

# Emotional Intelligence: Assessment Questions and Key Points to Consider When Assessing Answers

*Revised 9/21/09*

# Assessing Emotional Intelligence

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## Introduction

This material is from *The EQ Interview: Finding Employees with High Emotional Intelligence*, by Adele B. Lynn. For a greater understanding of what emotional intelligence means, and its importance in the workplace, please consult the book.

Emotional intelligence is defined as a person's ability to manage oneself as well as manage relationships with others so that one can live one's intentions.

Michael Rock has said, "Perhaps the most beautiful description of emotional intelligence comes from a retired high school teacher, Howard Hopkins, of Montreal, Québec, when he wrote the following:"

Every response you give to another person involves your intellect and your emotions. The intellect composes the message, and the emotions provide animation and grace. Emotion is to the message what music is to the lyric. Without the tune, would anyone ever remember the lyric? The skill to combine intellect and emotion in this dramatic and powerful fashion is emotional intelligence, and it possesses the power to elevate even the common exchanges of everyday encounters from the base level of me-and-you to the sublimity of I-and-Thou!

[http://canadaone.com/ezine/july04/eq\\_interview.html](http://canadaone.com/ezine/july04/eq_interview.html)

## The Five Areas of Emotional Intelligence

A brief definition of the five areas of emotional intelligence:

**1) Self-Awareness and Self-Control** – the ability to fully understand oneself and one's impact on others and to use that information to manage oneself productively

**2) Empathy** – the ability to understand the perspective of others

**3) Social Expertness** – the ability to build genuine relationships and bonds and express caring, concern, and conflict in healthy ways

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**4) Personal Influence** – the ability to positively lead and inspire others as well as oneself

**5) Mastery of Purpose and Vision** – the ability to bring authenticity to one’s life and live out one’s intentions and values

Mastery of Purpose and Vision, Empathy, and Self-awareness and Self-Control relate to our inner world, while Social Expertness and Personal Influence form our relations to the outer world.

## The 25 Individual Competencies

The five areas of emotional intelligence are broken down into 25 individual competencies:

### **1) Self-Awareness and Self-Control**

#### *Self-awareness*

- a) **Impact on others:** an accurate understanding of how one’s behavior or words affect others
- b) **Emotional and inner awareness:** an accurate understanding of how one’s emotions and thoughts affect behaviors
- c) **Accurate self-assessment of skills and abilities:** an honest assessment of strengths and weaknesses

#### *Self-control*

- d) **Emotional expression:** the ability to manage anger, stress, excitement, and frustration
- e) **Courage or assertiveness:** the ability to manage fear
- f) **Resilience:** the ability to manage disappointment or failure

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g) **Planning the tone of conversations:** the ability to plan the tone of a conversation to achieve the best results

## 2) Empathy

a) **Respectful listening:** listening respectfully to others to develop a deep understanding of others' points of view

b) **Feeling the Impact on others:** the ability to assess and determine how situations as well as one's words and actions affect others

c) **Service orientation:** the desire to help others

## 3) Social Expertness

a) **Building relationships:** the ability to build social bonds

b) **Collaboration:** the ability to invite others in and value their thoughts

c) **Conflict resolution:** the ability to resolve differences

d) **Organizational savvy:** the ability to understand and maneuver within organizations

## 4) Personal Influence

*Influencing self:*

a) **Self-confidence:** an appropriate belief in one's skills and abilities

b) **Initiative and accountability:** being internally guided to take steps or actions and taking responsibility for those actions

c) **Goal orientation:** setting goals for oneself and living and working toward those goals

d) **Optimism:** having a tendency to look at the bright side of things and to be hopeful for the best

e) **Flexibility and adaptability:** the ability to adapt and bend to the needs of others or situations as appropriate

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## *Influencing others:*

- f) **Leading others:** the ability to have others follow you
- g) **Creating a positive work climate:** the ability to create an inspiring culture
- h) **Getting results through others:** the ability to achieve goals through others

## **5) Mastery of Purpose and Vision**

- a) **Understanding one's purpose and values:** having a clearly defined purpose and values
- b) **Taking actions toward one's purpose:** taking actions to advance one's purpose
- c) **Authenticity:** alignment and transparency of one's motives, actions, intentions, values, and purpose



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## Assessment Questions and Key Points to Consider When Assessing Answers

### Self Awareness: Impact on Others

#### *Questions to Assess Impact on Others*

- 1) Tell me about a time when you did or said something and it had a positive impact on a coworker, a customer, or an employee.
- 2) Tell me about a time when you did or said something and it had a negative impact on a coworker, a customer, or an employee.
- 3) Tell me about a time when you were surprised about the positive impact your behavior or words had on a coworker, customer, or an employee. How did you learn this information? What did you do when you learned this information?
- 4) Tell me about a time when you were surprised about the negative impact your behavior or words had on a coworker, customer, or an employee. How did you learn this information? What did you do when you learned this information?
- 5) Describe a time when you knew you did or said something that caused a problem for a coworker, a customer, or an employee. How did you know it caused a problem?
- 6) Can you think of a time when someone interpreted something you said or did in a negative way, even though you didn't intend for it to be negative? Tell me about that.
- 7) How do you know if your words or behaviors have a positive impact on others?
- 8) How do you know if your words or behaviors have a negative impact on others?

#### *Questions to Assess Observation Skills*

- 1) Have you ever noticed that someone at work was having a bad day? How did you know? What did you do?

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- 2) Have you ever decided to delay presenting an idea to someone at work because the timing wasn't right? What did you base that decision on? What did you do?
- 3) Have you ever noticed that you were annoying someone at work? What did you base that on? What did you do?
- 4) Have you ever been in a situation where you thought you needed to adjust or modify your behavior? How did you know?

### *Key Points to Consider When Assessing Answers*

Most candidates should be able to come up with an example of something they did that caused concern for others. Watch for how they incorporated this awareness into future encounters. One candidate, surprised when his boss told him that he interrupted his customers, said that he didn't believe his boss and that his boss didn't know enough about him to make that statement. Without realizing it, the candidate proved his boss's point when he interrupted the interviewer as the interviewer asked a clarifying question.

Emotional intelligence requires a person to be aware of and to read cues in different situations and then adapt accordingly. This kind of adaptability to the environment ensures success. The questions listed above give you important information about a person's awareness of these types of cues. You also learn how the person adjusts his behavior according to the cues he reads. Because a person may be reluctant to admit that he may at times annoy others, the interviewer may need to introduce the question with a comment such as, "Everyone can be annoying at some time. Would you tell me about a time when you annoyed someone at work?" As the interviewer, you can help the candidate feel at ease so that you can extract the most honest answers from the interview.

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## Self-Awareness: Emotion and Inner Awareness

### *Questions to Assess Awareness of Emotions or Thoughts*

- 1) Tell me about a time when you were distracted or preoccupied with something. How did you know? What impact did that have on your performance? What impact did it have on others at work?
- 2) Tell me about a time when you were in a good mood at work. How did that affect your performance? What impact did your mood have on others at work?
- 3) Describe a time when you were angry about something at work. What impact did that have on your performance? What impact did it have on others at work?
- 4) Tell me about a time when the mood or attitude of your coworkers, employees, or other affected you.
- 5) Describe a time when you were aware that your mood was affecting how you were behaving at work.

### *Questions to Assess Awareness of Triggers*

- 1) Tell me about some situations or people that annoy you in your present or previous position. Tell me what you do about these situations or people.
- 2) Tell me about a time when you were able to avoid a negative situation at work. How did you know it was going to be negative? Tell me what you did.
- 3) Describe some situations or circumstances that bring out your best at work. How did you behave during those times?
- 4) Describe some situations or circumstances that bring out your worst at work. How did you behave during those times? What do you do about those times?
- 5) Tell me about a time when you purposely prepared yourself to deal with a situation that you know would be negative. What did you do? How did it work out?

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## *Questions to Assess Reflection Skills*

- 1) Tell me about a time when something that you had responsibility for at work didn't go well. Whose fault was it? (This is a leading question-it's assuming blame. The candidate should consider his or her own role in the problem.)
- 2) Tell me about a time when others didn't cooperate with you. How would you analyze that situation?
- 3) Tell me about a conflict that you had at work. How would you analyze that conflict?
- 4) Have you ever unintentionally insulted or offended someone at work? How did you handle that?
- 5) Tell me about a time when you reacted to something or someone in the workplace in a way that was not aligned with your intentions. What did you do after this situation?

## *Key Points to Consider When Assessing Answers*

### Awareness of Emotions or Thoughts

The key information extracted by these questions indicates the candidate's awareness that emotions exist and affect self and others. Once a candidate establishes her awareness of the impact of emotions, she improves her chances of being able to manage them. Some candidates deny that feelings or emotions exist. And although it may be true that some people are much more affable than others, it's likely that at times, emotions affect all of us. With these types of questions, you can expect the interviewee to minimize the impact of the emotions, or discuss constructive actions that she takes to manage her reactions. But the bottom line is that a candidate who expresses awareness of her emotions is more likely to be able to manage her emotions than one who is unaware. Also, research demonstrates that people who are self-aware or mindful of their actions have more positive outcomes.<sup>10</sup> When mindful or self-aware, we are provided with a window to examine our behaviors. If a candidate flatly denies any emotions at work, the candidate may be missing an opportunity to examine her behavior.

### Awareness of Triggers

The candidate who knows himself can predict or understand his triggers. In fact, understanding and predicting one's emotional reactions to situations is central to self-awareness.<sup>11</sup> By understanding what could cause or trigger a negative reaction, the candidate is much more likely to be able to manage himself by avoiding the situation or planning in advance for it. Look

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for follow-up statements that indicate that the candidate manages his reactions or takes steps to prevent the situation. When one candidate described a time when he purposely prepared himself to deal with a negative situation, he described a situation with a negative coworker. He said he knew that his coworker's negativity affected his viewpoint, so he purposely changed his lunch routine. He said he didn't find it useful to sit through lunch to hear his coworker's negative comments about the job.

These questions also give you important information about a candidate's tolerance level. In work situations, candidates must interact with many different situations and people. Therefore, learning about a person's tolerance and triggers provides useful information. You can also extract information relevant to fit. If a person relates that people and jobs that require a high level of interaction trigger a negative reaction, then it's obvious that a job requiring lots of interaction isn't an ideal fit for this candidate.

