

# INTERVIEW TO FIND YOUR STAR TEAMMATE

*A Guide for Leaders  
in Digital Learning*



Hiring is one of the most important decisions you'll make as a manager and a leader. You're not looking for just anyone with the right resume. You're looking for a star teammate, someone who can do the job with energy, motivation, and enthusiasm. Ideally, your new hire will help launch your organization to a new level of excellence. But how do you identify a star teammate?



**Asking the right interview questions can help you sort out the shining stars from the passing satellites.**

When you ask the right questions, and really listen to the responses, you can uncover a wealth of information about this candidate and how they'll fit into your team.

Of course, anyone who has ever interviewed knows it is easier said than done. That's why we've put together this guide. It includes sample questions and advice so you can interview to find your star teammate.



## DO YOU REALLY NEED A STAR?

You might think that good enough is good enough. There's no such thing as perfection, so why even try for it? That might be true when it comes to writing an email or buying a new pair of work pants. But hiring is a place where seeking the best possible fit can really pay off. More importantly, failing to find that star candidate can negatively impact your team and your whole organization.



**Star teammates are motivated, passionate and curious. They're self directed and bring new ideas and fresh perspectives. Instead of complaining about problems, they solve them. Most importantly, they do quality work whether you're watching them or not.**

Meanwhile, other candidates may look qualified but still be a poor fit. Hiring someone like this can cost you more than their salary is worth. Their inconsistency and lack of self-motivation, or poor fit with the rest of the team, may mean you have to manage them more closely.

They make more mistakes and are less confident in their work. This can lead to loss of opportunity, decreased team morale, and more headaches for you.

**Who you hire matters.** It impacts the culture of your organization, and your ability to attract great people in the future. If you're looking for excellence, someone who will bring motivation—produce great results, and solve problems—hire a star teammate.



## HOW TO IDENTIFY A STAR TEAMMATE

Knowing you want to hire a star teammate is easy. Finding them is trickier. Start by verifying that the candidate meets the basic functional requirements. Review their resume, portfolio, and job application to find out if they have the skills and knowledge to do the job. Once you have a short list of candidates, it's time to go stargazing.

During the interview you'll be looking for soft skills, analytical ability, emotional intelligence, motivations, passions, and goals. Know what you're looking for before you start.



**Hiring the right people takes time, the right questions and a healthy dose of curiosity. What do you think is the most important factor when building your team? For us, it's personality.**

*- Richard Branson*

### KEY AREAS TO INVESTIGATE

- 1** What are the key traits for success? Business icon Richard Branson says that for him hiring always goes back to personality. Your key trait might be different. You might seek out problem solving, enthusiasm or creativity. Ask situational questions and stay alert for evidence of this trait throughout the interview process. Make sure it's on your checklist so you note it when you see it.

- 2** **Are they smarter than you in some way?** We're not talking about IQ here. Instead, think about what this person can teach you and the rest of the team. Can they bring new knowledge, insight or expertise? Teams are energized by both giving and receiving. Star candidates add to the knowledge capital of your organization. Uncover their zones of genius by asking open-ended questions about how things work, their philosophy of education, and the interesting details on their resume.



**Emotional intelligence is the ability to sense, understand, and effectively apply the power and acumen of emotions as a source of human energy, information, connection, and influence.**

*- Robert K. Cooper, PhD*



- 3** **Do they have communication skills and emotional intelligence?** The best candidates communicate professionally and are considerate of their audience. You'll know you've found someone with strong emotional intelligence and communication skills when you see them adjust smoothly to your conversation and ask insightful questions.
- 4** **Can they analyze and problem solve?** Problem solving and analytical ability are essential for star players in any role. Offer hypothetical situations and ask them how they'd respond, or assign a quick sample project that tests their reasoning.
- 5** **Are they flexible?** You're looking for someone who can change their mind, pivot and grow with the organization. Ask them about a time when new evidence led them to alter their opinion or a situation where they took on new responsibility in response to changing organizational needs.

- 6** What is their passion, motivation, or goals? When you can tap into what someone really cares about and align purpose and passion, work transcends daily tasks and becomes a mission. When hiring, you should understand what that person is working toward and what motivates them. Make sure their goals align with the goals and mission of your organization.

All of these traits get to the heart of what makes someone a star employee. Not only are they equipped to do great work today, they're likely to keep getting better. Motivated people who are passionate about what they do practice their craft outside of work. They network and connect with people who can support their goals. They're also more likely to seek out constructive criticism so they can become even better at what they do.



**You can dream, create, design and build the most wonderful place in the world...but it requires people to make the dream a reality.**

*- Walt Disney*



## ASK THE RIGHT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Resumes, portfolios, and other documents help you understand the candidate's work history, but the interview is a unique opportunity to get to know the person. When done right, it can show you whether this candidate has the potential to be a star teammate.

Remember that you're trying to assess both their ways of working, and their knowledge and skills. Make sure you ask both assessment questions and analytical questions.

## STAR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Here are a few analytical questions to get you started. Some may sound cliché, but if you listen closely, you can uncover vital insights about your candidate.



### **CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT YOUR CAREER?**

Ask follow up questions about passion areas and goals. For example: That's really interesting that you went from X to X - how did that happen? Where do you see yourself going next? How does this job fit into your overall career goals? You're looking for purpose, passion, goals, and functional skills and knowledge



### **HOW WOULD YOUR COLLEAGUES DESCRIBE YOU IF I WERE TO CALL THEM? WHAT WOULD YOUR PREVIOUS MANAGERS SAY?**

This will give you insight into their key strengths. Do they align with what you really need or not? Dig deep and ask for examples that prove these traits.



### **WHAT PROJECT WERE YOU MOST PROUD OF?**

You'll gain insight into how they think about and approach problems. Do they possess key traits for the organization and role? Are they willing to go above and beyond? Pay close attention to how they talk about their teammates and management.



### **CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT A TIME WHEN YOU AND A COLLEAGUE SAW THINGS DIFFERENTLY? WHAT WAS THE SITUATION AND HOW DID YOU HANDLE IT?**

Again this will give you insight into how they problem solve, how flexible they are, and how they communicate. Pay attention to whether they seek to influence or command. Do they seek out data, give in to peer pressure, or stubbornly stick to their own opinion. Again, pay attention to how they talk about their colleagues. Are they respectful or dismissive, compassionate or outraged?

Pay attention to body language and attitude. Are they answering the question you asked? How do they respond when you disagree with something they said? Do they get excited or light up during any part of the conversation? Are they taking notes or otherwise showing that they're interested and engaged? These non-verbal responses can be a little more difficult to read over video chat, but they help you understand the candidate better. So it's worth the extra effort.



## A FEW FINAL TIPS

Hiring is a tricky business. You can never be certain that a new person will work out. But if you listen closely and know what you're looking for, you can spot red flags and gold stars during the interview process.



Consider giving short-list candidates a task or assignment. This allows you to check the quality of their work, see how they tackle it, and find out what kinds of questions they will ask. Whatever task you give should be proportionate to the job you're interviewing for. Be respectful of their time and make sure whatever you assign won't take more than a few hours.

Even the most thorough interview process isn't perfect. Take precautions when you can. We recommend building in a trial period, also known as a contract-to-hire agreement. Where you and the candidate agree to a 30, 90, or some other time frame trial period where you can both see how well they fit into your team.



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