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The Job Interview and Interviewing Through the Lens of Leadership

Colonel Rob Campbell

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The Job Interview and Interviewing Through the Lens of Leadership

Colonel Rob Campbell

It's the season - students graduating, entering the workforce, and interviewing for jobs. I've had my own experience with hiring as I added a new position to my small business. It was an interesting experience. I'll just say that I witnessed both the good and the bad - no-shows, the ball cap with sunglasses perched on top, the interviewee confessing they were just looking for a paycheck, to those who arrived presentable and prepared. I'm happy to say I found a man of character and talent for the position. After my interview I asked him to return and be interviewed by my teammates. I wanted them to have a say as they would work with him day in and day out. I've taken a leadership approach to the interview and interviewing.

The whole job-seeking and interview process is far different than it has ever been. When I was a teen, I filled out applications then returned to or called the company repeatedly, to see if they would consider me. Today it's all digital. The only time a job seeker and an employer engage in interpersonal interaction is during an in-person (non-virtual) interview. Often it never happens. Complete an online application and an automated email tells you that you made the interview cut or "no thanks." As a seasoned leader and 'people person' this anonymous process makes me uneasy. Since we are stuck with it, let's approach it through a leadership lens.

The interview is but a fragment of a greater journey of employment or, better put, a journey (work as a part of it) human beings' travel. It's personal. Once hired, a job is a mere steppingstone in one's greater career and life journey. For a company the journey of an employee consists of what I term RHOR. Recruiting, Hiring, Onboarding, and most important, Retaining a teammate. A leader has a role in each of these phases of the journey. For the hiring part, today's interviewees have the power. At moment of this writing jobs are plentiful, people have choices. Get it wrong, the good ones walk, and you may be left with those you don't want.

Leaders ought to flip the interview on its head. They and their company are being interviewed, not the other way around. This approach to the interview process – through a lens of leadership, will cause the leader and his or her organization to be better prepared, as if they were headed to an interview themselves. When a person arrives, what is the first impression? Are they met by someone or left to their own to find their way in a foreign environment? Consider the angst an interviewee feels when entering the building of their potential future employment. Are you and your team empathetic to this? Do you immediately put them at ease? What preparation have you done prior to the interview? Is the interview a task in a long list of tasks for the day or is it a main event labeled as a priority and backed with your intent? All of these questions need to be asked and answered wearing the lens of leadership.

Now onto the interview. In my leadership practice, after helping an organization form its vision, culture, and values, I've helped them find people (interview) to best fit it. If vision, culture, and values are not discussed in the interview, you are undervaluing your organization. People do not flock to "now hiring" or a paycheck. They want to join a cause and a team guided by a vision whom subscribe to a set of values. I will certainly address compensation, but the focus is on who we are, what we stand for – our 'why', and where we are headed, determining if the interviewee wants 'in' on our vision and to be one of our teammates. In my preparation for interviews, I've crafted a list of questions to help me (and others) choose the best candidate. Here are three.

1. *"Why this company? You have a resume rich with experiences and skills - why us?"*

This will help tease out the motivation to interview. Your company may be one of a long list of companies the interviewee chose. Look at it in the reverse. Your company made the cut. They chose you. Why is that? This question could also determine if they are just paycheck hunting. If you discover that through their answer - turn off! They are just hunting a paycheck and may not be interested in taking your team to new heights. If, however, you find they have done their homework on your organization and believe what you believe - if you find an interviewee to be hungry and eager to be a 'one of us,' you have someone with great potential.

2. *"Sometimes the 'rules' stand in the way of getting things done. When is it ok to break the rules and how would you approach that?"*

This is the ethical dilemma question. It helps you determine how a potential employee would deal with such a dilemma. Trust is essential and you'll want to get a feel for a person's character and trustworthiness. Be prepared to offer a scenario. You might even give them the question ahead of time, so they have time to think it over. If they are just a

plain rule-breaker, warning sign. If their approach is to present alternatives to leadership, instead of just rule-breaking, you may have a winner.

3. *"Let's imagine you've been selected for this position, and it is a year later. We are gathered here reflecting on what we have accomplished together. What would you want to say?"*

This question helps determine the vision of the interviewee. Have they thought about their future with the company? How would they generically describe success? Have them imagine a future then describe it. "Accomplished together," can help you determine whether they are in it for themselves or if they truly want to be a member of a team. Good employees will show up and do what they are told. Great employees will embrace the vision of the company, see themselves in it, and look toward a future of shared success.

These questions, while helpful, are not a panacea. You will certainly need to balance your feelings with facts. Does the interviewee possess the character, intelligence, skills, and experience for the position? It will be hard to determine this with total assurance in a 1-hour interview. Invest some time getting to know the individual. Involve others on the team. Use these and other thoughtful questions to help you pick the right teammate. View the interview through the lens of leadership. Make it personal. Good luck!

About the Author:

Rob Campbell is an Army Colonel turned author, speaker, and executive leadership coach. Rob founded Rob Campbell Leadership in 2017 following a 27-year Army career. A three-time combat veteran and recipient of three Bronze Star Medals, Rob shares his lessons from the battlefield to organizations of all kinds. Rob is a small business owner in Johnson City, Tennessee and a staunch veteran and military spouse advocate. Find him at RobCampbellLeadership.com.

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