### Reflection Skills

In the questions to assess reflection skills, the interviewer assesses how a person thinks or reflects about past situations. To help the candidate give straightforward answers, put the candidate at ease. Also, you may need to redirect the answer a few times because the candidate may want to focus on what she did to resolve the conflict or to get others to cooperate. Although that is important information that you should consider, the gist of the analysis should be about what the person thought about the experience. Did she rationalize? Did she assign blame to someone else? Or maybe she defended her actions as right. It's also possible that the candidate thought she was helpless. In the analysis or reflection, the person's answer should suggest that the candidate considered her own actions and what she could have done differently to be part of the solution. Holding oneself accountable would sound something like this: "Well, as I think back on this situation, I think I could have done [or said]. . . . If I had done this, I think I would have gained her cooperation sooner." This person's analysis of the situation and her behavior helps her to consider a better outcome. This positive reflection can lead to learning. However, listen for that fine line between holding oneself accountable and beating oneself up. Beating oneself up or becoming so discouraged by a situation that the person vows never to try it again may demonstrate a lack of resilience. The bottom line is that holding ourselves accountable for the results of our behavior is important and can lead to new learning. Also, holding ourselves accountable for situations such as these generally translates into holding ourselves accountable for work goals and production numbers.

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## Self-Awareness: Accurate Assessment of Skills and Abilities

### *Questions to Assess Accurate Assessment of Skills and Abilities*

- 1) Describe a time when you received feedback about your performance and were in agreement. What did you agree with?
- 2) Describe a time when you received feedback about your performance and you disagreed with the feedback. What did you disagree with?
- 3) Was there ever a time that you initially disagreed with feedback you received and later came to accept it? Tell me about that.
- 4) Were you ever surprised by criticism you received? What was the criticism and why were you surprised?
- 5) What has been a consistent strength of yours? What evidence do you have that this is an area in which you are strong?
- 6) What has been a consistent area of development for you? How do you know that this is an area of development for you?
- 7) List three things that you have learned about yourself in the last year that are relevant to the way you work. How did you learn this information? Describe a time when you used this new information.

### *Key Points to Consider When Assessing Answers*

The interview provides the interviewer or hiring manager with an opportunity to determine if the candidate possesses an accurate assessment of her skills. People who can accurately assess both their strengths and their weaknesses operate without blind spots. They maximize their strengths and find ways to improve or mitigate their weaknesses. When a candidate accurately assesses her own skills, that candidate is in a better position to determine whether she will succeed in the job for which she is interviewing. The questions above prove difficult for candidates because they may feel a need to guard against telling the interviewer about a time when they were criticized. The interviewer must set the tone so that the candidate feels comfortable. Be sure to include questions that ask the candidate to point to evidence; the evidence helps you to determine whether the candidate bases her answers on objective data. For example, Jerry stated that his problem-solving skills are above average. When the interviewer asked Jerry for evidence or examples that support his claim, he wasn't able to give

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specific data. He said things like, “Things come easy to me,” or “I always know where to look,” or “I just use my instincts.” In response to the same question, another candidate stated, “Well, I was asked to serve on a task force for reducing the error rates on our processing procedure. I was also assigned as a mentor to help new hires solve problems. I also was asked to review the troubleshooting guide that the engineering staff developed for our unit.” In the latter example, the evidence is specific and detailed.

Another important question asks the candidate to think about a time when he received feedback that he initially disagreed with and later came to accept. If the candidate addresses this question, it would be very helpful to determine how the candidate came to internalize the feedback. It shows that the candidate became open-minded at some point about the feedback. In reality, what often occurs is that people receive feedback that they don’t agree with and then spend their time justifying their behavior or proving that the feedback is incorrect. Sometimes, indeed, the feedback is incorrect, but often it’s not and we spend our time resisting what could help us.

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## Self-Control or Self-Management: Emotional Expression

### *Questions to Assess Appropriate Emotional Expression*

- 1) Describe some things that make you angry or frustrated at work. Tell me what you do in those situations.
- 2) Describe some situations where you are likely to get annoyed at work. What do you do when you get annoyed?
- 3) Tell me about a time you were angry with someone at work. What did you do?
- 4) Has there ever been a situation at work where you said something and later regretted saying it? Tell me about that.
- 5) Tell me about a time when you lost your temper at work. What did you do? What result did this have?
- 6) Tell me about a time at work when you had too much to do and it was causing you to feel stressed. What did you do?
- 7) What do you do when you are feeling stressed at work?
- 8) Describe a stressful situation at work. What did you do?
- 9) Describe a situation at work when you were very enthusiastic about something. How did your enthusiasm affect others?
- 10) Describe a time when you felt excited about work.
- 11) When do you look forward to going to work?
- 12) Describe a time when you felt grateful at work. What did you do?
- 13) Give me an example of when you expressed gratitude toward someone at work.

### *Key Points to Consider When Assessing Answers*

We know that people's temperaments vary and that some people rarely get angry while others get excited easily. It's also important for you, the interviewer, to realize that your own temperament will influence your interpretation of the answers. If confrontation frightens you



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and the candidate states that she raised an issue with someone, you may judge this tactic as negative and confrontational. So, prior to asking these questions, determine the cultural and job fit. For example, what may be appropriate for one job may be inappropriate for another. Be sure to put the candidate at ease, or she may be reluctant to answer these questions in a straightforward manner.

Also, it's important for you, the interviewer, to realize that anger is not negative. How we express our anger, however, can be negative. So, focus your attention on the behavioral expression of the emotion. How did the candidate express her anger or frustration? Was it productive? Did the manner in which she addressed the situation maintain a positive working relationship with the other person? Were you able to gain evidence of this based on what the candidate told you? Look for constructive ways the candidate expressed herself. Some appropriate methods would include calling the person aside and discussing the situation, asking the person whether he would be willing to discuss alternative views, discussing the situation privately with a mentor to gain advice on how best to address it, taking a cooling-off or time-out period before addressing the situation, rethinking the perspective of the situation, or separating the event from the person. Remember: look for evidence from the candidate to indicate that she manages or expresses her anger or stress in an acceptable manner.

In this section, many of the questions assess anger or stress management. However, some questions ask about excitement, enthusiasm, and gratitude. Excitement, enthusiasm, and gratitude could be very positive qualities. The questions aimed at gauging these qualities help the interviewer to determine whether the candidate appropriately expresses emotion about work. Managing emotion doesn't mean that people shouldn't express emotion. Expressing positive feelings can generate a positive mood for others.<sup>6</sup> Positive feelings generate a contagious environment. Expressing enthusiasm, excitement, and gratitude can bond teams and create a positive workplace culture. People display these emotions in different ways. Some individuals may express enthusiasm quietly; others may be bubbly. The point of these questions is to determine whether the candidate recognizes and behaves in a manner that allows for positive expression of emotions. The question about tempering enthusiasm is an important one. A good example came from a candidate excited about a promotion that he received. He said that he knew that a coworker interviewed for the promotion and did not get the position. He said that he carefully decided not to "rub it in his face" because he knew his coworker was disappointed. He also approached the coworker and discussed the issue. The candidate's sensitivity about the issue and his behavior demonstrated his awareness of the impact of expressing emotions.

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## Self-Control or Self-Management: Courage or Assertiveness

### *Questions to Assess Courage or Assertiveness*

- 1) Tell me about a time when you spoke up about something in the workplace. What was the issue? Why did you speak up about it? What did you say? What did others think?
- 2) Has there ever been a situation at work where you wish you had said something in a meeting or encounter but didn't? Tell me about that.
- 3) Describe what you did the last time someone blamed you for something at work that wasn't your fault. What did you do?
- 4) Describe a time when you were right and you knew you were right, but the other party (customer, coworker, your boss) at work didn't believe you. What did you do?
- 5) Tell me about a time when you felt something was unfair at work. What did you do?
- 6) Tell me about a time when you knew that you were told to do something that you thought wasn't a good idea. What did you do?

For managers or leaders:

- 7) Tell me about a time when you disagreed about the direction of the company or a policy. What did you do?
- 8) Describe a time when you and a peer were at odds about a particular decision or direction. What did you do?
- 9) Tell me about a time when your boss had a particular opinion that differed from yours. What did you do?
- 10) Tell me about a time when you disagreed with a goal that you were told to achieve. How did that go?
- 11) Describe a difficult performance discussion that you had with an employee.
- 12) Tell me about a time when you decided not to discuss an issue with an employee. What did you consider?

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### *Key Points to Consider When Assessing Answers*

Courage to speak up when appropriate engenders many fine qualities. Of course, recognizing how and when to speak up and when it's best to let things go depend on the person's role and the situation. Getting into an argument with a customer over who is right may be a huge waste of time and drive the customer away. However, speaking out about what is right if you're the CFO may be a critical job function. Obviously, then, accurate analysis of the answers to these questions requires filtering them through both the job function and the situation. In advance of the interview, you'll want to build the case for when these competencies are important. In general, though, you'll be assessing a candidate's likelihood of speaking up and doing so in a productive manner rather than being paralyzed by fear or inertia. Generally, these questions form an interesting balance with the questions about anger management. Usually, temperament forces people to be on one side or the other—either too assertive or not assertive enough. You're not trying to change the person's basic temperament, but rather determine his or her basic tendency and how he uses past experience to know how to navigate these situations. Look for answers that demonstrate that the candidate understand his basic tendencies and has taken steps to either turn up or turn down the volume on his assertiveness so that his behaviors produce the desired results with others. Also, you can determine whether the candidate has the courage to take responsibility for his environment by bringing up situations that could be improved. You can also determine if the candidate will contribute ideas and suggestions or just go along with the status quo.

In a management or leadership candidate, look for excuses. Some people say they don't confront negative behavior because they know the organization won't back them, or because they don't want to hurt someone's feelings, or because others will decrease productivity, or because the timing wasn't right. Be on the lookout for answers that suggest that the candidate skirts issues.

Follow-up questions that consider motive provide another layer of information. Ask, "Why did you decide to speak up?" or "Why did you consider this issue important?" or "Why did you decide not to speak up?" Again, you'll need to assess the answers by taking into consideration the job function and the culture of the organization.

# Assessing Emotional Intelligence

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## Self-Control or Self-Management: Resilience

### *Questions to Assess Resilience*

- 1) Tell me about a time when you felt that you were defeated at work. What did you do?
- 2) Tell me about a time when you were distracted or preoccupied about something. What did you do?
- 3) Tell me about a time when you felt like giving up on something. What did you do?
- 4) Describe a time when you didn't think things could get any worse, and then they did. What did you do?
- 5) Tell me about a time when you decided to give up on a goal.
- 6) Tell me about a time when you were overwhelmed at your last job. How often does that occur? What do you do about it?
- 7) Talk about the last time you were criticized at work. How did that go?

