

"Achieve More with Cornerstone"

CANDIDATE INTERVIEWS

Best Practices and Quality Standards for members of Cornerstone International Group when conducting executive and management candidate interviews.

CORNERSTONE
INTERNATIONAL
GROUP

Foreword



One of the significant advantages of Cornerstone Membership is having access to the Best Practices developed over the years. Our membership of AESC broadens that access to include the experience of the Top Firms within our Industry. As owner-managed businesses with a collective ambition to be the Best We Can Be, we are free to make our own choices but open to the challenge that in all aspects of our businesses we can learn from others.

There are many issues related to improving on this level, but mostly it has to do with developing internal trust, defining standards of operation, and gaining the trust of third parties. Our main goals of this Professional Development Manual are as follows:

A. Developing mutual trust among the members regarding the quality and consistency of service offered by sister offices to the same client.
B. Setting a standard of operation that will guarantee a minimum acceptable threshold of quality for all to adhere to.
C. Developing common documentation for assignments to multi-office clients, which underpins a consistent and globally sustainable standard of service.

Cornerstone as a network will comply with the AESC standards among all offices. Existing members are already applying these AESC standards and new members are thoroughly vetted and referenced for the quality of their work.

Publishing these Best Practices is not expected to generate significant change. But if there are aspects of our processes which can be improved, the requirement is to align with the AESC standards as closely as possible.

In cases of multi-office cooperation, we would urge members to comply with consistent standards. And, of course, all Cornerstone offices must follow the highest level of professionalism, integrity, and courtesy to fellow offices, to client firms and to potential client firms and to all candidates, whether solicited or unsolicited.

Wishing you all the very best 2014 and beyond

Simon Wan
Chief Executive
Cornerstone International Group

www.cornerstone-group.com
email: simon-wan@cornerstone-group.com

The Professional Development Manual

This manual is one of a series supporting Cornerstone International Group as a global leader in the business of Retained Executive Search and Leadership Development.

The objectives of this initiative are:

- To apply the standards and processes needed to provide the highest level of service and professionalism
- To ensure that our clients anywhere in the world receive a superior level of service
- To share our collective skills and experience for the benefit and improvement of all members
- To provide the support to all members that will help them grow and develop a profitable business

INTERVIEWING CANDIDATES

This manual describes professional interviewing techniques and objectives to be considered when interviewing senior level search candidates. It accompanies the manual on Retained Executive Search practices and should be used in conjunction with that manual.

The manual is in three parts. The first two are oriented towards an interview style appropriate for very senior and C-level candidates and are based on texts prepared by the Association of Executive Search Consultants (AESC), of which we are a member. The third part offers more how-to detail and may prove most helpful for more general, management level candidate interviews.

Part One:	Interviewing and assessing executive candidates
Part Two:	The client interview
Part Three:	Hints and process for management interviews

You may find “Interpreting your Results” in Part Three particularly interesting.



Contents

.....0

Foreword.....1

The Professional Development Manual.....2

Interviewing candidates.....2

Part One:.....5

Executive Interview & Assessment.....5

BE PREPARED.....5

ESTABLISHING THE "TENOR" OF THE INTERVIEW.....5

GOING THROUGH THE RESUME.....6

BEHAVIOUR BASED INTERVIEWING.....6

ASSESSMENT OF INTERPERSONAL SKILLS AND PERSONALITY.....7

DETERMINATION OF MANAGERIAL / LEADERSHIP CAPABILITIES.....8

DETERMINATION OF FIT.....8

ASSESSMENT OF FLEXIBILITY.....8

COMPENSATION.....9

CONCLUDING THE INTERVIEW.....9

ONE LAST THOUGHT.....10

.....10

Part Two:.....11

The Client Interview.....11

WHEN TO REFER CANDIDATES.....11

THE EXECUTIVE PROFILE: 12

THE "PREP CALL" 12

Part Three: 14

Hints for a Better Interview 14

Structure 14

Develop the Experience and Ability Requirements 14

Techniques Good & Bad 15

Keys To Good Interviewing: 15

Use a structured interview guide: 16

Listen With Both Ears 17

Interpreting Your Results 20

Look for Trends and Patterns in the Candidate's Life History: 21

Compare your results against what is known about successful managers: 24

Planning and Organizing 25

Part One:

Executive Interview & Assessment

(Based on texts excerpted from the "Best Practices in the Performance of Executive Search" produced by the Association of Executive Search Consultants)

There are many parts of the interview and assessment process. In terms of the actual interview, the following represents key components of the process itself:

BE PREPARED

Before the consultant comes into the interview, he or she should read the candidate's resume, LinkedIn profile or whatever written information is available about the candidate's background. Information should be gathered on the current employer with additional perspectives on previous employers when possible. The consultant should go over notes from the qualifying telephone interview and should put together a plan of interview questions.

