

# "My Interview with THE INTERVIEWER"

BY FLORENCE STONE, EDITOR, *MWORLD*

*Over the years, I have had the good fortune to interview a great number of talented executives of high-performance companies.*

In the course of that experience, I often wondered what factors brought these gifted individuals to their organization. Luck clearly played a role. Likewise, these individuals possessed the skills, ability, and knowledge that helped to set them apart from their peers. But the actual decision as to who belongs where, I've recently learned, comes from the judgment of someone like Dennis Troyanos.

In the course of doing the research for this article, Troyanos's name surfaced time and time again from a variety of sources. As one HR executive told me, "Dennis is a very special person who approaches demanding recruiting assignments with a great deal of honesty and sincerity. You can see that he has a genuine concern for his client's business." Another executive told me, "Troyanos stands head and shoulders above most if not every search person I have ever worked with."

An executive who got his position through Troyanos told me about the in-depth interviews he had with him and how insightful his interview questions were.

Recently, I turned the tables on Troyanos and interviewed *him*! Here is an excerpt from that meeting.

**Q** In the mid- to late 90s there was a lot of talk about "the war for talent." Do you believe that this war is over?

Not at all.

In our view, the last so-called war for talent, which took place just before the dot.com bubble burst in 2000, will look like a minor skirmish in comparison to the coming global competition for specialized technology, marketing, and strategic talent. We think of it as "*the war for talent version 2.0*." This war is the same as the last war only the stakes are higher, the competition is tougher, and the investors and stakeholders are much more savvy.

## What do you and your recruiters do to prepare to accurately evaluate candidates?

We spend a great deal of time with the hiring executive *prior to conducting the search* and evaluating candidates. In fact, it is not uncommon for us to meet with *all of the key stakeholders within an organization* who will interact with this new hire. These diverse perspectives give us a holistic/360 degree view of the role.

We think it's important to internalize and understand the charter of the new hire in the context of the overall mission of the team. That said, the most important thing we seek to understand in this discovery process is the hiring executive's unique management style.

By the time we present a short list of candidates to the hiring executive, we have typically spent a total of six hours or more with the candidate putting him or her through our rigorous process. This is generally accomplished in three two-hour sessions. Each of these sessions are specifically designed to assess a candidate's level of competency against a predetermined and agreed to set of criteria.

Once we are satisfied that a person has the requisite experience, level of skill, and track record to excel in the job, then the really tough work begins, namely, assessing the person's level of "fit" with the hiring executive as well as the team. The key to this assessment is understanding which candidate will *resonate with, be inspired by, and flourish under* the leadership style and vision of the hiring manager. This is not as clear in most cases as you might think.

## What are the worst mistakes that executives make in meeting with candidates?

I believe that there are essentially two flavors of mistakes that hiring executives tend to make, and they are specifically related to one another:

First, we find that even the most seasoned executives often fail to take the upfront time to develop an effective "interview strategy" prior to engaging a candidate for an important hire. In extreme cases, some executives actually spend more time thinking about the restaurant they are going to take the candidate to lunch at on interview day than the questions they plan to ask the candidate at that lunch. Generally speaking, if the first course arrives before you formulate your first series of questions, then it is already too late.

Now this is not to suggest that executives don't care enough to be strategic when it comes to the all important Q&A process. We believe that this casual approach is merely a symptom of a larger issue that equates to the second mistake, namely, *the hiring executive has not effectively thought through and documented the key elements of the position for which he or she is hiring!*

Frankly, if the executive hasn't got a clear, crisp picture of the functional mission of the position, the key skill sets required for immediate success as well as the *"skills that will be required in the future"* for long-term success of that mission, then it's nearly impossible to formulate an effective series of probative questions to ask the candidates to determine their aptitude for the role.

## Don't most executives write a job description prior to conducting an important interview?

Yes, in many cases they do. However, all too often this so-called job description is no more than a laundry list of static skills and unimaginative experience requirements that represent the employer's desire to "cover all the bases," as it were.

**Q Do you look for candidates with similar styles of management or individuals whose styles complement one another's? If the former, what are the advantages? Are there disadvantages?**

*Great question!* In our practice, we think about team building in much the same way as composers might think about developing a complex score for a wonderful opera or aria. If everyone is singing the same notes and the orchestra drones on in the same key...you really don't get music...what you get is monotony.

Music, on the other hand, is all about "harmony." Music is one note in perfect opposition to another note or series of notes. Ideally, these notes blend and support each other at the same time. The ability to create a unique *dynamic tension* between notes has made many a composer pretty successful.

Like the composer, we have found that great hiring executives typically seek and attract the kind of intellectual diversity that creates productive dynamic tension amongst the players on their team.

**Q What are the four or five practical things that our readers can do on Monday morning that will lead to better results in their next hire?**

First and foremost ...

**Be ready**—Never "wing" an interview. Take the time to really understand the true mission and goals that you expect the candidate to accomplish and formulate a strategic line of questions that will satisfy you that this individual will meet or exceed these goals.

**Be rigorous**—If an answer does not make sense, don't move on to the next question until you are clear about the person's capabilities. Ask for examples and challenge them to defend case studies whenever possible.

**Be introspective**—Ask yourself if this person can be inspired by your vision and the overall mission of the company. Do they have contagious enthusiasm, drive, and intellectual horsepower?

**Be decisive**—Formulate an action plan in advance that will move the process along quickly if this person turns out to be a star. If you are not decisive about a great candidate...trust me, the competition will be.

**Be strategic**—Gather enough information about the candidate to "close the deal" with the single best available person for the position based on their credentials and their ability to resonate with and be inspired by your management style.

If the hiring executive can achieve insight into these five critical areas, I guarantee he or she will achieve better hires, and as a result the executive's personal value as a high value leader will be dramatically enhanced. Frankly, the fastest way to get on a recruiters radar screen is to develop a reputation for being a magnet for talent. [MW](#)

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