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We Improve Your Success in Advanced Control Technologies for Devices, Vehicles & Manufacturing

Get more out of your interviews: **Eight Great Questions for Hiring Managers** *Prepared for PRA Clients* *by Doreen Kephart, CPC and Dan Trudeau, CPC*

Introduction

Candidates are expected to prepare for an interview by doing homework on the company and industry, reviewing the resume, getting a good night's sleep and making sure his/her shoes are polished.

The interview is just as important to you, but you may not have as much time to prepare. A "refresher" glance over the resume and making sure a conference room is available is often the maximum preparation that will fit into your busy schedule.

This level of preparation may get you through the technical portion of the interview, but will you uncover the intangibles that differentiate between an "acceptable" and a "great" employee?

In our experience, the right probing questions will reveal work ethic, level of responsibility, ambition and accomplishment. Addressing these topics in your interview will help you to find the candidate who best fits your organization. We have put together Eight Great questions you can use right away to add depth and discovery to your interviews.

How to Use These Questions

The Eight Great are designed to be used following the intro and background part of your interview. Use these questions after a warm-up question, such as "Briefly walk me through your work history." During their response, you can clarify information and ask for detail. This gives the candidate a chance to relax, because they are talking from their comfort zone.

When you use the Eight Great, Ask the question and wait. Resist the urge to help the candidate to answer the question by clarifying or giving them examples. If they don't understand, they should ask you. Their response will demonstrate how they will communicate with teammates when they are on the job.

We've given you some extra tools along with the Eight Great.

Use the *Clarify* if you need to re-state the question.

The *Listen* tells you expected outcomes for the question.

Use the *Follow-Through* to dig deeper.

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The Eight Great

1. In the past several years, what have you accomplished that makes you stand out from your peers?

Clarify: Tell me about a professional success you've had which would show me why you are the person I should hire.

Listen: The answer should describe projects or tasks the candidate did individually, not team accomplishments. If the candidate talks about what the team did, you ask, "And what were **your** specific contributions?"

Follow-Through: Was the task or project difficult and if so, why?
How did you get involved in this?
What obstacles did you face and how did you overcome them?
Tell me about another accomplishment.

2. In your last or current position, what were the major issues you addressed and resolved?

Clarify: Don't. Top candidates should be able to get this without help.

Listen: Like the last question, make sure the answer pertains to individual accomplishment. What kind of ownership or pride do they have in their voice as they talk? Are they able to communicate the issues effectively? Did they get to work a project start-to-finish? Do they describe issues they were assigned or they initiated? Use this question to hear technical experience AND to determine leadership/responsibility level.

Follow-Through: Why were these issues important?
Did the resolution of the issues save time? Money? Make money?
Is your solution still in place?

3. What mistake do you feel you've learned the most from?

Clarify: Candidates may need a little space to think about this one before answering. Give it to them.

Listen: Most people don't want to admit they have made a mistake. The beauty of this question is it has a built in way for them to turn a negative into a positive, so some of the tension is removed and they can concentrate on an honest answer. Everyone makes mistakes - you want to hear how they **LEARNED**.

Follow-Through: Did it ever happen again? If yes, why?
(Did they teach others how to avoid the mistake.)

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4. What is your approach to dealing with disagreements between you and your teammates?your manager?

Clarify: Do not accept “I never have disagreements.” “Are you telling me you never disagree with anyone?”

Listen: Most people will respond with a people skill such as talk with them privately, ask for help from a teammate or manager, build consensus, ask for a meeting. The look on their face may give you a clue they are remembering a specific situation. Ask them what it is. This is a test of their communication skills with their teammates. You want to know how they work with people in difficult situations.

Follow-Through: What is the most extreme disagreement you have been in and how did you resolve it?
What would your teammates say about working with you?
Your manager?

5. On a day-to-day basis, what are the elements that have to be in place for you to be happy in a position?

Clarify: What are the most important criteria you consider to be happy in a job?

