The only 3 true job interview questions are:

1. Can you do the job?
2. Will you love the job?
3. Can we tolerate working with you?

CAN YOU DO THE JOB (STRENGTHS)?

Executive Search firm Heidrick & Struggles CEO, Kevin Kelly explained to me that it's not just about the technical skills, but also about leadership and interpersonal strengths. Technical skills help you climb the ladder. As you get there, managing up, down and across become more important.

You can't tell by looking at a piece of paper what some of the strengths and weaknesses really are…We ask for specific examples of not only what's been successful but what they've done that hasn't gone well or a task they they've, quite frankly, failed at and how they learned from that experience and what they'd do different in a new scenario.

Not only is it important to look at the technical skill set they have…but also the strengths on what I call the EQ side of the equation in terms of getting along and dealing or interacting with people.

Interviewing for strengths is not a game. It's about figuring out if there is a match between the strengths required for success in the role and the candidate's strengths. If you accept that, then the advice for interviewers and interviewees are mirror images of each other.

Advice for Interviewers

Figure out what strengths you're looking for. Tell the interviewee what they are. Ask the interviewee for examples of behavior that evidences those strengths. (Using the Working Girl question to probe.)

Advice for Interviewees

Figure out what strengths the interviewer is looking for. Give him or her examples of behavior that evidences those strengths.

Strengths Definition

Gallup's Marcus Buckingham and Don Clifton provide an excellent definition of strengths in *Now Discover Your Strengths* (New York: Free Press, 2001).

Talent: Innate areas of potential strength (probably present at birth)

Knowledge: Things people are aware of, facts and lessons learned (through courses, mentors, reading, etc.)

John Clutten *BSc Civil Engineering (UCT), MBA (Wits)* | Cape Town | South Africa
www.johnclutten.com | +27 83 324 2421 | john@johnclutten.com | Skype johnclutten | LinkedIn http://za.linkedin.com/in/johnclutten/

Member of *NPA, The Worldwide Recruiting Network, your connection to premier independent recruiting firms located on 6 continents.*

Skills: How to-s, or steps of an activity (generally acquired through deliberate practice)

With that in mind, as an interviewer, make sure you understand the driving talent behind an individual's strength, how they acquired their knowledge of the subject and what they've done to practice the skill. Then you can be sure you've identified a real strength.

WILL YOU LOVE THE JOB (MOTIVATION)

Cornerstone International Group CEO, Bill Guy emphasizes the changing nature of motivation,

…younger employees do not wish to get paid merely for working hard—just the reverse: they will work hard because they enjoy their environment and the challenges associated with their work…. Executiveswho embrace this new management style are attracting and retaining better employees.

Advice for Interviewers

Heidrick & Struggles' Kevin Kelly had some helpful perspective on this. He told me that he likes to ask two questions to get at motivation:

1) "*What gets you out of bed in the morning (other than your alarm clock)?*" This helps him get at what's important to people now.

2) *"Talk about some of the most significant memories you have had throughout your career and what it is that got you through those times either good or bad."* This helps him get at patterns and trends.

Advice for Interviewees

Figure out what makes you happy. Then look to find and explain matches between the role and organization and those things.

CAN WE TOLERATE WORKING WITH YOU (FIT)

Continuing on with our conversation, Heidrick's Kelly went on to explain the importance of cultural fit:

A lot of it is cultural fit and whether they are going to fit well into the organization… The perception is that when (senior leaders) come into the firm, a totally new environment, they know everything. And they could do little things such as send emails in a voicemail culture that tend to negatively snowball over time. Feedback or onboarding is critical. If you don't get that feedback, you will get turnover later on.

He made the same point earlier in an interview with Smart Business, referencing Heidrick's internal study of 20,000 searches. *40 percent of senior executives leave organizations or are fired or pushed out within 18 months. It's not because they're dumb; it's because a lot of times culturally they may not fit in with the organization or it's not clearly articulated to them as they joined.*

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