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Too many hiring managers avoid telling candidates the truth about a job. Their logic is that if applicants find out how hard they will work or how boring the core of the open jobs are, they will walk away. This is a mistake. To hire effectively, you have to be honest about what working at your firm is like and what it takes to be successful.

The interview process should be about finding a genuine fit. If a candidate doesn't think they match up with your company or the role, they are probably right. Having them decline the role will save you from wasting substantial time and resources on onboarding, training, and starting to rely on a bad hire, who will probably leave prematurely anyway. The real costs of a hiring mistake are surprisingly significant.

Therefore, we counsel firms to design a process and train employees in letting job applicants interview them as much as they interview the applicants. In line with Bridgewater Associates founder Ray Dalio's advice in his book *Principles: Life and Work*, we encourage our clients to "Show candidates your warts."

The truth is you have no choice. In past decades, recruiting was easier. Investment banks, consulting firms, and other companies could come to college campuses to host events, in which they presented well-orchestrated pitches and painted their firms in the best possible light. Student questions could be met with the canned responses. And before any potential candidates were able to probe any further, the company representatives were gone. Finding out more would have required hours of outreach to company employees and alumni, so most students simply accepted employers' self-portrayed images as close enough to the truth.

Today, organizations trying to apply such tactics will have a rude awakening. In the era of Glassdoor and LinkedIn, savvy candidates will research the good, bad, and ugly about your company before interviewing. If you distort the truth by trying to project a purely positive image, they will know it.

Smart organizations instead use the interview to show that they can be transparent and that they expect the same candor from employees. This is an opportunity to set the tone for the relationship, so you want to model the right behavior. Do be positive. You can, for example, talk about why your happiest employees love working for you. But also be frank about the realities of your workplace and the job. Explain what some candidates may find tough, what motivates people to thrive in the role despite perceived downsides, and the key elements of your corporate culture, which could be a positive for some but not right for everyone.

We recommend that hiring managers spend a good deal of their time asking questions designed to help candidates lower their guards and truly understand if they will be happy in the roles to which they are applying. For instance, a recruiter might say one of the following:

- We have asked you several questions to make sure you will be a good fit for us. I'd now like to make sure that we will be a good fit for you. I'm sure it's important for you to be happy in your next job, so the more open you are with me, the more helpful I can be to you.
- Let's fast-forward two months, would you be happy with [some demanding aspect of the job]?
- You told another interviewer you were okay with traveling 80% of the time. Are you sure that won't become too much?

[Research shows](#) that asking direct and blunt questions is the best way to elicit honest answers. Unfortunately, many of us instead tend to try to read between the lines of interview conversations and come to our own conclusions about a candidate's preferences. For example, the CEO of a billion-dollar company with whom we worked would ask candidates, "What is your long-term career goal?" If they did not respond with one specific idea or could not clearly articulate it, he would take it as a sign that they were not ambitious enough and probably not willing to work long hours. He almost certainly would have received better outcomes by simply asking people if they were happy to come early and stay late in pursuit of success. Another hiring manager we know used to avoid asking sales rep candidates if they were fine with high-volume calling. He simply assumed that those who had past experience with that approach would be amenable to doing it again for his firm and vice versa. When we proposed to him that he ask candidates about this issue, he chuckled and responded, "Of course they will say they are OK with those volumes. They want the job."

But, in our experience, most people at more senior levels will not misrepresent themselves just to get offers. Hiring managers thus overestimate the risk of being lied to, while underestimating the risk of people genuinely not understanding whether or not they are suited to certain roles and organizations. If you still have trouble believing that, you might find a simple comparison helpful: Do you think that some 40% of U.S. marriages end up in divorce because brides and grooms intentionally lie to each other? Or is it that most don't ask themselves enough tough questions about whether they are good long-term fits as spouses?

Vincent Szwajkowski, a Boston Consulting Group alum and currently the chief marketing officer of ArcLight Cinemas, goes so far as to ask top candidates if they would like to conduct reverse reference checks on him. If they accept, he introduces them to two of his past direct reports — typically including one person who didn't work out — and encourages them to ask any and all questions they have. "Don't get me wrong," Szwajkowski told us, "I don't want to lose a great candidate, but I'd really hate to have to re-fill this position in six months because the candidate didn't like working for me."

At the same time, there are also steps you can take to help ensure candidates are honest with you. First, make sure to approach all interactions with a dose of humility; [studies](#) have found that people are very poor lie detectors. Understand that you cannot read minds and might have to work to get at the full truth. Second, let them know that you intend to pursue references. This will scare away the bald-faced liars. (One point of caution is that candidates may perceive this to be intrusive, become less likely to accept a potential offer from you and also leave a negative review on GlassDoor.com. The tone, wording, personal maturity, and natural charm of the person handling the interaction matters.) Finally, ask probing follow-up questions, ideally preceded by a softening statement that encourages honesty — for example, "I want to make sure I understand you correctly, do you mean that?" or "I want to be certain that we are aligned. Are you sure that you would be OK with that aspect of the role?"

Neither organizations nor employees benefit when the wrong people are hired. Organizations should take the lead in promoting more truth in the hiring process.

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