



PROFESSIONALS

Over the past 30+ years as a recruiter, I can confirm that at least two-thirds of my hiring manager clients weren't very good at interviewing. Yet, over 90% thought they were. To overcome this situation, it was critical that I became a better interviewer than them, to prove with evidence that the candidate was competent and motivated to do the work required. This led me on a quest for the single best interview question that would allow me to overcome any incorrect assessment with actual evidence.

It took about 10 years of trial and error. Then I finally hit upon one question that did it all.

Here's it is:

What single project or task would you consider the most significant accomplishment in your career so far?

To see why this simple question is so powerful, imagine you're the candidate and I've just asked you this question. What accomplishment would you select? Then imagine over the course of the next 15-20 minutes I dug deeper and asked you about the following. How would you respond?

- Can you give me a detailed overview of the accomplishment?
- Tell me about the company, your title, your position, your role, and the team involved.
- What were the actual results achieved?
- When did it take place and how long did the project take.
- Why you were chosen?
- What were the 3-4 biggest challenges you faced and how did you deal with them?
- Where did you go the extra mile or take the initiative?
- Walk me through the plan, how you managed to it, and if it was successful.
- Describe the environment and resources.
- Describe your manager's style and whether you liked it or not.
- Describe the technical skills needed to accomplish the objective and how they were used.
- Some of the biggest mistakes you made.
- Aspects of the project you truly enjoyed.
- Aspects you didn't especially care about and how you handled them.
- How you managed and influenced others, with lots of examples.
- How you were managed, coached, and influenced by others, with lots of examples.
- How you changed and grew as a person.
- What you would do differently if you could do it again.
- What type of formal recognition did you receive?

If the accomplishment was comparable to a real job requirement, and if the answer was detailed enough to take 15-20 minutes to complete, consider how much an interviewer would know about your ability to handle the job. The insight gained from this type of question would be remarkable. But the real issue is not the question, this is just a setup. The details underlying the accomplishment are what's most important. This is what real interviewing is about – getting into the details and comparing what the candidate has accomplished in comparison to what needs to be accomplished. Don't waste time asking a lot of clever questions during the interview, or box checking their skills and experiences: spend time learning to get the answer to just this one question.

As you'll discover you'll then have all of the information to prove to other interviewers that their assessments were biased, superficial, emotional, too technical, intuitive or based on whether they liked the candidate or not. Getting the answer to this one question is all it takes.

Lou Adler is the Amazon best-selling author of [Hire With Your Head](#) (Wiley, 2007) and the award-winning Nightingale-Conant audio program, Talent Rules! His new book, [The Essential Guide for Hiring and Getting Hired](#), will be published in January 2013.

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