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Are You Ready for an Interview?

Here are the Top Ten first round questions you need to be ready to answer.

Melissa Lyons | Women In Leadership Development Association | www.wildamania.com

This week I asked several of my recruiting colleagues from across the country about their first round interview process. Here is what they had to say ... and what you need to be ready for:

First, what are the top FIVE to TEN questions you ask every candidate?

All recruiters agree that they start out with a phone interview armed with a round of elimination questions, or as Bo Burch's group, Human Capital Solutions affectionately terms them "knock out questions".

1. **Are you still in the market for a new job? If you are not, do you have anyone with a similar background you would recommend?** This may be kind of a no-brainer, because first round interview questions are used to rule-in or rule-out candidates –but be ready for this question. You never know when you may be in the market for a new position, especially in our current economic climate, and building strong relationships with recruiters (a.k.a. headhunters) is always a good idea. **Never allow yourself to become invisible.**
2. **What are your career goals and what you are honestly looking for in a position within a new organization?** This question is designed to help the recruiter understand what you value in a new employer. As you prepare for your job search, think about how you would answer this and other questions. What size organization do you thrive in, do you like a "family" feel, are you numbers driven, do you like a lot of energy, is the company's involvement in the community important to you? Know what you want, and what you have to offer. A mismatch will only lead to your own disengagement and a new employer who is disappointed with their new hire.
3. **Walk me through your job history.** Gloria Blue comments, that asking the questions this way feels so much nicer to her than ... "so tell me why you left your last job"...

Recruiters are looking for answers that pertain to gaps in employment history as well as a record of longevity with past employers. New companies are looking for people who are engaged. By definition, employee engagement is intellectual and emotional commitment to an organization, which is also measured by three primary behaviors:

- **Saying:** The employee consistently speaks positively about the organization to co-workers and refers potential employees and customers.
- **Staying:** The employee has an intense desire to be a member of the organization, despite opportunities to work elsewhere.
- **Striving:** The employee exerts extra effort and exhibits behaviors that contribute to business success.

Source: SHRM Whitepapers, Employee Engagement July 2005 written by, Nancy R. Lockwood, SPHR, GPHR and Employee Engagement Higher at Double-Digit Growth Companies (2004), www.hewitt.com.

4. **What are your salary expectations? What is your bottom line? Depending on the job, are you willing to negotiate?** Let's face it, everyone has financial obligations, and no matter what job an individual is applying for, all have salary expectations they are not willing to go below. Make sure this issue is discussed effectively when it is asked – no need to waste time on an interview process when compensation is unacceptable to either party. **Tip to candidates:** be sure to investigate business reality in your geographic location to make sure your expectations are in line with what jobs pay in the vicinity. I know countless people who have relocated without due diligence in this area ... much to their disappointment. AND, if you are a dual income family, keep an eye open for what kind of opportunities are available for your trailing spouse or partner.
5. **What kind of professional qualities do you think you have that would make you competent for the position as described?** “It is amazing how many people are unrealistic about what they want to do, and their ability to do it.” Says Vangie Grave of The Oasis Group – which makes Gloria Blue's comment to the next question no surprise.
6. **What are or were your day to day responsibilities in your current or last position(s) and what do or did they entail?** Gloria comments that this line of questioning makes the potential candidate walk you through what they've done and how they've contributed. “It's pretty interesting what kind of responses you get, I've actually had people tell me they've made up some of the content on their resumes.” Oooh ... “knocked-out”, definitely, “knocked-out”.
7. **If we make a commitment to you would you be able to make a commitment to us for at least one year in this role?** Non-commitment to a question like this can be a deal killer. With the cost of turnover running companies between 100% and 400% of a candidates first years' salary (depending upon job level), employers are more and more concerned about job dedication and loyalty.
8. **Are you able to provide professional references from your last 3 positions?** If a candidate can't provide these, it is a major red flag by sending a message that your co-workers and past managers don't have positive things to say about your past performance. Make sure you have solid references, and know what they plan to say when they are called.

- 9. Is the candidate interested in relocating, and if so, is there willingness to do it at their own expense?** According to long-time recruiter Vangie Graves, companies aren't forking over big relocation packages any longer, and if they do, there is typically a pay-back clause in the offer letter if employment separation occurs within a certain time period.
- 10. Also, while not an actual question, each recruiter is keeping an ear open for communication skills and your likability factor – pay attention to things like “ums”, long pauses and your level of enthusiasm.**

For recruiters at Human Capital Solutions, if a candidate isn't “knocked out” of the interview process, a full interview is set up with an Account Executive. This round of questions focuses on behavioral interviewing where inquiries are made into the candidates past responses to challenges, opportunities and other business situations. Sample behavioral questions include responses about how specific problems were solved, ideas were brought to fruition, and the kinds of actions a candidate took in the past to ensure business success, followed with tangible financial results that benefited the organization. Corporate recruiters will either set up a face-to-face interview, or continue with a few behavioral and/or tactical skills related questions. All this is done before moving forward with management and team member interviews.

