



# Say Goodbye to the Skills-Based Interview

BY:

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# SAY GOODBYE TO THE SKILLS-BASED INTERVIEW

## Let's face it:

choosing the right person to join your team is hard. The investment in time, training and resources can make a poor selection financially risky. Focusing on a candidate's skills makes it even harder.

In our wealth management practice, we've discovered we have the best chance of finding future "A players" when we select primarily on character and only secondarily on natural ability. Skills are useful but are the easiest to teach. The most important skills that inform our teams' capabilities are those which are character-based.

## THE MOST IMPORTANT SKILLS ARE CHARACTER-BASED

**Take this example:** A friend who is a senior finance manager at a major media company recently filled a financial analyst position with someone who had never taken a single accounting course. My friend had worked with the candidate in another company, and knew that she had an exceptional work ethic, got along well with others, and was a strong analytical thinker. As my friend said, "I can help my new team member learn to read a spreadsheet and prepare a budget, but what's most important to me is knowing she's got what it takes to think strategically about the business and quickly form good relationships with business partners in our company."

Often, your best candidates don't come pre-packaged with the skills they need to succeed on your team. In fact, earlier in my career, my worst hires were people who had the most impressive job-related skills. When I got distracted by a candidate's skill set, I was more likely to overlook character flaws or natural ability gaps. Today, when I review resumes, I ignore skills. Instead, I look for indicators that the candidate is a caring person with natural leadership skills.

## THE FIRST INTERVIEW

In our organization, candidates who pass the resume screen are invited to a group interview with three people who embody our team character and spirit, regardless of their seniority or tenure. I encourage those interviewing candidates to ask any questions they want. Over time, we've stopped asking typical job interview questions, because they don't help us learn what we really want to know about a candidate's character. But there is one question (I call it the "Heritage Question") that we always ask during the first interview: "Of all the characteristics that your parents had, which is the one you admire the most and would like to share with others?" Candidates' responses to this question tell us a lot. For instance, does the candidate have a good relationship with their parents? What qualities do they admire in their parents, such as selflessness, hard work, or determination? The candidate's



response to this type of question begins to paint a picture of the candidate's values and their potential fit with our organization's values, which include a strong family orientation. After the first interview, I ask the first line interviewers only one thing—how the interviewers feel about the person. **I ask, “Would you invite this person to Thanksgiving Dinner, or not?”** If the answer is yes, the candidate is scheduled for a second interview with me and my business partner.

## THE SECOND INTERVIEW

To help assess character, before the second interview begins, we ask the candidate to complete a values exercise in which they reflect on and choose their five top values from an extensive list that includes, for instance, *freedom*, *family*, and *integrity*. When I interview candidates, I begin by giving the candidate a chance to ask us questions. After that, we spend about a third of the interview on the candidate's values. For example, I ask, “Why did you pick the values you did?” At this point, I want to have a lively conversation about what matters most to them. I also share my personal values and guiding principles and why they are important to me.

Our interview team then addresses the candidate's natural ability by reviewing results of a personal assessment tool called the Kolbe A Index, which the candidate had been asked to complete at home between the first and second interviews. **The Kolbe A Index highlights instinctive strengths in areas such as how they process information and how they handle risk and uncertainty.**

Throughout the second interview, I look for opportunities to ask deliberately “weird” questions. One question I always ask is “What's 25 times 25?” Candidates always feel that this question has come out of left field, and that's deliberate, because I want to see the candidate's reaction. Answers are varied, but there is only one disqualifying response—if a candidate makes up a number and tries to convince me it is correct. I always explain why I asked such an

unusual question. I share with them that I want to see how they are going to react when they are under stress or pressure—a situation they are likely to encounter repeatedly if they are hired to work in our organization.

After discussing values, reviewing the Kolbe A Index, and asking odd questions, I have a pretty good idea of the candidate's character and natural abilities. At this point, I know if I want to make a candidate an offer. I also know that there is a deeper truth at play: We don't really pick new team members; they choose us. I've deliberately conducted an interview that may very well cause a candidate to decide we're not the right organization for them. Most of what I've done through this unconventional selection process is to create conditions that allow the best candidates to decide they do or don't want to be part of our team. Of course, we'll only know if we and our new team members have made the right decision once they've run the gauntlet of our onboarding process.



*Contact Saša Mirković at Inspire Network to learn more about strategies for creating transformational growth or positioning your business for a successful generational transition.*

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