ESTABLISHING THE "TENOR" OF THE INTERVIEW

While professionalism must be maintained at all times, it is important that the consultant develop a positive environment that facilitates a meaningful and honest interview. The atmosphere should be one that allows the candidate to accurately portray him or herself, as opposed to putting on a "game face" for the discussion.

Establishing a positive atmosphere will allow the consultant to gauge the candidate's "real personality" and therefore make a much more informed assessment of interpersonal skills. (Please note that there are certain situations which call for a different type of environment that is meant to discern how a potential candidate works under stress. Nevertheless, in all instances, the consultant must come in with a plan to set the tenor of the interview.)

GOING THROUGH THE RESUME

The resume is the most complete "point of reference" for information about the candidate's professional career. Going through it in detail allows the consultant to understand, among other topics:

- **Total Experience:** This includes all functional areas, and provides a road map of the candidate's career from a technical perspective. It is traditional to perform the interview chronologically (either from start to finish or reverse), but any way that provides a complete assessment is acceptable. The last two to five years should be covered in the most depth to provide a realistic assessment of the candidate's current career status;
- **Experiences Relevant to the Position Description**: This is the "assessment of relevance to Client Specifications" which is the major "technical" piece of the interview. It helps determine the "fit" based upon actual experiences;
- **Accomplishments and History of Making Impact**: It is important to ferret out exactly what the candidate accomplished because of his or her initiatives, as opposed to what succeeded because of other people's leadership, by discussing specific projects or functional successes. It is also helpful to understand failures, or scenarios which were not successful, and to glean what the candidate learned from these experiences.

BEHAVIOUR BASED INTERVIEWING

Part of the total interview should centre on how a person has approached work situations in the past. The logic here is that how you behaved previously will help predict how you will behave in the future, i.e. past performance predicts future actions. The consultant should ask questions about past employment situations relevant to the skills required in the Client Position Description, seeking information on:

- How the situation was handled;
- Why the candidate acted in such a manner;
- What was the thinking and strategy behind those actions?
- What resulted from the candidate's handling of the situation?

The consultant may ask several of these "behavioural" questions either as the interview progresses, or in one group of questions.

ASSESSMENT OF INTERPERSONAL SKILLS AND PERSONALITY

Behavioural and situational ("future" based) questions will also help determine the candidate's suitability for the position. The objective is to determine as much "personality based" knowledge of the candidate as possible, including:

- **Executive Presence:** Especially in senior level searches, it is often thought that the candidate must carry him or herself as an executive: to show confidence, stature and the ability to be successful at the "Top";
- **Ability to Function Successfully within all Levels of the Organization**: From superiors, peers and reports as well as executives and employees in other functional and geographic/business areas, the ability to work cross-functionally and globally is often a critical piece of the Executive Profile;
- **Personality Traits Relevant to the Work Environment**: The consultant should ask relevant questions to put together a "personality profile" on each candidate, which will help to determine suitability to the client's working environment. Characteristics such as team orientation vs. individual contributor, flexibility to others' ideas vs. command and control, inspirational vs. follower, risk taker vs. conservative, experience in crisis situations, and a general passive vs. aggressive demeanor are all parts of the candidate profile that are important in the decision making process.
- **Reasons for Changing Positions and Companies**: Why the candidate made each professional move on the resume can be an important indicator of the future. Indications of strategic career planning (or lack thereof), opportunity based moves (or those based upon failure or circumstance) or entrepreneurial jumps into more risky but potentially rewarding situations, allow the consultant to develop an accurate candidate Personality Profile.
- **Interest:** Why the candidate is interested in this particular opportunity (and level of interest) often tells a lot about the candidate's thinking, what the key motivators are, and can help predict whether the candidate will be successful and happy in the client company .
- **Interpreting Candidate Questions**: Candidate questions that are proactive and insightful provide a strong indication of the candidate's grasp of the position, business and the "reality of the situation." Those candidates who fixate on things like size of staff, compensation, the next position, etc. show a short-sighted "what can you do for me" attitude. This is a "red flag" if not a knock-out factor for the serious candidate.

DETERMINATION OF MANAGERIAL / LEADERSHIP CAPABILITIES

- **Managerial Ability**: The candidate's ability to work through teams, whether direct reports or through a "Matrix" is a key to success, especially at the senior level. This includes the "scale" and breadth of people management and experience developing and leading initiatives;
- **Thought Leadership/Strategic Thinking:** Especially for "C-Level" candidates, this may be the most important part of the Executive Profile. True leaders can chart the course of their companies or functions, with the ability to survey and successfully negotiate the future business landscape. The consultant should check for background and experience creating corporate growth and/or operational strategies, alternative scenarios, business plans, ideas for significant change, and leading processes to final decisions. The candidate's ability to provide examples of these accomplishments, and to exhibit exemplary problem solving skills, is a net positive to his/her candidacy.