### *Key Points to Consider When Assessing Answers*

For most of us, life just isn't rosy all the time. By asking people to assess how they react to those times when work gets discouraging or when they feel overwhelmed indicates how resilient a person is during the difficult times. In response to questions about these situations, most people will want to filter their answers to present only a positive picture, so setting the tone for an honest discussion is important. You can do this by stating, "We know that every day can't be a great day; I'd like to know more about those days at work that don't go so well." Then listen for the candidate's ability to bounce back. First, what alerts the candidate to his response to bad days? Then, does the candidate have some sort of system to recover or cope with the bad days? If possible, it would also be useful to assess how many of these days the person encounters. (If every day is a bad day, that may be cause for concern.)

Be sure to look for the methods people use to overcome obstacles. It's not that resilient people don't have bad days, but they create ways to get through them. Oftentimes, resilient people realize that the situation is temporary. Others say they put the situation in perspective. Some say they talk it over with a confidant and realize that they may be blowing things out of proportion. Still others talk about what they may have been able to learn from these kinds of experiences. Candidates who dwell on the situations, place blame, constantly run away from challenging situations, give up, or describe victim or powerlessness behaviors provide the

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interviewer with cause for concern.

### *Bonus Questions: Assessing Awareness and Control In The Moment*

An important concept in emotional intelligence requires people to be able to exercise both self-awareness and self-control “in the moment.” By exercising self-awareness and self-control in the moment, we avoid backtracking, hurt feelings, and wasted communication. For example, realizing after the fact that an action or behavior caused harm or was inappropriate proves better than not being aware at all, but it still requires the person to go back and right the situation. Perhaps the situation required an apology, or a discussion to clear the air. One manager summed it up by stating that she thought about how she treated a particular employee and realized that she lacked patience in the situation. She decided to apologize to the employee and then set aside time to listen to the employee’s issue.

However, if a person can recognize and exercise self-awareness and self-control as the situation unfolds, she can then choose to act in an appropriate manner, thus eliminating unnecessary turmoil or backtracking. If the manager in the example in the last paragraph realized that her impatience affected the way she interacted with the employee, she could have adjusted her behavior on the spot. Interviewers and hiring managers should assess whether a candidate is aware and adjusts her behavior in the moment.

### *Questions to Assess Awareness and Control in the Moment*

- 1) Tell me about a time when you realized that a conversation wasn’t going very well. (Is the candidate able to realize during the situation the dynamics of the situation?) What did you do? (Is the candidate able to redirect the conversation for a better outcome?)
- 2) Tell me about a time when you realized that you weren’t speaking up during a meeting. What did you do?
- 3) Tell me about a time when you realized that something was best left unsaid. What did you do?

### *Key Points to Consider When Assessing Answers*

When exercising emotional intelligence in the moment, a person chooses to redirect

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conversations or actions as they unfold. The interviewer should look for examples where the candidate states that *during* a conversation or encounter, she steered the conversation in a more productive direction. Although it may prove difficult for the candidate to come up with examples, these kinds of displays of emotional intelligence speak volumes. A typical example might be: “The other day I was on the telephone asking for some information from a peer in another department. The peer, in a curt voice, said she didn’t have time to give me the information. I was annoyed at her answer, but immediately I thought, it isn’t going to get me anywhere to be curt in return. Therefore, I thought about her situation and I said, ‘I realize it’s the end of the month and you’re probably swamped. In fact, I hate to bother you with this request when I know you have so many other things to do.’ She’s a very reasonable person, so she said, ‘I’m sorry. I really am swamped and we’re shorthanded today. I know you need this. I can get this to you after lunch. Would that be okay?’” This candidate was able to give a concrete example of a time when she took steps to exercise emotional intelligence during the encounter that resulted in a more positive outcome. Had she acted on the fact that she was annoyed at being put off by her peer, she could have escalated the conflict. To establish awareness in the moment, look for evidence of both restraint in escalating conflict and also examples of having the courage to speak up when appropriate. Both factors contribute to successful interactions.

# Assessing Emotional Intelligence

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## Self-Control or Self-Management: Planning the Tone of Conversations

### *Questions to Assess Planning the Tone of Conversations*

- 1) Tell me about a time when you deliberately planned the tone of a particular conversation. (This indicates that the candidate is aware that tone affects outcome.) How did you do that? (This indicates skill.) What result did it have?
- 2) In your present job, can you tell me about some situations when you must think about how you are going to say something before saying it? What must you consider?
- 3) Tell me about a time when you planned the way you phrased a problem or situation so that you could get the best result.
- 4) Tell me about a time when you missed an opportunity to set the tone in a discussion. What happened?

### *Key Points to Consider When Assessing Answers*

Just as strategy factors into business success, strategy also factors into our success in our human relationships. By strategizing to get the best outcome from a conversation, a person deliberately determines how to interact in a productive manner. When the candidate answers these questions, the interviewer should look for how the candidate planned and prepared for the conversation by anticipating the reactions of the other party. For example, the candidate may relay a situation similar to the following: “I had to talk to a coworker about a problematic situation. Earlier, we had a staff meeting and decided on several actions that we could take to help one another meet the end-of-day cutoff deadline for running work. The coworker wasn’t doing something that we agreed to at our staff meeting and it was affecting my results. I thought about how he might react. I anticipated that he could get defensive when I approached him. So, I decided to open the conversation by saying that several of the actions he was taking as a result of our staff meeting were really helping me meet my deadlines, and I thanked him for that. I asked if things were okay from his perspective, regarding the new actions. Then I broached the subject of the problem. I’m so glad I decided to think about how to approach him, because he was very open to talking about the problem. If I had just come out and accused him of not doing something we agreed to, he would have had a very negative reaction.” In this example, the interviewer can see that the candidate was sensitive to the fact that he could set

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the tone of the discussion by the way he approached his coworker. The candidate gave forethought to his strategy and delivered it in a way that achieved a positive result.

Of course, this skill always has the potential for abuse. If a person sets the tone with the goal of creating outcomes that benefit only her or if she uses an insincere tone, she can be considered manipulative. Asking candidates to fully describe the situation or outcomes allows for a fuller disclosure of the facts. Also, probing questions about motive clarify the candidate's intentions and sincerity. One candidate seeking approval of the lead engineer said, "I knew if I buttered George up, I'd get his approval for the project and I'd look like a hero to the guys upstairs." Although this candidate may be sincere, further probing is in order because at face value, this response sounds quite manipulative. Also, the candidate's motives seem corrupt. A more in-depth discussion of manipulation and other warning signs for interviewers and hiring managers follows in the last chapter of this book.



# Assessing Emotional Intelligence

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## Empathy: Respectful Listening

### *Questions to Assess Respectful Listening*

- 1) Think about a time when you didn't understand something in the workplace. What did you do?
- 2) Describe a situation when you didn't understand why someone was acting a certain way or taking a certain position on some issue. What did you do?
- 3) Describe a time when you jumped to conclusions.
- 4) Tell me about a conversation with a coworker, employee, or customer that didn't go very well. What specifically occurred?

For managers or leaders:

- 5) Tell me about a time when you learned something by listening to an employee.
- 6) Describe a time when you asked someone for information about a problem.

### *Key Points to Consider When Assessing Answers*

Listening skills have many different levels of competency. Listening to gain information helps the candidate learn something. The candidate should be able to give examples when she asked clarifying questions, probed, or otherwise asked questions, and then listened to the answers to discern information. Listening for information provides payoffs in terms of quality and costs. According to an article in *Quality Progress*, two case studies presented clear evidence that listening to workers can result in big payback opportunities, which in turn result in cost and quality improvements.<sup>2</sup> Fundamental to the entire quality movement is the idea that solutions to problems come from listening to the people who are closest to the work. Obviously, managers and leaders should demonstrate in the interview process that they listen to information from a wide variety of sources.

The next level of listening requires the candidate to give examples of how he sought to understand someone's position or actions that were different from his own. In these examples, the candidate should give examples of how listening helped him better understand the

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underlying issues, values, or feelings associated with another person's position. Watch for the candidate's summary of this situation. Does he end it with, "I still can't understand how someone could take such a position." Or did the candidate walk away with a better and deeper understanding? He may still disagree with the other person's position, but he may demonstrate a different attitude about the person and his views. Also, watch for a respectful tone during the description of the encounter. If the candidate describes a situation in a tone that is incredulous of the other person's beliefs or actions, you can bet that the same tone comes across in his encounters with others. He's probably not listening to understand, but rather listening to prove his point.

Asking for contrary evidence always adds a deeper dimension to the interview process. By asking about times when a candidate jumped to conclusions or when a conversation didn't go very well, the interviewer gains important information about self-awareness and the reflection methods the candidate employs in the area of listening.

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## Empathy; Feeling the Impact on Others

### *Questions to Assess Feeling the Impact on Others*

- 1) Tell me about a situation when you sensed something was bothering a peer or coworker. How did you know? What did you do?
- 2) Describe a situation when you knew that something was wrong with a relationship you had with a peer, customer, or supervisor. What did you do?
- 3) Relate a situation in which you determined that something that you did or said didn't go over very well. How did *you* know?
- 4) Describe a time when you said or did something that had a negative effect on someone
- 5) Describe a time when you did or said something that had a negative effect on someone and you were unaware of it until someone else brought it to your attention.

For managers or leaders:

- 6) Tell me about a time when you sensed that an employee was struggling. How did you know? What did you do?
- 7) Tell me about a time when you noticed that your staff was overwhelmed. How did you know? What did you do?
- 8) Describe a time when a change you were implementing caused stress for your staff. How did you know? What did you do?

### *Key Points to Consider When Assessing Answers*

Look for empathy that emanates from within the candidate. If we must rely on others to bring to our attention occurrences that require empathy, then the effectiveness of our interactions diminishes. Did the candidate's understanding come from within? During the interview process, these questions can help you determine whether the candidate understands, expresses, or displays empathy toward others. Look for evidence that the candidate reads nonverbal cues, notices nuances or differences in people's behavior, or otherwise recognizes cues that indicate that something was amiss. Then assess the candidate's actions. Did she approach the person?

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Did she choose to ignore the behavior? Did she open dialogue? Did she lower standards or expectations? Did she rescue the person? (More information about expressed empathy appears in the next section, “Service Orientation—Desire to Help Others.”)

One candidate who noticed that a coworker was stressed by some recent software changes said that he wrote a fake memo from the head of the IT department stating that the software was going to be discontinued because it was difficult to use. This candidate was quite capable of reading the situation but failed sharply when it came to expressing empathy. Needless to say, his actions caused even more harm. They also violated just about every work rule imaginable. Sometimes the answers you get to these questions will amaze you!

The person who is well meaning but unable to understand his impact may well fall short of the requirements for a job that requires interactions with others. Assess the person’s level of awareness and how in tune he is with how others are experiencing him. If a candidate struggles to come up with an answer to these questions, he may lack empathy and be unable to recognize the plight of others.