Listen: Take notes on what they want and in what order. When the candidate is done, ask them if the items are in priority order, and if not, to put them in order. This will help you find out if what they want and what the job demands/offers match up. You will use these at the time of an offer to create a win-win situation. For example, if a short commute or flex time is the most important issue, then you may be able to pay a little less and offer flex time or a work-from-home day each week. You save money and the candidate is happier because you listened to what they wanted. This list is most critical when you are trying to convince a candidate to leave an existing job to join you.

Follow-Through: Why are these items important?
What of these items were being met by your most recent job?
Which were not?

6. What motivated you to choose this as your career and when did it become clear it was the right choice for you?

Clarify: Why did you want to become a (fill in the blank)?

Listen: You are listening to learn what excites them about their work, early motivation they had and did they follow-through, and personal pride/satisfaction they have derived. Again,

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these will give you clues about the person's enthusiasm and their drive. They may also identify hobbies or activities which influence them and give them additional skills.

Follow-Through: What are your ambitions for the future? Personally/Professionally?

7. What have you done on your own time to sharpen your skills?

Clarify: Shouldn't need any.

Listen: This question is aimed at uncovering initiative and commitment. What are they willing to do on their own time to become better at their job and career?

Follow-Through: Why did you select that class/hobby/activity/book?
What would you like to learn in the future?

8. What have you learned about our company and what is the primary reason you're interviewing with us?

Clarify: What did you learn about the company before you arrived, and what have you learned from others while you were here?

Listen: First, you want to know if they prepared for the meeting by doing some homework on your company. Second, if they have been interviewing with a number of people, this will help you find out what has already been covered and save you some time. Third, did they use their homework to decide if they are interested in your company (and that is why they are here)? Or, do they give an answer that talks about their interest in change, improvement or employment? This should also give you an idea of their motivation to be looking for a new job.

Follow-Through: What interests you about our company?
What have you heard about us from other people or former employees?
Do you have any questions about what you learned?

The Most Commonly Asked "Legal Question"

Hiring managers frequently ask us how they can ask about citizenship and/or visa status. Here is the question to do that:

1. Are you legally able to work in the United States? Would there be anything that would keep you from starting within two weeks of giving notice?

We find most candidates volunteer specifics when you ask these questions. However, if they don't, this is all you are allowed to ask until extending an offer. You can put in your job postings the type of visa you are willing to sponsor as a guide to applicants.

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The Most Common Mistake

The most common mistake hiring managers make in an interview is spending too much time talking. If you aren't prepared to do an interview, the first thing that comes to mind is what you know -- what the job will entail and what your company is like. We have had candidates who were at the interview for 60 minutes and spent 50 minutes of it never saying a word!

YES, it is important to "sell" your company and the job, but save that until later in the interview. Besides, if you give them all the answers up front, you'll never know if they could have answered your questions without the clues. Candidates expect to start the interview talking and proving to you that it is worth your time to continue. Let them.

PLAN TO LISTEN! Once you've completed the Eight Great and you have a good feeling about the candidate, you can then discuss the job specifics, the company and the great future they could have with you. If you don't have a good feeling, you can send the candidate on their way with a "Thank you for your time, here are some brochures for your reference, and we'll be in touch when our interviewing process is complete." Either way, you have optimized your time.

Conclusion

Interviewing is an exciting and interesting process from both sides of the table. You can improve your interviewing process by using the Eight Great to get the most return from the time you have invested. We advise our candidates they will not get every job they interview for, but if they have given their best effort in preparation and been allowed to share their story on the interview then both sides have treated the meeting with the respect it deserves. We hope tools like the Great Eight can help you achieve that level of success as well.

Prepared for PRA Clients

by Doreen Kephart, CPC and Dan Trudeau, CPC

Doreen and Dan are teammates at Professional Resource Associates(PRA), Marine City, Michigan. Combined, they have 25 years in recruiting, marketing and communications and are active in IEEE and ISA. They are both Certified Personnel Consultants through the National Association of Personnel Services and have conducted thousands of interviews on behalf of clients involved in advanced control technologies for devices, vehicles and manufacturing.