DETERMINATION OF FIT

Possibly the most important factor to be assessed is the compatibility of the candidate with the culture and style of the client corporation.

This requires the consultant to do extensive research into the company's style, values and preferences and to be influenced by these during the pre-interview selection and the interview itself.

Finding and putting forward candidates most likely to be comfortable and contribute rapidly to the company is one of the most important pillars of the retained search process. Successful placements earn the loyalty of clients and the corporate fit is a highly important component of success.

ASSESSMENT OF FLEXIBILITY

Candidates who have shown flexibility in corporate environments are often put at the head of the list. This may include the ability to relocate, work weekends, travel extensively when necessary, maintain a "24 x 7" image and to be available in crisis work situations. Candidates who possess these qualities are viewed as loyal, invested in their jobs, and passionate about their careers. Employers tend to want these people on their teams, and leading their companies.

COMPENSATION

Although compensation may not be THE deciding factor in determining a career decision, it WILL be a factor. All of the individual parts of compensation are important to help determine the proper balance between base salary and other cash components, and long-term incentives (LTI) including equity. But, the most important aspect of compensation is the "total compensation package" of the candidate. This allows the engagement manager to advise the client on the proper "Total Offer" for the candidate.

Aspects of the compensation package are:

- **Base Salary:** Including the date and amount of the last raise;
- **Annual Bonus:** Including date of payment, what it is based on, and determination if the candidate has to be employed if it is paid in the following year. Any "minimum guaranteed bonuses" or additional "special" performance bonuses should be noted.
- **Equity**: the makeup of the Equity Plan: whether it is Stock Options, Restricted Stock, etc., vesting schedules, and what is "left on the table" of unvested equity if the candidate leaves (money left behind has deterred many a hire at the last minute when the information is first discovered by the candidate, and the client balks at buying out a huge amount. Get this information at the beginning of each individual candidacy);
- **Other Considerations:** There are several "wealth building" options in private equity and other firms that should be checked. Also check for special situations such as medical encumbrances or relocation paybacks. Details of the candidate's living status (homeowner vs. renter) to determine potential relocation expenses will be important at the offer stage.

CONCLUDING THE INTERVIEW

During the interview process, it is incumbent upon the consultant and engagement manager to maintain candidate interest. This is not a one-way interrogation. As the candidate asks questions, these should be answered in a professional and honest manner. The search firm should point out the positives of the client and position, but also when appropriate, point out potential pitfalls, or certain negative historical data which could be relevant.

Assuming mutual candidate and search firm interest at the end of the interview, which should last between one and two hours minimum, the candidate should be prepared to give potential dates to interview with the client, as well as initial professional references. Depending upon the policy of the search firm or preference of the client, one or two reference checks may be conducted prior to the initial candidate interview with the client.

ONE LAST THOUGHT

There are certain questions which are out of bounds, either legally or ethically. These include, among many others, questions relating to birth origin, marital and family status, race, religion, sexual preference, other gender specific areas, etc.



Part Two:

The Client Interview

(Based on texts excerpted from the "Best Practices in the Performance of Executive Search" produced by the Association of Executive Search Consultants)

Once the first candidate/client interview takes place, the client becomes much more involved and the centre of attention.

At this point, the interview process moves from assumptions of suitability to the precise response of the client.

WHEN TO REFER CANDIDATES

A candidate should be referred when:

- He or she has been thoroughly interviewed by the search firm, in person or by video conference/Skype, and found to be qualified;
- The consultant is able to speak to the candidate's experience level and achievements, education and background, personal strengths and weaknesses, perceived cultural fit, and financial expectations.
- An executive profile with all of this information has been written and a resume has been readied for presentation to the client;
- Depending upon the preference of the client, initial background checks and one or two professional references may be completed prior to the initial referral.

Note: In addition to checking references provided by the candidate, the search firm may approach people it trusts who are likely to know the candidate. These sources must be approached in confidence without compromising candidate confidentiality.

In all events, the source cannot know the status of any potential candidate (whether previously called, already a candidate, etc.), but rather should be approached for general information about the person, and the source's view about whether this individual may be a viable candidate for the search.

THE EXECUTIVE PROFILE:

It is incumbent upon the search firm to provide a comprehensive and objective opinion of each candidate's suitability for the open position. In additional to technical competencies and relevant experiences/accomplishments over the candidate's career, other skills should be highlighted.