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## Empathy: Service Orientation

### *Questions to Assess Service Orientation*

- 1) Tell me about a time when you offered assistance to someone without being asked. What did you do?
- 2) Describe a situation when you offered assistance to someone even though it was outside of your job description. What did you do?
- 3) Relate an instance when someone needed help and you couldn't help him. What did you do?
- 4) Tell me about a time when you recognized that someone needed help. What did you do?
- 5) Describe a situation when you were asked to help someone at work. What did you think about that?
- 6) Was there ever a time when you resented helping someone at work? Tell me about that.

For the manager or leader:

- 7) Tell me about a time when an employee was struggling. What did you do?

### *Key Points to Consider When Assessing Answers*

As we said earlier, service orientation is important. In this series of questions, the interviewer should be determining whether the candidate is helpful without being asked. First, is the candidate able to see the need? Second, is the candidate willing to assist? The interviewer will be able to determine this by how readily the candidate can come up with concrete examples of when she offered assistance to others. Look for a wide variety of examples. In other words, did the candidate help coworkers? How about peers from other departments? Also look for the candidate's willingness to assist outside her job description. Even a small thing like the example of the janitor offering directions without being asked, is an example of a person assisting others outside his job description. It's also telling when a person can determine that someone is struggling or confused and then offers assistance accordingly. Someone who is service oriented

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yet unable to directly assist another person will often serve as a broker or conduit for the person needing assistance. In other words, the service-oriented individual will make a phone call or introduce someone who can help the person in need, or will direct the person to someone who will know the answer. People who are service oriented can't always solve a problem, but they are concerned enough about a person who needs help to direct her to someone who can.

There are a few cautions to consider when evaluating service orientation. The interviewer will need to determine whether the candidate is aware of when he is being taken advantage of by a "needy" coworker, someone who always seems to need help. This kind of manipulation on the part of the coworker can be particularly challenging for someone with a strong service orientation. There is a fine line between being helpful and being used—although to err on the side of being helpful is preferred. That's why the question about whether or not the candidate has ever resented helping someone is important. It will give the interviewer an idea about how the candidate balances these points.

Another caution applies to managers or leaders who display rescuing behavior. Rescuing behavior results when compassion for an employee who is struggling causes the manager to lower or compromise standards. The manager may also give the work to other more capable people to cover for the employee who is struggling. Being empathic toward employees who are struggling does not mean that a manager should forgo standard performance-management techniques. On the contrary, empathy should serve as an entrée to the performance-management discussion. Empathy will also enable the manager to build rapport with the struggling employee, thus building a bridge for better performance.

# Assessing Emotional Intelligence

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## Social Expertness: Building Relationships

### *Questions to Assess Building Relationships*

- 1) Who are some key people within your organization who you currently must work with on a regular basis to get your work done? Describe your relationships with these people.
- 2) Describe your present responsibility for building and maintaining relationships at work. Whom do you build relationships with? How? Why?
- 3) Tell me about a time when you were able to get something done at work because of a relationship you had with another person.
- 4) Tell me about some of the people whom you have to work with on a regular basis that you find difficult to get along with. What have you done to build stronger relationships with these people?
- 5) Tell me about a situation when you “won someone over” at work. What did you do?
- 6) Tell me about someone who is resistant to you. What did you do?
- 7) Tell me about your relationship with your manager. What works well? What would you like to see improved?
- 8) What do you do that makes you a good follower?

### *Key Points to Consider When Assessing Answers*

The interviewer should determine what steps the candidate takes to build relationships. Does she take active steps to build solid working relationships? Or is she unaware of how to build working relationships? Ideally, the candidate should recognize and take steps to actively build relationships. Evidence of steps would include being friendly toward others by saying good morning, asking if there is anything a coworker needs, inviting people to express concerns, listening to others' ideas, asking for input, following through on commitments, taking steps to include people in meetings, and finding ways to assist when possible. According to a study in the *Journal of Organizational Behavior Management*, these types of expressions of positive psychology in the workplace by peers and management lead to enhanced satisfaction, motivation, and productivity and create a positive workplace climate.<sup>11</sup> The proactive steps

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taken by the candidate should be work related. We're not looking for people who develop friendships at work. We're looking for candidates who value and take actions to build honorable and respectful working relationships.

When asking the candidate about someone who is difficult to get along with, look for evidence that the candidate has tried to build a relationship with the difficult coworker. A few people are just very contrary, and no amount of effort may change that. We don't expect candidates to have perfect working relationships with 100 percent of their coworkers, but we do expect candidates to get along well with most people. Be sure to probe if someone says he gets along with everyone. That's the kind of pat answer that begs for clarification. Respond with "It sounds like you're working with a great team. Most of us, however, at some point in our past, have encountered a team member that isn't easy to get along with. Can you tell me about someone in your past who was more difficult?"

Another important consideration is how the candidate views his relationship with his boss. Does he view the boss as someone with whom he should actively be taking steps to build a relationship? What is he doing to ensure a solid relationship? In this regard, the interviewer can assess how the candidate keeps his boss informed, how he supports his boss's mission, and how he works as a team member with his boss. The relationship with the boss is about being a good follower. What type of follower skills is the candidate expressing? Good followers are not yes-people. They are open to direction, offer suggestions, give honest input, put the department (and the boss) in the best light, seek to understand the department's mission, and help others within and outside the organization to get the best from their department.



# Assessing Emotional Intelligence

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## Social Expertness: Collaboration

### *Questions to Assess Collaboration*

- 1) Tell me how you recently solved a work problem. What process did you use?
- 2) Describe a time when you had to solve a problem that involved or affected other people within the company. How did you solve it?
- 3) Have you ever implemented an idea or solved a problem and had your solution meet with resistance? What do you think you could have done to avoid the resistance?
- 4) Describe a time when you sought someone's ideas or opinions about a project or idea you were working on.
- 5) Was there ever a time when you rejected someone's idea or opinion about a project? Tell me about that.
- 6) Tell me about a time when you offered your idea or opinion to someone.
- 7) Describe a time when your input improved someone's work.
- 8) Have you ever offered an idea or opinion at work and had nothing to gain from it? Tell me about that.

### *Key Points to Consider When Assessing Answers*

The interviewer should be looking for two specific types of actions: actions that the candidate took to invite collaboration and actions that demonstrate that the candidate acted collaboratively with others.

The candidate should be able to describe times when he deliberately sought out the ideas or suggestions of others. As the interviewer or hiring manager, you should look for proactive steps on the part of the candidate that invite others into the problem-solving or idea phase of a project. Collaboration isn't about telling people afterward. That might qualify as good communication, but it's not collaboration. If collaboration is the competency that you desire, look for action steps. Also, follow up with questions that clarify the specific type of input the candidate was seeking. Also, ask follow-up questions to determine what the candidate did with

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the input. If the candidate asked for input but didn't use it, what steps did she take up front and afterward to ensure that people still felt respected or valued. Nothing can be more demoralizing than to be asked for input and then have that input ignored. Action steps to mitigate this type of situation might include asking for input on any of three acceptable solutions; telling people specific reasons why their input could not be used; and making clear to people that you are seeking advisers, not decision makers, in the process. However, a collaborative spirit goes beyond seeking advice. True collaboration requires that we sometimes surrender the decision making to the group process and that we facilitate a group process that will generate the best result. The interviewer will have to decide what approach is best suited to the job and the organization.

In addition, the candidate should be able to give examples of when she behaved in a collaborative manner to help others with their ideas or problems. The interviewer should listen for times when the candidate willingly offered ideas or solved problems without being asked. Also, the tone in which the candidate offers her ideas is very important. Is the candidate's tone helpful? Or is the candidate describing a time when she offered advice or input to someone in a way that might sound demeaning or arrogant? Here's an example: "I told Joe that the best way to do the job was to open the port before he started the process. I told him, but he didn't listen to me. It could have saved him a lot of time." This candidate offered her coworker some assistance, but it would be important to clarify exactly what transpired in this interchange. If you think the candidate may have communicated in a way that was arrogant or demeaning, be sure to ask for additional examples. If the candidate paints a consistent picture of offering ideas and having people reject them, you'd have to wonder if the rejection is inherent in the manner in which she is offering the ideas.

When asking questions about collaboration, look for a consistent behavior pattern that suggests that the candidate understands and values collaboration, and actively behaves in a way that promotes collaboration. The candidate who is truly collaborative is so because she believes in it, not because the organization expects her to be.

For some very senior people, collaboration may be seen as a competitive advantage, and the interviewer may be looking for evidence that senior people will have a vision that includes collaboration in the marketplace. Consider this comment by Paul Polman, CFO of Nestlé: "One of the core challenges of ECR [the retail industry's efficient consumer response] is to ensure that we foster collaboration when in so many areas we are competitors."<sup>13</sup>

# Assessing Emotional Intelligence

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## Social Expertness: Conflict Resolution

### *Questions to Assess Conflict Resolution*

- 1) Tell me about a dispute with a peer. What was it about? What did you do? How did it end up?
- 2) Tell me about a time when someone suggested something that you disagreed with. What did you say?
- 3) How have you resolved differences with peers or others? Tell me about the process you use to resolve your differences.
- 4) Have you ever encountered someone at work who was unreasonable? What did you do?

For managers or leaders:

- 5) Tell me about a time when there was a dispute between two coworkers. What did you do?
- 6) Tell me about a time when you had a conflict with an employee. What did you do? How was it resolved?
- 7) Describe a time when someone felt that you were unfair. What did you do?
- 8) Relate an incident when someone verbally attacked you about something you said or did. What did you do?

### *Key Points to Consider When Assessing Answers*

Answering questions about conflict is uncomfortable for most candidates. Obviously, putting the candidate at ease is important. The interviewer should ask questions to gain a balanced view of the candidate's ability to address conflict. The interviewer will first want to assess whether the candidate typically avoids conflict or addresses the conflict head-on. This information will give the interviewer some indication of fit within a particular job. Most important, the interviewer will want to determine the candidate's skill level when addressing conflict. What steps or actions does the candidate take to resolve conflict? Does he look for common ground? Does he approach the conflict by putting his opponent at ease? If so, how does he do this? Does he assume the best and seek a win-win solution? What words does he

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use to accomplish this? You'll need to probe enough to gain a thorough understanding of the approach the candidate uses. An opening such as, "Juliana, I know that this is important to you, so I'd like to find a way for us to work together on this. I believe we can find a solution that will work for both of us," sets a win-win tone. It disarms the conflict. Another important consideration is whether the candidate openly states his concerns and needs and invites his opponent to do the same. The dialogue might sound like this: "Why don't you tell me what a positive resolution would look like, and I'll do the same for you. Maybe from there we can find some common ground." Again, the interviewer should be determining how the candidate engages in the conflict. Does it sound reasonable? Incredible as it may sound, when you ask people about a particular conflict, you will hear examples of how people take an extreme position or escalate the matter immediately by bringing it to a supervisor.

