methods such as behavioral interviews, they may not possess the skills to expediently elicit and evaluate responses. In many companies, human resource managers have developed behavioral-based questions to help detect cultural fit. But because hiring managers put their individual stamp on top of corporate culture it is imperative that they, too, ask the right questions to accurately assess a candidate's cultural fit.

I always coach my clients to ask these behavior description questions that cover four major areas — Success, Challenges, Environment and Offer. The questions are:

## 1. "Tell me about your greatest successes? What caused your success?"

Most employers stop with the first portion of this question. It's the follow up question that prompts candidates to become much more introspective. The candidate might describe how a supportive environment energized their success, or how their success came about because the company encouraged risk taking or gave them the ability to make their own decisions.

It's not enough to know that a supportive environment was behind their success. You need to know what a supportive

environment means to the candidate. To one person it might mean everyone was on board with a particular decision, but to another it might imply that they had the ability to make his or her own decisions. The answers to these probative questions will help you determine the candidate's cultural alignment with your organization.

## 2. "Tell me about your greatest challenges. What caused them?"

While question number one deals with the positives, this question is designed to bring out the cultural obstacles that stood in the way of the candidate's progress. Finding out what caused these challenges, instead of how they overcame them, will give you much greater insight into the areas of your culture that might become an impediment to a candidate's successful performance on the job.

## 3. "What kind of environment do you need to be most successful?"

Here, candidates discuss process, tools and staffing issues. This helps you learn about their assumptions about what it takes to be successful, and their assumptions about what prevented them from being successful. Those assumptions will include key cultural areas such as work style, team orientation, customer orientation, decision making and risk taking.

#### 4. "What's important to you to see in an offer'?"

With this question we're looking for things other than money. This includes vacation time and other perks such as laptops, cell phones and other electronic tools, additional training or the ability to purchase other capital equipment. How candidates respond to this question will help you determine what needs to be included in a final offer in order to gain acceptance.

I also highly recommend that candidates speak with peers to help them determine if there is a range of personalities or if there is one type of personality in the organization. Sometimes hiring managers will override their team, but it has been my experience that candidates rarely succeed when the manager making the selection hires against the recommendation of their staff.

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