These include intellectual ability and interpersonal skills, perceived cultural fit, personal strengths and weaknesses, educational background, compensation parameters, interest level, and if appropriate, the candidate's point of view. The Executive Profile can be written in several formats:

- **Traditional Format:** For many years the Executive Profile has been a chronology of the candidate's background that illuminates the professional background through college, graduate school and all the employers and positions through to the present time. It also includes an evaluation of the candidate's suitability for the position, interpersonal skills, strengths and weakness, and compensation parameters.
- **Alternative Format:** Clients have mixed views of the traditional format, sometimes preferring to read only information that is complementary to the resume, i.e. the search firm evaluation, compensation parameters, et al. Therefore, the Alternative Executive Profile should be sent along with the candidate resume.
- **One-Page "Bulleted" Summary:** This is a simple chronology of the candidate on one page that includes education, all employers and position titles, and compensation parameters. It may also include "Push / Pull" factors which consider why the candidate is interested or qualified. The Bulleted Summary can be prepared singularly, or constitute the first page of the Alternative Format. A candidate resume should also be sent under this format.

THE "PREP CALL"

There is nothing more disconcerting to a client than interviewing an unprepared candidate. While one would think that a candidate should be prepared for an interview, sometimes a very busy candidate may not focus on the interview until the last minute.

The consultant should prepare the candidate for the client interview in a "Prep Call" within the 48 hours prior to the meeting to make sure that the candidate has the proper time to prepare. The following are several parameters to be covered in the "Prep Call":

- **Knowledge of the Client:** The consultant should be prepared to answer any questions that the candidate has regarding the company that are not confidential. If asked by the candidate, the consultant should also have, and be able to provide access information on, the client company, including the client's website, recent press, the client's businesses, global reach, recent financial/business transactions (acquisitions, etc.) and executive changes.

- **Review the Position Description:** The consultant should go over the Position Description and answer any questions that the candidate may have, so that the candidate will be fully prepared on the interview.

- **Client Interviewers**: If possible, in addition to the interviewers' names and positions, the search firm should secure short biographies of the each. As the Client already has the candidate's resume, this somewhat "evens up the playing field" by allowing the candidate some peripheral knowledge of whom he/she will be meeting.

- **Client Culture**: You want candidates to understand the client company culture before the interview so the candidate can assess interest level and prepare for success within the environment.

- **Confidentiality of Information**: In preparing the candidate, the consultant cannot reveal confidential information it knows about the client that is not germane to the interview process, including any known interview questions that may be asked.

- **Additional Insights**: The consultant should be prepared to answer any questions, some of which may be somewhat basic or mundane, that the candidate may have. These may include questions about client culture and its appetite for candidate questions, interpersonal skills (be yourself and present in a professional manner) and even what to wear (men should wear suits and women, suits or appropriate business attire).

- Depending upon the level of the position, leadership / managerial background and executive presence may also be discussed.

Part Three:

Hints for a Better Interview

STRUCTURE

A lack of preparation is one of the most frequent causes of poor interview results. Start by fully developing the job specification before the interview.

For managerial jobs, check the special requirements of those positions for the client's industry, the client's culture, demands of the client, and the personal requirements of your client's hiring manager and other supervisors. When people talk of "fit" or "chemistry," they are talking about these special requirements.

Failures to define the job clearly and to know the personal requirements needed for effective job performance are the single biggest shortcomings to successful interviewing.

DEVELOP THE EXPERIENCE AND ABILITY REQUIREMENTS

Identify what will be meant by "success" in the job. This important step outlines the criteria for measuring candidates and judging finalists. Focus on three areas:

- Technical (technical & professional skills & knowledge).
- Managerial (supervisory skills).
- Personal (personal abilities & traits).

Example: Using the job of controller as an example, these requirements might appear as follows:

- Technical: Familiar with PCS, LAN (Local Area Networks), mainframes, financial modeling on computers, CPA, MBA, and 10 to 12 years of increasingly responsible experience.
- Managerial: Has been a controller in a decentralized company and is capable of performing the traditional duties of controller. Will be hiring and training key people in general ledger accounting, accounts payable, credit, forecasting, budgeting, and cash management.
- Personal: Must be in top 10 percent in general intelligence. Needs to be flexible but capable of upholding standards. Good communicative and leadership skills, strong stamina and endurance, capable of travel 40 percent of the time.

By disciplining ourselves to define the job clearly and then determining personal requirements needed for successful job performance, we have developed a structure for integrating and interpreting our data once the interviews have been completed.

