Choosing a Leader

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Assignment 7

Interview Goals

Interviewing for any role has to have goals set out for what you're looking for and what you're not looking for. For interviewing leaders this is even more important, as a bad leader can do much more damage to an organization than a bad individual contributor can due to their influence. Organizations need to be careful when selecting a leader and avoid hiring someone without the requisite skills to lead or who has a severe culture mismatch with the organization.

The first overall goal I would set out when looking to hire a leader is to establish their capability. Determining if the candidate has any leadership experience is an obvious step, but not having direct, official leadership experience is not necessarily a deal breaker for someone who wants to and is capable of leading. The goal is to establish what experience they do have, whether it is as the leader of an organization, the manager of a team, or a small business owner. Leaders can gain skills from any number of activities, not all of which are necessarily from directly leading a group.

The second goal for interviewing a leader is to establish a culture fit within the organization. Pairing a leader and team together with mismatched cultures can result in poor performance and high employee turnover and is generally not a great idea. Before beginning the interview process, it is important to establish what the culture of the team or organization is. Is the team laid back and behaves more like a group of friends? An autocratic-bent leader is probably not a great match. Is the team made up of 9-5 clock-in-clock-out workers that don't spend an extra second talking to their colleagues? Maybe a transactional-bent leader is a good match.

The third, and probably most important, goal of the interview process is to establish if there are any red flags. Obviously, things like the candidate being overtly racist, sexist, etc. are something that should be considered major red flags. I would also consider the candidate downplaying the importance of work culture, employee mental and emotional health, and employee growth and advancement to be

major red flags. Lastly, while it isn't as big a red flag as the previous notes, it's going to be a red flag if the candidate doesn't refer to themselves as part of their previous teams, especially when it comes to successes and failures. If a candidate says something like, "they failed because ____" or "I succeeded because ____" that's going to be a red flag.

Interview Format

The interview process for any candidate should probably follow the guidelines outlined here, but they're especially important for leadership roles. Leaders have the capacity for great increases and decreases in organizational performance by way of their influence, so it's important to ensure that they are thoroughly interviewed before committing to hiring them. The cost of a bad hire can be high.

The first stage of the interview process would be a pre-interview screening. This would be a phone call, video call, or in-person interview with another leader within the company; either the hiring manager, an executive, or a team leader depending on who is available and the scope of the hire. The point of this interview is to get a more thorough explanation of their history and experience, more so than what is abbreviated on a resume. This will help the hiring manager determine if the candidate is worth putting through the onsite interview panels. This step of the interview is also a good time to look for red flags in the candidate's answers to questions, as well as let the candidate ask their own questions about the company, organization, or team.

On the day of the onsite interview (which could also be done remotely if necessary), there will be multiple, multi-disciplinary panels with different objectives. The number and type of these panels really depends on what kind of leadership role is being interviewed for. For example, when interviewing for a role in executive leadership it would be important to have panels with other executives, higher up managers, and support staff (HR, legal, etc.) since those are the groups most likely to be directly affected by the candidate's potential role. For a lower-level leader, like a team lead or manager, panels

made up of the salespeople, engineers, artists, etc. that make up whatever the company's

product/service is would be good. Regardless of who makes up the panels, it is important for individual

panels to establish what their focus is and grade the candidate's performance based on that. There

should at least be a panel for leadership experience and style, one for culture fit, and one for

communication skills (especially with differing audiences), in order to effectively gauge the candidate.

Once the onsite interviews are done, panels should submit their feedback to the hiring manager for it to

be compiled and common threads to be discovered.

The final part of the interview process is the follow-up post-interview screening. This is a chance

for the hiring manager to follow up on any feedback, positive or negative, that the candidate received in

their onsite interview panels. This is also a good time to answer any questions that the candidate has

about the team or role that they're interviewing for, now that they've been interviewed and have more

context. This final interview is the go/no-go call on whether or not to hire the candidate. Regardless of

the decision, it is important to leave the candidate with a positive feeling of the company and the

process.

Interview Questions

On your last team, how high was employee turnover and why?

What I would be looking for with this question is not specifically that turnover is low or that

there was none. This is a chance for the candidate to show that they can reflect on their leadership

skills. It's also a chance for the candidate to reveal how they deal with changes within their followers.

Are they mad when a teammate takes another job? Are they happy that their team never changed? Did

they try to keep people from leaving their team, if so how and why? Did they try to foster their

followers' growth, even though it might lead them to leaving the team eventually?

What was the worst performing team you led, and why?

This question is another one aimed at revealing the candidate's ability to self-reflect and grow. It's going to be a big red flag if they immediately place blame on their followers instead of on themselves or the team as a whole. It's also going to reveal how they dealt with this underperformance, such as if they worked on the culture or environment or training.

What's the most valuable thing you've learned from a team?

This question might immediately throw up a red flag if their answer is that leaders don't learn from their teams, but the other way around. We're hoping here that the candidate gives a strong answer about how learning is a two-way street between the leadership and their followers. If they are unwilling to learn then they're not going to be a good candidate.

What is a leader's purpose?

This question will help establish what kind of leadership style they prefer as well as if they're a good culture fit for the organizations. If they're primarily concerned about improving the economic output of a team that's going to speak to a different type of leadership and culture than if they're primarily concerned about building a good work culture and environment for their team. This question is also a likely place where the candidate will expose any red flags.

How would you deal with shifting deadlines?

This question is going to help establish how the candidate deals with change, how they deal with upper management, and how they treat their subordinates. If their answer is immediately that they would force their employees to work harder/longer/sloppier, then that may point to a bad culture fit or someone that a team is quickly going to stop listening to. If their answer is that they push back on upper management about the shift and its purpose, then communicate that to the team, that might be a good sign of a highly communicative leader. It's a good sign if their primary concern is the welfare of their

followers. Even if they do have to pressure the team to work extra hours, knowing that they'll prioritize

making it up to the team and making that process as smooth as possible (buying dinner, staying late

with the team, scheduling future time off, etc.) is a good sign.

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