As the interviewer, you'll also receive information from the candidate regarding tolerance and diversity issues. People are not all the same, and sometimes personality or values are at the heart of the conflict. Is the candidate overly sensitive to people's differences? Does he require people to conform to his idea of what's right? These kinds of issues are quite important to assess. Sometimes, the skill that's needed is less one of conflict resolution and more one of understanding and valuing differences.

Another critical role is the one that a manager or supervisor takes when two people who report to her have a conflict. Does the candidate have a good track record of addressing these types of conflicts? What methods does she use? Is she building her staff's conflict resolution skills in the process? Or is she rescuing her employees and constantly playing mediator? Also, is she bold enough to address conflicts that are interfering with teamwork, morale, and productivity?

One final thought on conflict resolution: some people really are impossible to get along with. Most are not. If the candidate is placing many people in the category of "impossible," then perhaps it's the candidate who is impossible. Be sure to ask for multiple examples if you have any doubts.

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## Social Expertness: Organizational Savvy

### *Questions to Assess Organizational Savvy*

- 1) Did you ever have an opportunity to advance a new idea at your last job? How did you go about doing that?
- 2) Tell me about a time when you gained support for an idea that you had. How did you do that? Why was this idea important to you?
- 3) Describe a time when you couldn't get support for an idea that you had. What happened? Why was this idea important to you?
- 4) Within your present position, what happens when you run into someone who isn't supporting your efforts to get things done? Describe what you do.
- 5) Have you ever had someone undermine your efforts? What did you do?
- 6) How can you tell who makes decisions in your organization?
- 7) Tell me about a time when you needed support from peers in order to get an idea across. How did you gain that support? Why was it important to you to get that particular idea or initiative accomplished?

### *Key Points to Consider When Assessing Answers*

As an interviewer or hiring manager, if you've made the decision that organizational savvy is important to getting some jobs done, you'll have to assess whether or not the candidate will fit in and understand your organization and have the skills to grasp the dynamics that lead to success. From the candidate's responses to the questions listed above, you should be able to determine whether he has an understanding that how he approaches people, and whom he approaches, is part of an overall strategy to gain support. The candidate should be able to articulate why certain individuals are key and what methods or tactics he used to gain an individual's support. Also, the candidate should be able to recognize that each idea is different and may require a different approach to move it forward. You should be able to determine whether the candidate understands and exerts energy to build a strategy to get things done. One candidate said, "I don't think about how to get ideas across; I just put them out there and see what happens."

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Next, focus on whether the candidate has the kinds of relationships that extend across the organization and whether the candidate knows how to engender other people's support. Look for genuine relationships and support with a wide range of people who are willing to help the candidate. These relationships should not be based solely on an attitude of "I'll support you if you support me." The relationships should be more genuine and should be based on trust and respect. The way the candidate describes the support and how he gains sponsors is often very telling. One candidate actually said, "I told Henry that if he expects support for his next initiative, he'd better support me on this." This kind of ultimatum is not the way to create true teamwork.

The candidate will need the ability to read the climate within an organization or even within a meeting in order to be able to assess timing, opportunity, and key players. What is the candidate telling you about her assessment of climate and culture? One candidate, when asked about bringing ideas to fruition, said that every week at the senior staff meeting, there was time on the agenda for each senior staff member to discuss enterprisewide improvement ideas. She said that the tone in some of those meetings was rushed or negative. She noticed that when the meeting tone was rushed, the plant manager often killed ideas with quick one-liners such as "It's a good idea, but I don't think we have time for that kind of initiative." She also noticed that if the production meeting preceding the staff meeting was negative, then rather than entertain new ideas for improvement, the plant manager would say, "We need to focus on getting our numbers up." The candidate said she realized that these two situations were simply not conducive to the climate needed to "sell" an idea or initiative. She acknowledged that while the plant manager was very powerful, he was also very open and reasonable, as long as he was approached at the right time. This candidate's responses to the interviewer's questions indicated that she was able to give specific examples that supported her position. It was obvious that she had the ability to read important information about the climate in her previous position, which allowed her to advance her ideas.

Understanding the candidate's motives or intentions also proves valuable. Is the candidate advancing goals that are for the good of the organization or is he simply building himself up? You should listen for intention. Although it may be difficult to determine intention, by asking questions about why the candidate was pursuing particular ideas, you'll gain a sense of what the candidate values. One candidate talked about several ideas that he was trying to advance at directors' meetings. These ideas could be grouped under the heading "gaining a larger piece of the organization under his control." Now, it's not unreasonable to want to gain control of things that impact your operation, but the interviewer began to wonder whether this was the best plan for the organization. As the interviewer pressed and asked follow-up questions about why these ideas were worth pursuing, she uncovered the candidate's motive, expressed in his own

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words: “I knew if I could get all of these pieces of the organization under my umbrella, then the board would have little choice but to make me the next executive VP.’ That motivation is not necessarily bad, but it does require that the interviewer or hiring manager take a second look.

# Assessing Emotional Intelligence

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## Personal Influence & Influencing Self: Self-Confidence

### *Questions to Assess Self Confidence*

- 1) Tell me about a time when you took on a task that you considered “out of your comfort zone.” How did you feel? Why did you do it? Did you think you were going to succeed or fail?
- 2) If you were going to try to persuade me regarding something, how would you do it?
- 3) Describe a time when you interjected a different point of view or a different side of an issue. How did you go about doing that?
- 4) Tell me about a time when you were confident enough to disagree with something or someone.
- 5) Tell me about your strengths. How do you know they are your strengths? How do you measure your strengths? What feedback have you gotten that indicates that this quality is a strength?
- 6) Tell me about a time that you were concerned about being successful at a task or you thought you were going to fail. What did you do?
- 7) When do you typically ask for assistance? Describe the last time you asked for help on something.
- 8) How do you think you’re going to perform at this job?

For managers and leaders:

- 9) Tell me about a time when you had to implement a change. What did you say to your staff? How did you convince them to follow you?
- 10) Tell me about a time when you had to lead others in a certain direction and you had some doubts. What did you do? What did you say?
- 11) Have you ever experienced a time when others questioned your ability to lead? Tell me about that. What did you do?



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### *Key Points to Consider When Assessing Answers*

The entire interview process is useful for assessing a candidate's confidence level. How does the candidate project his ideas and answers? Is the candidate willing to take a stand? Or is the candidate quick to retract his comments? What level of commitment does the candidate have to his answers? What are the candidate's nonverbal characteristics communicating? Confident people stand up straight, smile more than less confident people, and make eye contact.<sup>3</sup> Throughout the interview process, you will be able to assess the level of confidence the candidate projects.

Balancing the candidate's presentation with facts is also quite useful. After all, you want to make sure that the candidate's confidence is based in reality. Asking questions about strengths and following up with questions to determine how the person knows his strengths is often worthwhile. Listen for statements that provide evidence, such as "Every year it appears on my performance appraisal"; "Every boss I have tells me that time management is one of my strengths"; "My teammates rely on me for *my* organizational skills"; "I have achieved results such as --- by using this strength." Remember, sometimes a candidate needs to be encouraged to talk about his strengths. Even someone who is confident in his abilities may not always be comfortable telling others about it because it may feel boastful. Encourage the candidate to tell you about areas where he really feels confident. Don't confuse humility for lack of self-confidence. A person can be very confident about a skill or ability, yet feel as though it is inappropriate to tell others about it.

It also takes confidence to voice ideas and opinions. Look for evidence from the candidate about when she voiced her ideas or opinions. Ask how she went about it. You'll also get a clear picture of a person's confidence by asking questions that allow the candidate to describe situations when she voiced a contrary point of view and the manner in which she communicated it.

To determine confidence versus arrogance, try to challenge the candidate on something. Does she become argumentative? Or is she interested in learning more about your position? Also, look for subtle body language. One candidate subtly shook her head in a quick dismissive manner when the interviewer presented an opposing viewpoint. Appropriately confident people listen to others, think about the issues, and have a more holistic view of life than those who are arrogant. People who are realistically self-confident make a balanced assessment.<sup>4</sup>

People who are confident also are willing to admit that they need assistance. Has the candidate

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ever asked for help? A project can be jeopardized if someone involved doesn't have the skill or information to complete the job, but it can be more of a crisis if that person lacks the confidence to speak up. Therefore, it's useful to ask a client how he typically knows when to ask for assistance. This line of questioning is also helpful to determine whether someone lacks confidence to try a few solutions on his own. Is the candidate willing to act independently or must he always stop and ask for direction? Confidence could be a key factor in this person's success.

But what if all indications suggest that the candidate is self-confident? Could there still be cause for concern? Yes. Overconfidence is the hallmark of a narcissist. Asking a candidate, "How do you think you're going to perform on this job?" poses a purely hypothetical question. It is not a behavior-based question. Evidence suggests that narcissists generally predict future performance based on expectation, not actual performance. If a person unequivocally states that she would do a great job and does not back that proclamation with facts about past performance, it may be cause for concern. Chapter 10 contains more information to help the interviewer make a balanced judgment.

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## Personal Influence & Influencing Self: Initiative and Accountability

### *Questions to Assess Initiative and Accountability*

- 1) Tell me about a time when you decided on your own that something needed to be done. What did you do?
- 2) Describe a time when you did more than was required on your job. How did you feel about that?
- 3) Have you ever made any improvements to your work without being asked? Give me some examples. How did you do it?
- 4) When you perform your present job, have you ever thought about a way to improve the quality of the product or service that you provide? Tell me about that.
- 5) Have you ever come up with a way to cut costs in your present position? What did that entail? How did you go about doing it?
- 6) Have you ever thought of a way to perform your present job in less time? What did you do about it?
- 7) Tell me about a time when something you did resulted in a change for your department or area. How did you go about doing it? How did you feel about that?
- 8) Have you ever taken the initiative to do something that didn't work out? Describe that situation. What did you do? How did you feel about that?
- 9) Have you ever solved a work-related problem that had been a problem for a long time? What did you do? How did you do it?
- 10) Have you ever taken an action and gotten blamed when it didn't work out? Describe what happened.

