**How To Interview For Character**

In our last two articles, **Why You Should Consider Hiring For Character** and **The Most Important Character Traits In Church Hiring,** we looked at the importance of character in hiring church staff as well as some of the most important character traits to consider. In this article we look at how to interview for character.

My experiences and research, including more than three decades of hiring church staff, and nearly a decade of church consulting has helped me understand that the most effective form of hiring involves a relentless focus on interviewing for character. Given the choice between hiring a person with a high level of competence and a low level of character, and another with a moderate level of competence and a high level of character, I’ll chose the latter every time. Why? Because surveys and experience show that most people get hired because of their competence but get fired because of character. Typical character issues include dishonesty, moral failure, inability to get along with others, overly controlling, bullying, poor job performance, refusing to adapt to change, and failure in leading change. So, how do you interview for character? Let’s look at 5 different approaches.

**5 Approaches For Interviewing For Character**

First, it is helpful to think of character in terms of personality traits that reflect character. Have you ever considered humility, compassion, flexibility, and dependability as personality traits that reflect character? Most haven’t made that connection but these are traits vital to success in most churches. When viewed through the lens of personality traits, character is no longer an arbitrary concept. A person’s character can then be measured by observing a person’s behaviors and by getting a better understanding of how they have behaved in certain situations in the past.

So, where to begin? Start by identifying those traits that are of vital importance for success in the position you are interviewing for. You should be able to identify at least 5-10 traits that are non-negotiable to focus on in an initial interview. Other traits can be interviewed for if subsequent interviews are scheduled. 40 examples and definitions of character traits to choose from can be found in our last **post**. You may have others that aren’t listed that are unique to your church or ministry. I suggest you consider using several approaches to interviewing around these traits. Below are 5 that I have found effective.

1. **Tell me about a time.** With this approach you ask the candidate to share an example of when they exhibited the trait you have in mind. For example, if you want to determine if they are *conscientious* you might ask:
* Tell about a time you were assigned a task you dreaded. What did you do?
* Give me an example of a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to complete an assignment.

Notice that you are not using the word *conscientious* or defining the quality for them. Rather, you are asking the questions and looking for evidence to support that they are conscientious.

1. **Hypothetical scenarios:** With this approach you pose a hypothetical question around a character trait. For example, if you want to determine their *integrity* you might ask:
* *How would you respond if you discovered that you had inadvertently been spreading false information about a circumstance involving two of your peers? What steps would you take?*
* *How would you respond if you caught a fellow staff member in what you believed was an obvious lie?*
1. **Have someone with the gift of discernment conduct an interview.** One of the most underutilized spiritual gifts in church leadership is that of *discernment*. Those with the gift of *discernment* have a sixth sense about character. They can discern a lack of character through conversational cues the rest of us miss. In my experience, having people with the gift of *discernment* serve on Personnel and Search Committees and involving them in the interview process is a critical component to hiring for character.
2. **Self-evaluation:** Provide the candidate a list of character traits and definitions like those in our last **post**, and ask them to evaluate themselves on how much they reflect that value. Use a scale of 1-10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest. Or, use a simple four-point system: 1- Marginal, 2- Competent, 3- Above Average, 4- Excellent.
3. **Reference Checks:** Using the same approach, ask references to rate the candidate’s character traits. Compare how the candidate responds to how their references respond. Beware if there is a dissonance.

A sixth source for interviewing for character is that of resume checking. In our next article we will examine how to thoroughly check a candidates resume.

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