This focus and structure are essential to good interviewing. It helps us to know where to look for key information. Failures to define the job clearly and to know the personal requirements needed for effective job performance are the single biggest shortcomings to successful interviewing.

TECHNIQUES GOOD & BAD

Know-it-all Recruiters. Some recruiters approach an interview as a game of wits. You see this in highly control-oriented people. They sometimes approach an interview with an "I'm in charge" kind of demeanor. They try to "catch" the candidate in this or that statement; and in doing so, they come across as manipulative and artificial. This causes candidates to be wary and leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Deceptive Results. Really good candidates can be easily missed and passed-over by this kind of interviewing — because they hold back, do not trust the interviewer, and come across as "not aggressive," not bright or quick enough, too shy, not forthcoming, etc. On the other hand, a crafty, cunning interviewee, well-schooled in the art of being interviewed, can out-wit this kind of interviewer, and end up "looking good" when they are actually not.

Accurate Interview Results. People open up to recruiters who are genuine, warm, trusting and trustworthy, empathetic, and as willing to give as well as receive.

When professional interviewers fail to predict future performance of candidates correctly, they have in all probability taken a short cut and ended up omitting something very basic

KEYS TO GOOD INTERVIEWING:

As stated, the secret to a good interview is preparation and structure.

When beginning an interview, after the opening introductions and initial small talk, explain who you are, why you're here, and then lay out the ground rules.

Make sure you outline how long the interview will take, the primary areas you will cover, describe the opportunity without disclosing the client, describe what the next steps are after the interview, and ask for questions.

Answer all the questions you can, but be very careful about proprietary data and do not divulge the client—save that pearl until after you have decided to present the candidate, and only then—with the client's permission.

Interviewees are anxious. Be cognizant of this. Therefore, any clarification you can give them reduces their anxiety and, in-turn, makes them more willing to provide you with what you want to know.

USE A STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE:

Almost any good book on interviewing will include an outline of questions to use. Some of these might be very helpful. Either develop a structured guide based on the job specs or use a set of questions that help you cover the candidate's experience in a step-by-step format. Be thorough and be complete. When professional interviewers fail to predict future performance of candidates correctly, they have in all probability taken a short cut and ended up omitting something very basic.

A good interview guide will cover the following:

- The Obvious: Name (correct spelling), address, phone number, social security number, etc.
- Education: Colleges/universities, locations, dates of attendance, majors, favorite subjects, least liked subjects, degrees earned (and in what year), offices and honors, athletic letters, extracurricular activities, military and other training.
- Experience: Firm names, addresses, kinds of businesses, starting and ending dates and salaries, titles and departments, duties, last supervisor, supervisory duties, most enjoyed, least enjoyed, major accomplishments, reasons for leaving.
- Activities: Primary outside activities that may be germane to work itself such as professional reading, association memberships, etc.
- Goals: What are the highlights of your experience and accomplishments? What are your goals? Which of your jobs did you like least? Which of your jobs did you like the most?
- Supervision: What characteristics do you seek in a good boss? What characterizes a poor boss for you?
- Influences: What key influences helped you to become the person you are today?
- Strengths: What are your primary strengths?
- Limitations: What are your primary limitations? What are you doing to improve?

- Planning: Outline how you approached a major project and describe the outcome. Would you do anything differently?

The first few times you use an interview guide, you're apt to be a little mechanical. Do not worry about it. After a while, you can conduct the interview in a seemingly unstructured and relaxed manner by simply having the person outline his or her job experience. As you listen, you can fill in the sections on the structured interview guide. And, when needed, you can ask questions to get the person to elaborate. Just do not let them spend too much time wandering off on tangents. Make a note of it when they do.

LISTEN WITH BOTH EARS

Make sure you are listening and asking questions, not talking and telling. A good interview "flows." If you are doing a good job, the interviewee will become animated, provide you with good input, and sometimes all you need to do is get them started and just sit back and listen.

When listening, use both ears but also listen with the "third ear." What are your intuitions saying? Write these intuitions in the margins of your guide. People are communicating all the time. All their behaviours have meaning: "Arms folded across chest;" "Collar loosened and tie disheveled;" "Looking straight into your eyes with a fixed stare;" "Looking out into space;" "Watching you write down notes as they talk;" "Leaning back in their chair;" "Leaning forward across the table;" and so on. The way people dress, the manner of their speech, how they describe themselves, the things they laugh about, the values they express—these all send messages.

The way people dress, the manner of their speech, how they describe themselves, the things they laugh about, the values they express—these all send messages.

Here are some candidate types you are likely to encounter from time to time.