### *Key Points to Consider When Assessing Answers*

Initiative is a key factor desirable in many job functions. Interviewers or hiring managers will

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want to screen candidates to determine whether they act on their own initiative. Candidates should cite examples of actions they have taken to improve quality, cost, timeliness, or customer service. The key word here is “actions.” Having a great idea is one thing, but how did the candidate act on her idea? Did the candidate act independently to improve things that were within her control? Otherwise, did the candidate engage others to advance an idea that was for the good of the department or team? How? Did she just tell the boss and let the boss deal with it, or was she a dynamic partner in taking action to change something? Of course, the interviewer or hiring manager will need to evaluate the scope of independent action the candidate was able to exercise. For example, in some companies, it would not be possible for a frontline employee to change a procedure independently. But don’t underestimate the actions that a determined person without positional power could take to influence changes. The interviewer should be evaluating *whether* the person takes actions, as well as *how* the person takes actions. Both features are important. A person who organizes a union is demonstrating initiative. But it may not be in the best interest or fit for the hiring company. The interviewer should be certain to ask “how” questions to determine what form the candidate’s initiative takes.

Also important to keep in mind when asking a candidate about initiative is to ask how the candidate felt about the situation. Sometimes people take initiative, but then feel resentful that they had to perform the burden of the work. A question such as “Describe a time when you did more than was required on your job. How did you feel about that?” allows the interviewer to determine the candidate’s feelings about going above and beyond. Sometimes candidates will take the initiative, but they will not do so because of a service orientation. Asking about the candidate’s feelings will give the interviewer a new dimension of information. Some people take initiative and then play the hero. Still others play the martyr. Both of these roles can be destructive in the workplace.

Similarly, determining how the candidate reacts when he has taken initiative and it doesn’t work out gives the interviewer important data. Does the candidate stop trying? Does he regroup and find another strategy? Or does he decide on another initiative as the focus for his energy? All of these details will give the interviewer useful insight. When asked about an initiative that didn’t work out, one candidate said, “I figured, I wasn’t going to waste my time and energy, so I decided to leave.” With some probing, the interviewer discovered that this was a pattern of behavior that the candidate had displayed with a string of other employers. Some employees place blame if their actions don’t work out. Here again, probing offers insight into how employees respond to initiatives that don’t work out.

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## Personal Influence & Influencing Self: Goal Orientation

### *Questions to Assess Goal Orientation*

- 1) Describe some goals for your present position. How were these goals determined? Do you meet these goals on a regular basis?
- 2) Have you ever thought that these goals were unrealistic? Why?
- 3) Have you ever had a goal at work that you didn't meet? How did you feel about that?
- 4) Tell me about a goal that you imposed on yourself at work. Why did you decide on that particular goal?
- 5) Tell me about a time when you didn't achieve something that you set out to do. What happened? How did you feel about that?
- 6) What goals do you have right now?
- 7) What goals did you accomplish last year?
- 8) Tell me about a time when you didn't feel like working. What did you do?
- 9) Describe your process for setting goals for yourself.

For the manager or leader:

- 10) How do you set goals for those who report to you? Describe the process you use to set goals within your unit or department.
- 11) How have you helped others set goals?
- 12) How do you ensure that the goals are aligned with the business strategy?
- 13) Tell me about a time when someone who reported to you did not reach an important goal. What did you do?

### *Key Points to Consider When Assessing Answers*

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When evaluating goal orientation, keep in mind the position and the types of goals required. Some positions may require short-term goals—goals that can be achieved within the day or even within the hour. Setting goals can be as simple as writing five things to do on a piece of paper and deciding to get them done before lunch. Other positions will require the candidate to set long-term goals. In both cases, the interviewer should be listening for specific, clear goals set by the individual.

To begin the discussion on goals, you can ask about the goals the candidate must achieve in order to successfully complete her work. Each job should have goals, and the candidate should recognize what those goals are. (If the candidate is working in a situation that does not have recognized or stated goals, then don't punish the candidate for a poor work situation. Instead, shift the focus to what goals she has set for herself.) The initial discussion about goals in her present position will help the candidate focus on goals at work. Also, you'll gain insight into the candidate's opinions about working toward goals. Does she consider goals an imposition? Or does she consider them helpful?

Next, shift the discussion to self-imposed goals, and seek evidence of them in the candidate. Look for times when the candidate decided on and met these goals at work. Although self-imposed goals related to outside activities (golf scores, exercise, dieting) are useful to determine if the candidate has the ability to set goals and follow through, it's important to determine whether the candidate considers the workplace a place where self-imposed goal setting is of value. After all, your purpose is to evaluate whether the person will set goals at work, not in her personal life.

You'll also want to determine whether the person is capable of reaching goals. Some people are great at setting goals, but reaching them is another thing. Evaluate the results the candidate achieved.

Lastly, you'll want to consider how the candidate reacts when she doesn't meet a goal—imposed by either others or herself. Does she rationalize? Blame others? Give up in defeat? What happens to the candidate's motivation in these instances? If you're interviewing a manager, you'll want to know about her goal setting as well as her ability to help others set and reach goals. Does she impose goals on others? Does she see goal setting as a collaborative effort? What technique does she apply if goals aren't reached? How does she help others achieve their goals? Most people respond best to a collaborative goal-setting process. Also, does the leader see herself as a partner and resource for assisting people in reaching their goals?

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## Personal Influence & Influencing Self: Optimism

### *Questions to Assess Optimism*

- 1) Tell me about a project that you knew was not going to deliver results. How did you know?
- 2) Describe a time when you tried something new at work. How did that work? Would you do it again? Why or why not?
- 3) Describe a situation at work when you were optimistic and it affected the outcome.
- 4) Describe a situation at work when others wanted to move forward on something and you didn't think it was a good idea. Why didn't you think it would work? What did you do?
- 5) Describe a time when you were more optimistic than others at work about a particular project. What did you do?
- 6) Tell me about a time when you had misplaced optimism. How did you proceed?
- 7) Tell me about a time when you didn't believe that a project was going to turn out on time, on budget, or on track. Why did you think it was going to be a problem?
- 8) Give me a situation where you believed that something was going to be successful and it was. How did you know?
- 9) Tell me about a time when someone on your team was negative about an outcome. How did it affect you?

### *Key Points to Consider When Assessing Answers*

Optimism isn't intended to compensate for poor project planning, poor sales skills, or poor customer service. When you're evaluating the candidate's answers to the above questions, you're going to have to take into consideration and balance the data the candidate is giving you against the attitude the candidate has about the situation. If the data clearly suggest that poor skills or poor planning is an issue, the candidate's optimism won't make a difference. However, the spirit of these questions is to try to determine what perspective the candidate brings to the team. Listen for positive statements and a hopeful perspective that the candidate brings when

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describing past situations. Find out about the candidate's tolerance for others who are optimistic. Does the candidate have a positive regard for hopefulness or optimism, or does he view such thinking with contempt? Sure, facts and data are important, and certain candidates trained in certain disciplines will rely more than others on facts, but often underlying the facts is a person's belief about a particular situation. In this situation, you'll be listening for the underlying belief.

Also, listen for how the candidate describes the causes of bad events. Those who explain bad events in a circumscribed way, with external, unstable, and specific causes, are described as optimistic. In the learned-helplessness model, people become helpless. This learned helplessness is represented as a generalized expectation that future outcomes will be unrelated to actions.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, a candidate will sound like a victim—he will express that no matter what he had done, the outcome wouldn't have improved. The victim voice says that "nothing is my fault."<sup>12</sup> Listen for this type of victim voice from the candidate.

Here's an example of what one candidate said when asked about a project that she didn't think would work: "I just saw this as one more project that wouldn't produce the result that management promised. I just get tired of their pie-in-the-sky promises." Although the candidate may be right about management's thinking, further probing is in order. When the interviewer asked for an example of projects that didn't produce a result as promised, the candidate said after some hesitation, "Well, they said that a program fix would eliminate errors by 17 percent. It didn't." Further probing about the results revealed the following: "It only produced a 15 percent improvement in errors." Maybe management was a bit optimistic, but it seems like the results speak for themselves.



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## Personal Influence & Influencing Self: Flexibility and Adaptability

### *Questions to Assess Flexibility and Adaptability*

- 1) Describe a time when you had to change your plans to accommodate someone else at work. How did you feel about that?
- 2) Tell me about a time when something at work was changing. How have you adapted to the change? How did you feel about the change?
- 3) Relate a time when you wanted something at work to remain the same, but others didn't. What did you do? How did you feel about that?
- 4) Describe a time when you had to learn something new. How did you feel about that? How have you adapted to the new system?
- 5) Tell me about a time when you had trouble adjusting to a change. What did you find difficult?
- 6) Give me an example of a time when you were flexible.
- 7) Give me an example of a time when you weren't very flexible.
- 8) Tell me about a time when you had to reconsider how to interact or behave because you weren't getting the results you required.
- 9) Were there any behaviors that you had to abandon that worked for you in a previous job that didn't work in a new job? How did you know these behaviors didn't or wouldn't work in your new job?

For managers or leaders:

- 10) Tell me about a time as a manager that you found it necessary to bend the rules. What did you do? Why did you do it? How did you feel about it?
- 11) Tell me about a time when you were flexible and accommodated the needs of someone on your staff. How did you feel about that?

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- 12) As a manager, have you ever been flexible and later regretted it?
- 13) What types of behaviors did you need to develop when you transitioned from worker to supervisor? From manager to director?
- 14) Were there any behaviors that you had to abandon that worked for you in a previous role that didn't work in a new role? How did you know these behaviors didn't or wouldn't work in your new role?
- 15) Was there ever a time when you changed roles or jobs or organizations that you had to let go of behaviors that contributed to your success in past situations?

### *Key Points to Consider When Assessing Answers*

With all the changes that take place in the workplace, candidates should be able to give you concrete examples of times when they had to be flexible. Asking the follow-up question "How did you feel about that?" is an important way to assess the candidate's underlying assumptions about change. Is the candidate someone who enjoys change, or does he like things to remain the same? Look for a picture to emerge about how the candidate views change. Just as with all the competencies, the job will dictate whether or not the competency is important. Being rigid and following a set pattern, schedule, or method may certainly be desirable in some jobs. In fact, being too flexible in some positions may be a detriment. Carefully match the competencies with the job. If flexibility is important, listen for evidence that the candidate is indeed flexible.

Consider this answer to the question "Tell me about a time when you had to adjust to a change at work": "Well, just recently, we changed the procedure for receiving large orders. We used to have two people check in the order. One would check the computer system and verify the order against the packing list, and the other person would check for the merchandise. Now, one person has to do both jobs. So, I had to learn how to use the computer system where the electronic packing lists and orders are stored." The interviewer then asked the follow-up question "How do you feel about that?" and gained the following information: "Well, I don't like it. It's so much easier to do it the other way. It's confusing to find everything on the computer and also go and check the order." Another follow-up question provides even more information about the situation: "How are you adapting to this change?" "Well, I'm doing okay. My supervisor said that I had the fewest discrepancies and also had the fastest check-in speed, so my numbers are very good. Our department measures speed and accuracy of order check-in." So it's possible to dislike the change yet be able to adapt quite well. This answer gives the interviewer important information. If the candidate had said, "I'm adapting okay," the interviewer wouldn't have enough information to evaluate the candidate's position and would need

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to ask for concrete measures. Also, remember that additional examples will enable the interviewer to determine whether the candidate generally dislikes change, yet adapts well, or whether this is an isolated example. It's important to acquire this information if the job that you're interviewing candidates for requires lots of change and flexibility.

