



This Is How You Identify A-Players During An Interview

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Over the last 15 years I've probably interviewed close to 1,000 people for all sorts of roles. From sales to marketing to engineering to customer service to management and even CEOs and board members.

When I started interviewing, I'd estimate my hit rate was right around 50%, which means only 1 in 2 candidates would be a good fit for the role. Over the years and as I continued to interview and hire, I started to see the "real life" impact of hiring A-players.

If you haven't heard the term "A-players" before, don't feel bad. Here's a quick rundown — when it comes to people in the context of work, you can generally group them into 3 categories:

- A-players: the top 5% of people. They work hard, go over and above, are well liked and respected and typically move "up the ranks" fast.
- B-players: most people. They do the 9–5 thing, do their job well and are generally the "good not great" people.
- C-players: the bottom 10%. They do just enough to scrape through, don't volunteer to take on new projects, like (and cause) conflict and have little to no personal accountability or responsibility.



- A-players love to hire other A-players and build teams of super smart people that love to win. They genuinely want to be the “dumbest” person in the room and love learning from those around them
- B-players hire C-players because they’re worried about someone coming in and taking their job
- C-players don’t really hire (too hard/too lazy), but if they do, they’ll pretty much take whoever comes along

So obviously you want to hire A-players, right? Good. I sat down earlier today and thought about all of the A-players I’ve been fortunate enough to hire over the years at my 5 previous companies — most of which are still in those companies today.

I thought about the commonalities between them and what “makes them tick” and I also thought about my actual interviews with them — even the interviews back in the early 2000s. When I asked myself “*What do they all have in common that would form the foundation of an A-player?*”, I came up with a series of personality traits and past experiences.

I then looked at it from another angle and came up with 7 questions you can use in your interview process to give you a much better chance of finding and hiring them.

Here are those 7 questions:

Q1: Have they been promoted at least once in a previous role?

A-players are great at what they do and good managers will pick up on that fast, offering them more responsibility and eventually a more challenging role. Look at their LinkedIn profile and see if, at any of their previous companies, they’ve been promoted. Once is great, twice is amazing and three times is out of this world.

Q2: Have they had to lead a big project in a previous role? How did they handle it?

A-players like to take on more responsibility over time, not less. Have they had a previous manager that was so confident in their abilities that they were given a large or important project to run on their own?

Q3: Is this the same role as a previous job or is it somewhat/completely different?

A-players love challenges. I found that most A-players don’t change companies so much as they change roles — because they like the challenge of constantly learning new things and being in new situations.



might change:

A-players do research on a company before an interview. They try to understand your strategy, what's going well and even what's not. Can they clearly articulate what they like about your company but also provide some constructive feedback on something you might want to change?

If they don't know what your company does or they have no opinion (positive or negative) about it, that's a red flag.

Q5: Are they confident without being cocky?

This is a fine line. A-players have great track records and you want someone who talks a lot about being on great teams and having great managers and mentors, not someone constantly saying "I this, I that".

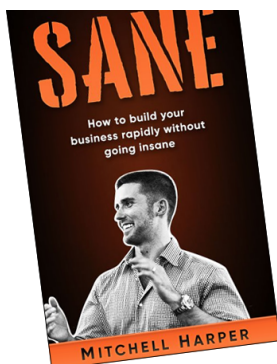
Q6: Are they committed to continual learning? Can they prove it?

A-players love learning new skills. Ask them what they learned in their previous role. Ask which book they're currently reading. Ask what they plan to learn in the next 6–12 months and how they'll go about doing that.

Q7: How would you rate the quality and quantity of questions they ask YOU during the interview?

A great interview is always a conversation — it's never one-sided. Look at the quantity and quality of questions they ask YOU. A-players care about the team they'll be on, their manager and where you want to take your company moving forward.

Remember, hiring A-players isn't a science. There's a lot more to it than asking the 7 questions above, but in my experience it's a great place to start. You also need to trust your gut, check references, assess if they're a great cultural fit and most importantly ask the people on the team they'll be a part of whether they'd like to work with them or not.



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