The Timid Soul:

All the books tell a prospective interviewee to be articulate when being interviewed. Some people are just not articulate and, although they are being interviewed, this process does not make them so. This does not mean they are unqualified. Nor does it mean they are poor candidates. It may be situational. They may need a job too much. They may want a job change so much, they are just too nervous to be calm and articulate. They may just be “Timid Souls.”

Do what you can to make these people feel comfortable and at ease, but do not try too hard. You need to understand the candidate as he or she actually exists. If the candidate is shy and has little to say, you need to know that. Accept them and just press on, but look for areas that appear to spark some interest by them.

When you find that spark, exploit it. If you do not find that spark, press on anyway, show interest in them and proceed through your interview guide just as you would any other candidate.

The "Perfect" Candidate:

With outplacement firms widely covering the globe, with career planning services widespread, and with easy access to self-help books, there are many people on the job market today who have become skilled at being interviewed. Many can look amazingly credible and proficient even they are not — they are just proficient at looking good in interviews.

In these cases you must probe, avoid taking things at face value, and focus on questions in areas where you are getting sanitized answers. If you find you are not getting anywhere, pull out some questions, which cannot be thought out in advance by a candidate and answered with a rehearsed pat response. Examples might be:

- If reincarnation were real and, in fact, completely true, what you would return as in your next life?
- Pick a point in their career and ask: "What made you feel really good when you were at XYZ Company?" "When in your career have you felt really good about something you participated in or something you did?" Follow with: "Why was that? Why did that make you feel really good?"
- If you could start all over again fresh out of high school, what would you do differently?
- Suppose you were the sole survivor in a plane crash far off course at sea; and after days in a dinghy you landed on a deserted island. You had plenty of water and ample food; but you knew it would be months, if not years, before you were found. What would you be inclined to think about and do on that island?

The object is not to outwit or even match wits but rather to change the rules a bit, to elicit some spontaneity from the candidate, and coax the candidate back on your ground and away from his pre-rehearsed and practiced "canned" responses.

Early Birds and Latecomers:

The simplest way to handle either one is to stick to your agreed upon schedule. If the early birds arrive at 8:15 for a 9:00 agreed upon appointment, acknowledge their arrival, arrange for them to have coffee or a soft drink, inform them you will be ready to begin, as agreed, at 9:00. Then make sure you bring them in promptly at the correct time.

For the latecomers, do the same in reverse, only keep your scheduled end time—do not delay it. Bring them in and inform them of the allotted time based on the agreed upon schedule. Start the interview and end it on time.

The Compulsive Talker:

Their style will tell you all about them. Compulsive talkers might be very defensive in nature, they might feel certain "self-importance," or they could give you all the facts and details before you arrive at a conclusion. Just listen and learn. But do not lose control of the interview.

At the end, if the interviewee is still talking, put your papers together, close your briefcase, put away your pens and pencils, and stand up. Be polite, but be firm, thank them for coming, and if you have to, usher them out as you outline the next steps in the process, shake hands, and say goodbye.

The Take-Charge Type:

Some people come in, start using the phones, making copies, and give your secretary or the available clerks their airline tickets with instructions to change a reservation, confirm a flight, and just act as if they are taking over.

Take all this in. Make notes. What does this behaviour tell you? Such people are often quite insecure. Their behaviour is not intended to mask their insecurity from you so much as it is to mask it from them.

Let them think they are establishing themselves and defer to them rather than try to wrest control from them. By listening effectively and taking copious notes, as you should, their needs for control are met. Often they will reveal a much more thoughtful and less aggressive side of themselves later in the interview.

The Mysterious Stranger:

Some candidates will be evasive, even secretive. They'll question your interviewing approach and take exception to questions most people will readily answer.

Be careful when interviewing such people. They may be highly suspicious by nature. They may be "good" at seeing details and flaws. They might be good candidates for some jobs such as investigative attorneys, security chiefs, and auditors, for example. But they also may tell your client overly negative things about you as a recruiter and as an interviewer. If you reject such candidates, they may take the initiative to contact your client, so advise your client beforehand.

The best approach for people like this is to be honest, direct, and clear and answer their questions as forthrightly as you can. Make sure you understand their needs. If they seem uncomfortable with a line of questioning, ask them if they are and why. Remember, you do not need to control them. Your job is to understand them and assess them against the criteria you have already established for the job.

INTERPRETING YOUR RESULTS

Points to consider once interviews are over:

In what ways does or does not the candidate fit the job specs? Can the client train the candidate or alter the job to compensate for areas where the fit is less than perfect. Would the client even consider modifying the job to accommodate this candidate?

How will this candidate fit into the client company? How will the fit be with the supervisors.

What was the level and quality of thought the candidate exhibited during the interview? Was the candidate logical? Intuitive? Practical? Could the candidate see the big picture?