In addition, employees, and especially managers and leaders, should understand that different jobs and roles might require different sets of behaviors. If they are aware that different roles or jobs require different behaviors, probe to discover how they became aware of the need to adapt. Were they able to read the environment or the people and realize that they had to adapt their behavior? Or did someone have to point out the need for a different set of behaviors? Preferably the candidate determined the need for different behaviors by observing others in a similar role, by assessing people's reactions, and by anticipating differences. This internal compass would lead to flexible and adaptable behavior without the need for someone to point it out. If someone must point it out, the person may have already lost credibility or have a performance problem.

Asking a candidate interviewing for a managerial or leadership position about examples of when she accommodated others or when she felt it necessary to bend the rules gives you important insight into the candidate's flexibility. You should assess the answers you receive against the fit within your organization. These questions involve judgment issues that you'll need to evaluate against the landscape of your organization. For example, is the manager's example about bending rules in favor of satisfying customers? The judgment portion of the question is separate from the issue of flexibility. If you're attempting to determine whether someone is flexible, the candidate should be able to give evidence where she demonstrated flexibility in her thinking and decision making and acted in a flexible way.

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## Personal Influence & Influencing Others: Leading Others

### *Questions to Assess Leading Others*

- 1) Tell me about a time you had an idea and you got other people to follow you. What did you do?
- 2) Describe a time when others relied on you and followed your lead.
- 3) Tell me about a time when you were able to influence others. How did you do it? How did you feel about influencing others?
- 4) Describe a time when you took charge of a situation.
- 5) Tell me about a time when others looked to you for direction. What did you do? How did you feel about that?

For managers and leaders:

- 6) How do you get people to follow you? What do you do? How do you influence them?
- 7) Tell me about a time when someone was resisting you. What did you do?
- 8) Describe a time when you were able to get people to follow you on a controversial issue.
- 9) Tell me about a time when you united your followers around an issue.
- 10) Describe a time when you influenced people to follow you when you did not have positional authority.
- 11) Give me an example of when you influenced your peers.
- 12) Give me an example of when you influenced your boss.

### *Key Points to Consider When Assessing Answers*

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The candidate should be able to provide examples of times when she emerged as a leader. Look for examples when the candidate deliberately demonstrated leadership and also for examples of when the candidate emerged as a leader because others sought out her knowledge, skill, or interest in a particular task or subject. When a candidate deliberately demonstrates leadership, she chooses to lead. All three of the examples provided above demonstrate deliberate leadership.

However, depending on the role and the job that you as the interviewer or hiring manager must fill, it is also useful to determine whether others seek out the candidate as a leader. When others ask a candidate to provide leadership, this demonstrates that the candidate possesses some quality or expertise that others require. When asked to give an example of when others followed his lead, one candidate answered in a humble, quiet demeanor, “Well, there was a very tense situation with a huge customer. We were supposed to deliver something on spec and we missed the deadline and didn’t manufacture it up to spec. The customer was threatening to pull his business. (The customer accounts for 40 percent of our revenues.) Joe came to me and asked if I would be willing to meet with the team to address the situation. I have a long history and a good reputation with this customer. So, I did. The team took my recommendations and we were able to retain the customer. Joe also asked me if I would stay involved with the team for a while to make sure that we maintain the customer’s confidence. It’s been about a year and things are running really well.” This candidate clearly demonstrated that he had expertise, and he influenced the team through his reputation and skill.

When you’re evaluating a candidate’s influence, remember that charisma and assertiveness don’t necessarily make a person influential. Influence comes in many different sizes and styles. Look for the type that will make a good fit with the position and your organization. Someone can exercise leadership with a very quiet and unassuming style. Look for results and evidence, not for charm.

When interviewing to fill a managerial or leadership position, assess the methods candidates use to influence people. Obviously, they have positional authority; however, look for examples of how they influence people beyond the use of positional authority. If the only answer a candidate can give you is, “I just told Jim he had to do it,” I would be concerned that the candidate isn’t aware of the other methods of influence. Probe deeply to give the candidate an opportunity to tell you about his tactics and methods for influencing followers. In *The World’s Most Powerful Leadership Principle*, James Hunter describes a positive method as “the skill of influencing people to enthusiastically work toward goals identified as being for the common good.”<sup>2</sup> To accomplish enthusiastic support and garner a following, leaders must engage people, value them, honor their ideas through listening, and help them to feel important. They must express gratitude and display caring. However, leaders must also display competence.

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Watch for signs of these behaviors in the answers that you gather.

Questions aimed at influencing peers as well as the boss give you valuable insight into the candidate's method of influence when positional authority doesn't exist. One candidate, when asked about gaining a peer's cooperation said, "I went to our boss and let him deal with it." Again, the interviewer gains important information. Another telling example came when a candidate was asked about resistance. He responded, "I don't believe in playing games with people. We're here to get the job done, so whenever I say to do something, I expect people to do it or I tell them they can go somewhere else."

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## Personal Influence & Influencing Others: Creating a Positive Work Climate

### *Questions to Assess Creating a Positive Work Climate*

For leaders and managers:

- 1) Describe the climate or culture of your present department.
- 2) What specific steps do you take to set the tone within your department?
- 3) How is the climate within your department different from that of other areas within your company?
- 4) What evidence do you have that you've created a positive climate or culture?
- 5) Describe the ideal climate of a department. What actions do you think a leader must take to create an ideal climate?
- 6) Tell me about a time when your staff was not very energized. What did you do?
- 7) Tell me about a time when someone expressed concerns about the working climate of your department. What did you do?
- 8) Describe a situation when an employee was disrupting the climate you were trying to establish. What did you do?

For employees:

- 9) Describe a positive working climate. What would it feel like? What do you do to create a positive working climate every day?
- 10) Give me some examples of what you do to ensure that your coworkers have a positive day.
- 11) Give me an example of some actions you've taken with a negative coworker. What have you done to create a more positive working relationship with this person?

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12) How do you support your supervisor in creating a positive climate in your work unit?

### *Key Points to Consider When Assessing Answers*

Generally, these questions are for leaders or managers, who should be able to give you answers that indicate that they recognize their responsibility for creating a positive climate within their work group. Good leaders visualize and articulate the culture they expect to create in their work units. That vision should be consistent and fit within your company or organization. In addition, candidates should be able to outline specific steps that they have taken to create a positive climate with their staff. The answers that you gain should give you a good indication of whether or not the candidate even considers climate to be his responsibility. Although organizational issues, market conditions, and other factors influence employee morale and satisfaction, so does the direct leader's action. Probe further to determine whether the leader recognizes that he controls certain factors, and look for evidence of how the leader acts. It's also helpful to ask for more than one example. If a person has held more than one leadership position or has worked in multiple companies or organizations, asking for multiple examples gives the interviewer more insight into how the candidate sets the tone or climate when in a leadership role.

Some leaders tie the climate to the corporate values of teamwork or respect. Some develop their own set of operating behaviors for their department or team. The key point here is that leaders should have a clear vision, should establish guidelines for interacting that support the vision, should have clearly communicated what's expected, and should act in a manner that is consistent with this vision. The candidate should also be able to give evidence of the positive culture she created. Is her overturn rate lower than average? Are there opinion surveys or satisfaction surveys that call out her department as unusually high scoring? Even anecdotal evidence can support her claims. One working supervisor was able to describe a very positive culture; when asked for evidence, she said, "Well, this isn't something that you can measure, but when my husband was diagnosed with cancer, my employees all got together. They took it upon themselves to divide up some of my work. They said that while my husband was sick, they were all going to pitch in and try to relieve me of some of my tasks. In addition, they left me a written report every day letting me know what they were able to complete. Everyone worked together on this. It was great." Obviously, this person did something to engender this kind of support.

Another point worth noting involves the energy of the work unit. Energy and mood are contagious, and the leader sets the tone. Is the candidate aware that he or she can take actions



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to increase the energy level of the group? One candidate said that she noticed that her staff was getting weary during a particularly busy time in the dead of winter. She decided to have a summer luau party one Monday afternoon. It was a total surprise, and she purposely chose Monday. She said the energy and high spirit created by the luau lasted all week.

Also, ask about how the leader would address a negative or resistant employee. Will the candidate act to defend the culture he is creating? Will he teach and mentor employees to support the culture? Sometimes, leaders do a good job of envisioning and articulating a positive culture, but they get stymied when someone resists. Perhaps they lack the skill or the courage to address resistance. One leader gave evidence of a very positive culture that he created; then a new person entered the work unit, and her manipulative and backstabbing behavior destroyed what he had created. He said in the interview, "I learned how one person could destroy everything I worked hard to build." When the interviewer probed with "What did you do when you realized this was happening?" the candidate responded, "Well, there wasn't much I could do, she was very strong willed." This sense of helplessness speaks volumes. Assuming that the manipulative person was hired by this leader, the situation would even be worse. The leader didn't take actions to defend the culture he created, nor did he initially hire someone who would fit into the culture.

Although the responsibility for creating a positive climate rests primarily with the leader, employee actions speak volumes. Questioning a candidate about climate and her role in it gives the interviewer or hiring manager insight into the candidate's self-leadership skills. Does the candidate realize that all people have a role in setting climate or tone? Does she take actions to create a positive climate with peers and others? Ask a candidate some questions to assess what actions and responsibility she takes to set the tone. One candidate said, "It's not my job to worry about whether or not my coworkers are having a good day. That's my boss's job." On the contrary, if each employee concerned herself with whether or not her coworkers were having a good day, morale problems would go away. Also, serving internal customers (coworkers) requires the attitude that each person manages his behavior to create a positive experience for the people he encounters. Be sure to probe; questions such as these will often elicit simple answers such as, "I'm real easy to get along with. Everyone likes me." That may be true, but that answer lacks clarity. Dig deeper for specific examples of how the candidate behaves. That characteristic engenders a positive climate.

# Assessing Emotional Intelligence

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## Personal Influence & Influencing Others: Getting Results Through Others

### *Questions to Assess Getting Results through Others*

For managers or leaders:

- 1) Describe some of the results you've achieved in your area within the past year. How did you achieve those results?
- 2) In what areas did you fall short of delivering the results you wanted to deliver? Why did you fall short? What could you have done differently?
- 3) Describe how you typically get results from other people.
- 4) Tell me how you set goals for your staff. Give me an example of a time when someone wasn't meeting a goal. What did you do?
- 5) Has there ever been a time when no matter what you did, someone was unable to reach a goal? What did you do?
- 6) What have you done to share your expectations with your department?
- 7) Have you ever set a goal too low? What did you do?
- 8) Tell me about a time when someone was resisting you, your ideas, or your authority. What did you do?
- 9) Tell me about a time that you were wrong in the way that you addressed an employee situation.
- 10) As a manager, tell me about a time when you didn't have enough resources to do the job. What did you do?

