

5 Things I Look for in a Great Job Interview

Here is what separates a good candidate from a great one.

By [Matthew Swyers](#) | [@TrademarkCo](#) | Jan 16, 2012

In my career I have reviewed thousands of resumes and conducted hundreds of employment interviews for both The Trademark Company and other businesses for which I have worked. In doing so, I got to see the good, the bad, and the downright ugly in terms of resumes, interviewing skills, and the like. For other CEOs looking to hire, here's what I think makes a great candidate stand out from the good ones.

1. Attention to detail

How many times have you heard this one, right? Pay attention to detail. Let me say it again: PAY ATTENTION TO DETAIL!

There's a great story at the end of the movie *Coming to America* with Eddie Murphy. It goes something like this:

A man goes into a restaurant. He's having a bowl of soup and he says to the waiter, "Waiter come taste the soup." The waiter says, "Is something wrong with the soup?" He says "Taste the soup." The waiter says again, "Is there something wrong with the soup? Is the soup too hot?" The man says again, "Will you taste the soup?" "What's wrong, is the soup too cold?" Replies the waiter. "Will you just taste the soup?!" "All right, I'll taste the soup," says the waiter, "where's the spoon??" "Aha. Aha! ..."

At this point you may be asking yourself, "So what does this have to do with identifying a great candidate?"

Not less than two months ago I received a wonderful e-mail from an applicant seeking to work for The Trademark Company. The e-mail was personally crafted. The note struck a wonderful tone emphasizing capability and a willingness to learn more about what we do here. Most importantly, the candidate emphasized attention to detail. I was sold. I was ready to open up the resume and see what they had to offer. And then, "Aha. Aha! ..."

The applicant had failed to attach a resume. In the blink of an eye, all of the time spent preparing for this submission--researching me, the company, and the job's requirements--vanished into thin air. Poof!

Some CEOs may have overlooked this and just asked for the resume. But you can't say you have an eye for detail and then fail to deliver on the point. Everything job candidates do, from cover letter to resume and beyond, must prove that point. Otherwise they are just wasting your time. I passed on that candidate.

2. Proofread

My contracts professor in law school told this one to the class one day. Although he was an otherwise socially challenged individual, this story has always stayed with me.

It seems that at some juncture he was involved in delivering a speech on some topic that involved a “public option.” He had written and prepared the speech but had left the PowerPoint slide presentation to one of his assistants.

Well, as he began delivering his speech—a seemingly dry speech—he could not understand why a wave of chuckles and murmurs would, from time to time, arise from the audience. It was not until he neared the end of his presentation that he glanced up at the screen projecting the bullet points of his speech behind him. And right there, right in that moment, he understood with perfect clarity why his speech had evoked the unexpected reaction from the crowd.

If you omit the letter “L” from the word “public,” it won’t be flagged by spell check. It will, however, be picked up by anyone else reading the slides as you deliver your speech on the “pubic option.”

This could very well be you at your next sales presentation: pissed and embarrassed because you overlooked your employee's failure to proofread his resume during the hiring process. So, check the candidate's resume and cover letter for misspellings that spell check might have missed. In so doing you will make sure that you hire someone that's thorough and doesn't rely on spell check to do their job.

3. Preparedness

One of the first things I always do after an interviewee leaves is to ask every single person who came into contact with them what they thought. Why you might ask? You never know what little windows into your prospective employee this may provide.

Once I asked one of our receptionists what she thought of a particular interviewee. I was very surprised to hear what she had to say. She said she thought the interviewee was pleasant but did have some trouble when she first arrived: It seems that the prospective employee had no idea who she was interviewing with, so the receptionist had to call around the office for 10 minutes until she could figure out who to notify that their appointment had arrived.

I thought this displayed a lack of preparedness on the interviewee’s part, especially as she was interviewing for a job that had primary scheduling responsibilities for me and would require her to know and keep track of all of our most important customers.

In another case, after a 45-minute interview the interviewee stood and said, “Mark, thanks for the second interview.” Big problem: My name is actually *Matt*. Nevertheless, I shrugged it off—perhaps I had misheard the applicant, or maybe he had simply had a momentary lapse. However, when I walked him to the door he proudly reiterated my name, “Mark, again thanks. I look forward to hearing from you.” Every fiber in my being yearned to reply, “Well, if I meet this Mark fellow, I’ll be sure to have him call you.” I did not. I also did not call him back.

A candidate should know everything about you that they can find out and engage you on a level that you will enjoy and that moves you one step closer to offering them the job.

4. Phone and e-mail correspondence

Another thing that also gets overlooked is professionalism in e-mail and phone communications. I pay attention to the candidate's e-mail address and how they answer their personal phone.

Sure we all have private lives, but we all have to be professional in dealing with employers--and, most importantly, prospective employers. So if a candidate's e-mail address is "bigsexy@gmail.com" or "hunkaburninlove@yahoo.com," think twice about hiring him. Gmail, Yahoo and other companies have a great price point for new e-mail addresses: free. There's no excuse for not having a professional-looking e-mail address.

For me, an interview starts when I call you to set up the interview. Recently I called an applicant, and they must have been at a the reunion tour of Van Halen--because when the candidate answered, all I could hear was "Ain't Talkin' 'Bout Love" blasting through my phone. I mean, it was so loud I could actually see people in my office starting to bob their heads to the tunes.

After a few attempts shouting into the phone--"Is [Name Omitted] there?"--finally the music departed and I was able to hear once again. The heads stopped bobbing in my office and the person on the other end said, "Speaking." Ahhhh. Well, I know they love music...and that they lack judgement.

5. Honesty is overrated

Yes, you want your potential employee to answer questions truthfully, but answering too truthfully may also show a lack of judgment. For instance, I often ask the hypothetical question, "If you were hired and six months after you were hired another opportunity presented itself, would you go on an interview for that opportunity?" You would be surprised at how many people say they would. Wrong answer!

Let's take one of my more infamous examples. Once I was asking a prospective employee to explain an 18-month gap in his employment history. To this day I remember his response verbatim. It went like this: "Man, the whole work thing ... ya' know ... like, wow." I was left mouth agape and speechless. Needless to say: He did not get the job.



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Matthew Swyers is the founder of [The Trademark Company](#), a web-based law firm specializing in protecting the trademark rights of small to medium-sized businesses. Matt founded the company on the belief that top caliber trademark services should be affordable to all. Today, the company is recognized as one of the top trademark firms in the world by industry magazines while maintaining its customer service focus and an A+ rating with the Better Business Bureau