When it comes to professional advancement, knowing your story (as well as you know your favorite joke) is one of the BEST things you can do for yourself.

In my blog article about “Top Ten Interview Errors and How to Avoid Them”, I talked about knowing your challenges, actions and results. Recruiters, whether they are headhunters who are hired by corporations to find top talent, or corporate recruiters who work within big organizations, are looking for what kind of contributions you have made – with the theory that past performance is indicative of what you will accomplish in the future.

As a tip to those of you who are transitioning into a different career altogether, know **how** what you have done in the past, translates into what you can do in a new environment. Have experience-based examples ready to discuss including how those experiences relate in the new career path; prepare yourself by reading articles, participating in mastermind groups, other professional groups and volunteer activities in your new “field of dreams”.

When it comes to questions about problems encountered with co-workers, especially when that person is someone to whom an employee reports, what are recruiters looking for ... and not looking for in a response?

Everyone had similar answers to this question, but Vangie Graves puts it this way, “I am looking for the truth, no matter what the situation was, and I also want to know how they dealt with that situation. This helps me know what type of environment they will work well in and what is not for them. It also helps me know how they respond to stress or adversity.” Bo Burch adds that this is where he looks for a candidates' diversity factor. In this context, “diversity” is a different opinion or idea, an area that is often the cause of employee conflict. Long-time recruiter, Gloria Blue looks for hostility in the candidates' response. Hostility, resentment or disgust will make for a shorter interview if they “go off” on the subject. “On the other hand,” she continues, “if the candidate is sincere and states a genuine lack of leadership and frustration with honest and thorough answers via their responses I will continue forward and feel that there might be true issues within the organization that they came from.”

A tip for all candidates, learn to be committed to effectiveness rather than the desire to be “right”. Being known as a collaborator is definitely an attribute of an “A Player”.

GET READY. GET SET. GET INTERVIEWED.


Get out a piece of paper, or your computer.

Write down and answer all these questions.

Familiarize yourself with your responses.

Have a friend or family member work through a mock interview process with you, using these questions.

Network ... the unpublished job market is huge!

Check out Wilda's upcoming Group Coaching teleconferences on our calendar at www.wildamania.com. 

Wilda! Women In Leadership Development Association™

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Leaders Seeking Compensation Philosophy Highly Linked to Business Plan

Bo Burch | Chief Principal | Human Capital Solutions, Inc.

Successful business leaders recognize that a compensation philosophy mirroring the mission of their company is a key element in developing a strategy that ensures competitiveness in the marketplace. Such a philosophy must simultaneously advance the financial health of the organization, link up the work that is desired to be done with the number of resources needed to effectively complete the work, and provide the necessary incentives to employees to buy into the company's success. To these ends, the trick is to effectively reward and compensate employees within a performance-based pay plan that is understandable. This must be well-supported by both management and line positions, and directly link employee contributions to the success of the company.

To establish the basis for this performance-based pay plan, and its link to the business plan, the organization must be sure to articulate its vision and mission to its workforce. To be the most effective, objectives and initiatives for each division and/or department of the organization should be developed. This supports efforts to achieve the organization's mission. Further, in developing these objectives and initiatives, the decision-making process should include an analysis of the number of exempt and non-exempt positions needed to successfully accomplish these objectives, and implement the identified initiatives.

Valuing the Position

In determining the market values for these exempt and non-exempt positions, the organization can plausibly rely on small regional and/or locally driven salaries for its non-exempt positions, and a larger regional or national geography for its exempt positions. Further, the market value, and range of key positions might reflect the pay philosophy. The organization may choose to meet 60% to 85% of market value. The value or impact particular positions have within the organization to obtain its objectives and succeed in its mission (i.e., impact on the organization's “bottom line”) must also be critically analyzed to ensure the internal equity among positions. Positions, whether exempt or non-exempt, are classified high or low within the pay plan based on these (i.e., external and internal) analyses. Bear in mind, the internal equity analysis is an


evaluation of the positions, not the people occupying them. Evaluations of both external and internal equity must be reexamined and revised periodically by the organization to assure employees their compensation is competitive in the market, and is maintaining the proper value and the impact positions have on the organization's business plan. This better ensures that the organization's investment in compensation of its human capital motivates its workforce, positively impacts retention, and thus advances its business plan.

Evaluating Performance

An element of an effective performance-based pay plan ensures employees are meeting or exceeding expectations for their positions, and that the evaluation system of the plan accurately reflects and documents personal performance. There are several keys to the effectiveness of the pay plan. Foremost is the proper training of supervisory personnel to conduct such performance evaluations. Success or failure hinges on the ability of supervisory personnel to effectively perform their roles as evaluators and on the confidence employees have that the supervisors can do this competently. Moving up in the position's compensation range is based on continued and improved competency in meeting job expectations. Movement to the higher end of the range can be based on exceeding expectations. Providing an effective feedback mechanism for the employees is another important aspect of the performance evaluation.