For employees:

- 11) Describe a situation when your actions helped others achieve results or goals.

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### *Key Points to Consider When Assessing Answers*

When interviewing candidates for leadership positions, be sure to establish evidence that they use established performance-management techniques. Good performance management requires the leader to establish clear expectations, measure performance, clearly communicate expectations and measures, monitor employee performance, and give feedback throughout the performance cycle. Through your discussions with the candidate, you should be able to determine what the candidate does to clarify expectations, how the candidate checks or monitors results, and whether or not the candidate gives regular performance feedback. But the manner in which the leader executes this process is critical. Use the interview process to determine *how* the candidate engages the employee in the performance-management system. Organizations with effective performance-management processes create a culture of dialogue. Leaders must encourage pervasive two-way communication, through which individuals and groups question, challenge, interpret, and clarify goals and engage in regular performance dialogue to ensure that employees' actions are aligned with the organization's goals.<sup>10</sup>

For example, from the candidate's answers, do you get a sense that the process is collaborative? In addition, what is the tone of the discussions the candidate is conveying? Does the candidate see herself as a partner for achieving goals? Does the candidate offer employees help and resources to reach goals? Does the candidate see herself as a mentor or coach to help people achieve goals? When asked about goals and the role the manager plays, one candidate stated, "Look, I put it out there in no uncertain terms. Everyone knows what I expect. I'm not there to hold anyone's hand. If they can't deliver, I have to cut my losses." This candidate might deliver clearly defined goals, but it seems that the process stops there. Although we're not suggesting that an emotionally intelligent leader coddle someone, a bit of coaching would certainly be in order. Why? Because people's performance improves when the leader actively gives performance feedback and has built a coaching relationship with the employee.

It's also interesting to examine how a candidate addresses resistant or reluctant employees. Did the candidate immediately push back or give the employee an ultimatum? Did he give up and get other people to cover for the resistant employee? Or did he give clear feedback, listen to the employee, involve the employee in problem solving, and offer support, additional training, or other resources to overcome the performance difficulty? Listen carefully to distill the tone of the employee discussions. There is one thing you can count on as a leader: eventually, someone, somewhere, will resist your ideas, suggestions, or goals. Learning what the candidate does to influence a person who resists gives the interviewer critical information. Look for answers that suggest that the candidate worked up front to build the relationship; included the employee's input and collaborated with the employee on the ideas, projects, or goals; and

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asked for employee feedback and listened to employee concerns. True influence is in the details and the tone.

Sometimes, however, even a leader who employed all the right methods encounters a situation in which a person is unwilling or unable to meet the demands of the job. In this case, the leader must courageously take the next step—progressive discipline. The interviewer must determine whether the candidate gave the employee in question fair and ample coaching and counseling, and then whether the leader addressed the situation in an honorable manner—even if it ended in termination. If a leader fails to address performance problems, ultimately, he can lose influence with others on his team, because by accepting lower standards for one person, he lowers the expectations for everyone.

To determine how a candidate gets results when he has no positional authority, be sure to direct your questions specifically to that point. Ask, “How do you typically get results from *peers*?” or “Tell me about a time when a *peer* resisted you, or your ideas. What did you do?” Here again, the candidate should give answers that describe collaborative approaches. Did the candidate recognize the need for strong peer-to-peer relationships? Did she ask for input on ideas, projects, or goals that affected peers? Was the candidate open to feedback, and did she listen to concerns? Influence is made of building blocks. A candidate’s awareness of the process of influencing others will be evident in the manner in which she describes her interactions.

# Assessing Emotional Intelligence

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## Mastery of Purpose and Vision: Understanding One's Purpose and Value

### *Questions to Assess Understanding One's Purpose and Values*

- 1) Describe a time when you were lost in your work in a good way— when time just flew by and you were totally absorbed in what you were doing.
- 2) Tell me about a time when you felt bored at work.
- 3) Describe your ideal job.
- 4) Describe the worst possible job for you.
- 5) What type of work would you find most inspiring?

### *Key Points to Consider When Assessing Answers*

By asking these questions, the interviewer should get a picture of the type of work most aligned with the candidate's interests. Of course, it would be very useful if you asked these questions before you described the job. If the candidate knows what the job entails in advance, the candidate may answer the questions to suit the position. So, as the interviewer, arrange your discussion so that you ask these questions before you describe the position or job duties. The question about being lost in one's work, earlier described as flow, helps the interviewer understand the kind of work that resonates with the candidate. One candidate stated that the worst possible job for him would be a position where he would have little or no help in solving problems and be expected to interact with angry people all day. Well, the technical support opening required a great deal of independent problem solving with little direction. It also required almost constant interface with irate users. So, fit may be an issue in this case. Another candidate described feeling bored and disliked attending meetings. If the particular culture at the hiring company and the position required the candidate to attend meetings, this misalignment may be cause for concern. Getting to know a candidate on this level enables better hiring decisions.

As for the question "What type of work would you find most inspiring?" we're not suggesting that you should necessarily eliminate a candidate based on the response to this question, but it does give you information to consider. Let's say that you're interviewing candidates for an accounting job at a financial institution and the candidate states that the job they would find

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most inspiring would be working with children—a far cry from accounting. Does that mean he would make a poor accountant? No, so this statement is not a factor that should eliminate this candidate as a potential hire, but if you have another candidate who loves numbers and gives evidence of that, the latter may be a better fit in terms of job satisfaction. A study in the *Journal of Vocational Behavior* cited a positive correlation between emotional intelligence and job satisfaction.<sup>3</sup> People who are able to articulate what type of work they find inspiring are demonstrating a level of awareness that should be taken into consideration when assessing fit.

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## Mastery of Purpose and Vision: Taking Actions Toward One's Purpose

### *Questions to Assess Taking Actions Toward One's Purpose*

- 1) How did you decide on your chosen field of endeavor, college major, or line of work? What influenced you? What actions did you take to end up in this field?
- 2) What do you like about your chosen field? What do you dislike?
- 3) What actions have you taken related to your career that you are pleased you took? What pleases you about your actions?
- 4) Have you ever pursued a career-related goal, perhaps a credential or a specific job, only to discover that when you achieved your goal you were disappointed? Tell me about that.

### *Key Points to Consider When Assessing Answers*

Interviewers or hiring managers should ask candidates to give them evidence of deliberate actions leading to specific goals or job paths. In particular, look for evidence of when candidates took actions toward something they found desirable. We recognize that sometimes people simply “fall into” the ideal life path. But once on the ideal path, what actions does the person take to advance on this path? As the interviewer looks for signs of intrinsic motivation toward work, she gains a deeper understanding of the candidate’s willingness to pursue interests and goals. The interviewer also discovers what the candidate likes and dislikes. One candidate indicated that he was leaving a particular job because he didn’t enjoy it; yet, he was applying for essentially the same type of work. Something seemed amiss, so the interviewer pressed for more details. It turns out that the candidate was asked to leave his job.

We recognize that sometimes people perform jobs just for the money. Jobs sometimes serve as a means to an end, while true fulfillment takes place elsewhere in life. Depending on the candidate’s situation, he may not be seeking an ideal job. However, often the candidate can provide evidence of taking action toward his purpose. One candidate applying for a night-turn production job provided a good example. When asked “What actions have you taken toward your career that you were pleased you took?” the candidate answered, “I’m taking one right

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now by applying for this job. With this job, I'll be working night turn, and that will enable me to take classes during the day and finish my degree."

What about the hoards of people who feel stuck in fields they don't particularly like, but stay because of good pay or convenient hours, or some other personal reason? Should they all be written off at this stage of the interview process? No. The entire interview process looks for the best candidate for the job on many different levels. These questions simply help to determine potential fit and satisfaction. The interviewer or hiring manager may find that these questions better serve some jobs and not others. Alternatively, the interviewer may ask some general questions to determine fit. When given the opportunity, interviewers or hiring managers who hire for skill *and* fit serve the organization better in the long run.



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## Mastery of Purpose and Vision: Authenticity

### *Questions to Assess Authenticity*

- 1) Describe a situation where you found yourself in a values conflict. What did you do?
- 2) Tell me about a situation at work where you felt that you had to compromise your beliefs or values.
- 3) Describe a time when you felt very strongly about something that happened at work—something you considered to be an affront to your values. What did you do?
- 4) Tell me how you gain people's trust. What do you do? What actions did you take?
- 5) Tell me about a time when you lost someone's trust.
- 6) Describe how you know you have honored the commitments that you've made to others.
- 7) Tell me about a time when you failed to honor a commitment.
- 8) Has there ever been a time when you promised something at work and were unable to deliver it? How did you feel about that?
- 9) Tell me about a time when you did less than your fair share at work or you got out of a difficult assignment. How did you feel about that?

### *Key Points to Consider When Assessing Answers*

The questions about values conflicts and compromised beliefs produce useful data. As the interviewer, you'll want to listen to the candidate's willingness to tell you the truth. Sure, everyone wants to present himself as a team player, but what is the candidate willing to disclose? Generally, people who feel strongly about their values can give an example. The interviewer must refrain from judging the candidate's values. Remember, the intention of these questions is to determine whether the candidate will fit in the hiring organization.

When candidates discuss how they gain trust, look for specific actions or behaviors. People

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skilled at building trust do so by developing relationships, listening to others, responding with empathy, genuinely soliciting input from others, and, of course, contributing fairly. Fair and equal contributions at work, measured by following through with promised and assigned work and honoring commitments, lead to workplace trust.<sup>10</sup>

Most candidates find the question “Tell me about a time when you lost someone’s trust” more challenging. Candidates also find “Tell me about a time when you did less than your fair share” difficult to answer. The interviewer may have to prime the candidate to disclose this information. However, if a candidate provides an answer, follow up with “How did you feel about that?” One candidate stated that he felt really lucky to get out of some difficult assignments. When the interviewer probed, she was told, “I don’t really care to learn something that I’m probably never going to do again.” That answer may be truthful, so you have to be grateful that the candidate was honest. But if the job for which you’re interviewing candidates requires the candidate to learn new things that he may not use on a daily basis, fit becomes the issue.

If manipulation and deceit are a candidate’s strong points, it’s unlikely that these questions will prove useful. We’ve devoted Chapter 10 to discussing this problem.

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