Was the candidate able to extrapolate information well—take gems of wisdom from one experience and see their relationship in another? How well was the candidate able to attend to details?

What was the candidate's emotional tone or balance? Tightly wound? Relaxed? Bored? Interested? How well do you think he/she will handle stress?

Was the candidate confident? Anxious? Was the candidate difficult on himself/herself when evaluating past circumstances? Did he/she project blame on others?

How adaptive, flexible, and resilient did the candidate seem to be? Was the candidate generally optimistic and operating in the present or was he/she pessimistic and operating in the past?

What kind of orientation will the candidate require?

Will the candidate be satisfied over the long haul?

What do you think the candidate really wants out of this job?

What really motivates and sustains the candidate?

LOOK FOR TRENDS AND PATTERNS IN THE CANDIDATE'S LIFE HISTORY:

Review all information you have and the notes you have taken.

Biographical data and behaviour history have been shown in years of research to have high value in predicting job success. Career patterns and basic facts are difficult to fake in an interview. Here are some patterns to observe:

a) The Constant Success Pattern:

It is often assumed that people basically have an increasingly successful career, starting in college and progressing through one promotion after another through the course of their career.

This pattern does exist but it is not the norm; and in fact, it is rare. It is characterized by high grades in school, considerable social activity (clubs, class office, fraternities, etc.), and by excellence in other endeavours, athletics, high popularity, elected office, etc. Their work history is fairly stable, typically with rapid progression, especially in the early years, and with five or more years in each job, sometimes with the same company.

These people experienced leadership opportunities early in life, applied that experience at work, found it to their advantage, and essentially succeeded all along. These are usually confident, self-accepting people, and their success negates any need to hop from job to job.

It is often assumed that people basically have an ever increasingly successful career, starting in college and progressing through one promotion after another through the course of their career.

This pattern does exist but it is not the norm; and in fact, it is rare.

b) The Typical Pattern:

Most managers were B students in school and involved in some school activities, but not many. They probably worked part-time in varied odd jobs (usually whichever paid the best for warm bodies and a pair of hands). They may have been slow starters in college, had trouble picking a major, changed majors several times, maybe even flunked out a year or dropped out and then came back.

By the time they actually graduated, they still didn't know what career they wanted to pursue and often didn't like the major with which they selected.

They usually spent two years with their first employer and maybe three with their second. Typically, they spend their longest tenure with their third employer, usually five or six years. Over their careers, they will change career direction two or three times and work for six or more companies.

Interviewers reviewing their interview notes might think this a mediocre career, but it is not mediocre, it is typical. Some outstanding candidates may show this pattern. You have to get beyond the cultural stereotypes of success. This typical pattern is closer to the reality of career progress.

c) Early Success Followed by Late Career Difficulties:

Some candidates you interview will have been star athletes, even scholars, in their very early adult years (high school typically, but also college as well). They may have made quick progress in their first jobs. Early in their careers they may show the normal short tenures. Then a trend develops. A pattern of short tenures develops and they seem to plateau at a certain responsibility level. Maybe they lacked the social skills to develop stable, mature, and lasting relationships. Maybe they lacked the talent to effectively lead or manage others.

Some people never stabilize. Their entire career, both educationally and professionally, is a series of one-two-three year tenures.

Some may look really good. They may interview really well or present themselves very favourably because their early success gave them solid self-esteem, and their self-image may be that of a real winner. But go beyond the facade. Look at the facts. What does the data tell you? If you've written down your concerns and your hunches, you probably have clues of your own as to why their careers seemed to have waned. The reasons could be many, for example:

Modest mental ability.
Problems.
Adjustment difficulties.
Lack of perceptivity, sensitivity, and insight into others.
Flaws in communication skills.
Excessive self-centredness.
Health problems.
Alcohol (even drug) abuse.

d) Examine the Reasons for Long and Short Job Tenures:

Take the candidate's longest job tenure and ask them: "What was it about the company, the job, the industry or the people, that made that position suitable?"

Some people who stayed 10 years or more with one firm early in their careers suddenly experience a series of short job tenures. Often, they grew weary of the environment and then they went out and picked an opposite environment.

The most common situation is where a person worked for a large established firm that offered good training, security, varied opportunities, but slow (although steady) progress. Because of the slow progress, the person might have opted for a smaller firm to gain greater responsibility. However, smaller firms have fewer resources, often little or no infrastructure, usually less talent, and certainly have fewer places to go career-wise.

Having made this kind of career shift, the person is probably seeking to find the perfect small firm, only they do not find it. They keep looking and slowly discover the reality of life in a small company. They may never come to grips with the possibility that maybe, just maybe, they might need the stability, resources, talent, infrastructure, and organizational support of a large firm.

