



ROUNDTABLE INTERVIEWS: WHY EMPLOYERS SHOULD USE THEM AND HOW CANDIDATES CAN SURVIVE THEM

I am surprised at how seldom roundtable interviews are used for final selection. Even at the most sophisticated companies, individual interviews that typically last a half a day or more are still commonplace. Instead, once a candidate has gone through multiple phone interviews, assessment testing, references and background checks, I highly recommend utilizing a roundtable interview to save time/expense and get consistency/consensus from the process.

Time/expense: Having a candidate interview with each member of your executive team can take an entire morning or afternoon. Include lunch and the majority of your day is gone. Do this for two or three finalists in a week, and your best, brightest and most expensive members of your team spend more time interviewing candidates than running your schools.

Roundtable interviews can usually be completed in about two hours. This enables you to effectively meet with a group of finalists during the course of a day – not a week. Another benefit is cost reduction because you won't have to fly in members of your team on more than one occasion for the same position.

Consistency/consensus: Remember the game in grammar school when they lined up 10 kids in a row? Then the teacher whispers a sentence into one child's ear and asks them to whisper it to the next and so on down the line. The teacher then asks the last child to repeat the sentence out loud. Wasn't it always different than it originally started? It's a test in human nature. We tend to hear things differently and then restate the message as perceived.

The same can happen during interviews. Three hiring authorities all ask a candidate the same question and sometimes perceive three different responses. **This is perhaps the greatest benefit of roundtable interviews.** It eliminates any confusion because everyone hears the same answer at the same time. It really gets everyone on the same page. In addition, it provides a great forum for follow-up questions.

While roundtable interviews might be the best means for evaluating talent for employers, it often results in a nervous night's sleep for even the steadiest candidates. Regular interviews alone can be exercises in overcoming stressful situations. However, sitting around a table with 4-6 executives can be downright scary. The thought alone can paralyze someone with fear. Here are some tips on how to ace your next roundtable interview.

Arrive early: I know it's 101 info, but this is why it is so important. Getting there a little early gives you time to use the restroom, calm down and adjust to the surroundings. It's like athletes warming up before a big game. The reason they stay calm in front of 50,000 people is because they spend time beforehand in the environment and adjust to it; the same principal applies here.

Water: Don't be afraid to bring a small bottle with you in case they don't offer it. If you are going to be on the hot seat for two hours, you will need it. Being fully hydrated has been proven to keep the mind at its sharpest.

Answering questions: Candidates tend to try to please an entire room when answering questions. They try to make eye contact with everyone. I find this can be distracting for candidates and cause them to lose their focus or thought. Instead, try looking directly at the person who asked you the question when answering. If everyone at the table is going to ask at least one question, you will have given each of them sufficient attention and "face time" before the meeting is over.

Employers should embrace the roundtable interview, and candidates can survive them. I hope it leads to better hires and jobs for everyone. Do you have a hiring technique or interviewing trick you want to share? I'd appreciate your thoughts on the topic. Feel free to share them with me at vincent@ed-exec.com.

EXECUTIVE SEARCH

Vincent Scaramuzzo is the President of Ed-Exec Inc., one of the leading executive search firms in education. He has consistently been ranked in the top 2 percent of all recruiters worldwide by Management Recruiters International, the world's largest executive search firm. Vincent is also

a contributing writer to Career College Central's magazine and website. As a specialist in the education field, Scaramuzzo works nationally with universities, colleges, and online and career schools. He can be contacted at vincent@ed-exec.com or 860.781.7641.