Investing in Human Capital

Lastly, a determination of the financial health of the organization is necessary to decide how much of a human capital investment the organization can afford to invest in the performance-based pay plan. For purposes of this brief, an approach might be to examine receipts over expenses in order to establish a health baseline measurement of 0 – 3 over, say, the past three years, with three as the highest measure. What is the projection for the coming year? What might the organization expect its ongoing medical insurance costs to be for the coming year, as well as other key components of its benefits package? With this analysis, the organization can then decide where to establish its percentage increase pool for its pay plan. For example, the financial health of the organization might warrant a target 5.0% wage and benefit increase for the coming year. Within this targeted 5.0% pool, personal performance might be rewarded with varying percentage increases based on not meeting, meeting or exceeding expectations (example: does not meet = 0, meets = 2%, exceeds = 4% to 6%). Documented, concrete examples of not meeting, or exceeding expectations, are critical in regards to rewarding or not rewarding performance.

So many leaders are searching for a compensation philosophy that is equitable and fair; the best place to start is from a supply and demand perspective relating human capital to the strategic needs of their organizations. Today organizations are heavily competing for talent and skills to effectively accomplish their business plans and create shareholder value. Making sure the talent and skills are performance and market based, along with being dedicated to the mission of the organization secures its "bottom line" success and demonstrates an effective compensation philosophy. 

Inclusion and Diversity Placement

HCS is pleased to announce that one of the world's largest utility companies has just selected and hired their Vice President of Inclusion and Diversity. HCS was awarded the search after the company upgraded the position from Director to Vice President in September. The client

interviewed five candidates before making an offer and receiving acceptance in early November.

“Human Capital Solutions, Inc. (HCS) is seeing a number of global organizations recognize value in hiring an executive or appointing an officer to head up Inclusion and Diversity (I & D),” states Bo Burch, founder of HCS. “A pattern we have noticed as many of our clients pursue an I & D initiative, is they are seeking to cultivate diversity and inclusion to develop world-class, high-performing teams. They want to ignite change and inspire critical conversations around diversity, inclusion, and innovation” Burch concludes, “Strategic, dedicated I & D resources create venues and environments for open dialogue, diverse opinions, and a multitude of perspectives that generate real intellectual capital.”

To develop a unified vision of what diversity and inclusion means to generating shareholder value, HCS believes in a four-pronged business case for diversity:

- Diversity drives the recruitment of the best dynamic talent.
- Diversity enriches the creativity and innovation that shapes and sharpens the brand.
- Diversity grows and enhances competitive advantage.
- Diversity heightens stature and belief in the company within the consumer base.



The Open House at Human Capital Solutions

Last Friday's Open House and holiday gathering at the new offices of Human Capital Solutions, Inc. at 6317 Oleander Drive was a rousing success with lots of great food, an art show, entertainment, and stimulating conversation for the many who were in attendance. It was the best holiday bash we've ever hosted, so for those who missed it, we hope you'll be available to join us May first for our spring version. To those of you who were here to celebrate with us, thank you!


All of us at Human Capital Solutions, Inc. would like to thank you for your contributions to making 2008 another banner year. Please accept our heartfelt wishes for a safe and Merry Christmas along with the entire holiday season, AND may the New Year bring you great prosperity among the people most important to you.



Human Capital Solutions Welcomes Kristina Mulholland


Human Capital Solutions, Inc. is pleased to announce the addition of Kristina Mulholland to the team. Her concentration in Human Resources Management will be a great asset as she begins her work as a Sourcing Consultant.

Kristina Mulholland grew up on Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Although she has lived in North Carolina for twelve years now, she still considers the Cape her home. During her college career, Kristina interned for a local Wilmington telecommunications company as the Vice President's assistant. During the internship, her main focuses were customer relations, proposal writing, staffing and recruiting, and receipt reconciliation. In May 2008, Kristina graduated from the Cameron School of Business at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington with a

Bachelors Degree in Business Administration concentrating in Human Resources Management. In her spare time, Kristina likes to spend time with her family and friends, travel, hit the beach, and support her New England sports teams the Red Sox, Celtics, and Patriots. 

Enhancements to www.humancs.com

Be sure to take advantage of the improvements to our website!

- Updated candidate tab – search career opportunities, upload your resume, browse our resources, or take our candidate satisfaction survey
 - New client tab – view our industries, disciplines, and positions filled; submit a job; read or submit a testimonial, or take our client satisfaction survey
 - Monthly poll on our home page – participate in the poll, then view the results in next month's Prosperity at Work E-Tip 
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