It is a good technique to ask candidates what they learned from each of their jobs and how they view their overall career progress.

Some people stay longest in stodgy and bureaucratic companies. Ask why. Some people stay longest in entrepreneurial companies. Ask why. There is something about them that causes them to stay with those firms. It might be important for you to know.

Some people never stabilize. Their entire career, both educationally and professionally, is a series of one-two-three year tenures. Often, their stories about why they left and what they want in their career are very credible, even make complete sense. But they may be chronically impulsive. They may be bright, attractive, pleasing personalities, but their patterns indicate "trouble".

These kinds of people may have very strong likes and dislikes. They may have an intolerance for ambiguity. They may be unable to tolerate the normal frustrations that occur in any job, in any company, or in any organization. People with this unstable pattern often present themselves really well, look really good, and interview extremely well—after all, they have had a lot of practice.

Often, these same people exhibit a chronic failure to follow-up, meet commitments, make plans, and stick to their mission (especially if they must tolerate pain and frustration at the same time).

COMPARE YOUR RESULTS AGAINST WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT SUCCESSFUL MANAGERS:

A great deal of research has been conducted over the years about managerial effectiveness. Many practical, real-world insights have been accumulated, which tell us what makes effective managers. When interpreting your interview results, look for these characteristics in each of your candidates:

Intelligence:

The single best predictor of managerial success is mental ability. Research indicates that an interview often is inaccurate and/or incomplete in identifying the personality traits in a given candidate. However, most interviewers can be fairly accurate in estimating a candidate's intelligence in general, e.g., high intelligence (top 10%); above average intelligence; average intelligence; or below average intelligence.

You will rarely interview a senior manager who is not well above average in intelligence. Typically, those who are at this intelligence level will often have completed undergraduate and graduate-level courses. Most upper level managers fall in the top 25 percent intelligence level, and most middle managers fall in the top 30 percent level.

Organizations that use psychological testing most often will give an IQ equivalent comparison. The cut-off that many organizations use for exempt-level hires is around the 30th percentile. For upper management levels, they prefer the 10th to 20th percentiles, and they often have cut-offs at the 25th percentile.

Emotional Maturity:

Not surprisingly, research confirms that good managers are fundamentally sound people. They have flaws, to be sure, but they have a number of common characteristics such as moderate to high levels of confidence, the ability to respect the rights and needs or others, comfort in leadership roles, the ability to tolerate frustration without becoming reactive or abusive, a genuine concern for the welfare of the organization and the people in it, high drive levels and the capacity for extended hard work, the ability to persevere when the going gets tough, and socially acceptable ways of letting off steam and frustration.

If your interview results show a deviation from this pattern, you need to find out what the consequences will be for the person on the job.

The entire issue here is not so much mental health and perfect motivational patterns, but rather the issue is job fit. Impulsive, overly independent people often make excellent entrepreneurs. Nervous, insecure people with solid skills in other areas may work well in a secure, structured job.

Social Skills:

The interview allows you to gain insights into the social skills of candidates. How well do they represent themselves? How well do they communicate? Are they effective listeners? Do they have a history of being effective in group activities and organizational life? Or are they loners? Do they seem to read between the lines in social interactions or are they naive and flat-footed in their approach to others?

Field research reveals that most people do not fail on the job because they lack the technical skills. Almost invariably they fail because there is some primary deficit in their social skills, e.g., they are boastful, they lecture but do not listen, they are insensitive, they do not keep confidences, they fail to communicate clearly, or they do not understand the basic norm and standards of the organization.

The entire issue here is not so much mental health and perfect motivational patterns, but rather the issue is job fit.

Indeed, the more subtle issues of fit with a company, job, and boss usually get down to social skills and the styles employees use when relating to others. Make sure to review your interview results closely in this area.

PLANNING AND ORGANIZING:

Good managers are effective at putting together plans and bringing together the resources to make them all happen. The actual work in which managers engage is often chaotic, but good managers are able to rise above this. They outline realistic, attainable objectives and communicate these clearly to their staff, but they do more.

They follow up effectively and monitor progress. They have high standards for performance. They provide good feedback to people and coach effectively. They act as a balance wheel when things get out of control. They help to stabilize things, not inflame them.

Your interview notes will give you plenty of data to review with regard to managerial effectiveness. Not only are managers effective with their own people, research indicates that they are effective with peers, suppliers, customers, and especially with their bosses. Good managers typically do not have problems with authority, either having it or in deferring to those with more authority.

If candidates consistently blame all of the people with whom they work for career problems, watch out. The very job of a good manager is to figure out how to get people's support and leverage that support. Look for evidence that the candidate can do this.

