



HIRE SMART AND KEEP 'EM

How to
Interview
Strategically
Using POINT

Joan C. Curtis
Foreword by Patsy Hammett

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I am not afraid of storms, for I am learning how to sail my ship.

—Louisa May Alcott

I dedicate this book to my amazing mom, who taught me the value of learning and who continues to live as if each day were a new ship to sail.

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Foreword

How to recruit and retain the best talent is on the mind of human resource executives every day because it is on the mind of their organizations' chief leaders. In today's world, there really is a war for talent. Top talent wants to work for top organizations. Top organizations must brand themselves as employers of choice. In the end, company executives must attract, select, and hire the best and the brightest for their organizations. This is what makes a top organization. Jim Collins made this clear in his bestselling book, *Good to Great*. He wrote that great companies get the right people on the bus.

Having led the recruiting process for a global manufacturing company for almost 18 years, I can say firsthand that recruiting top talent today is more difficult and challenging than ever. Technology has changed the playing field in terms of how we source candidates, communicate with candidates, and even interview candidates. With the impact of technology, we now have more reason than ever to be focused on the "high touch" of recruiting. Connecting with candidates before, during, and after interviews is a critical part of the formula for hiring the best and the brightest.

If you want to be successful in hiring top talent, Joan's book *Hire Smart and Keep 'Em: How to Interview Strategically Using POINT* will help you. I know because not only have I learned and used her strategic interviewing approach and her POINT system, but I have also made this training available to hundreds of recruiters at the company for which I work.

Joan understands how to create a successful and effective interview process that includes keeping the interview legal. This is a must in today's world. Companies strive to conduct business in an ethical manner. Without this knowledge, managers stand to put themselves and their organizations in

jeopardy. In today's competitive environment, companies cannot afford to have a negative brand resulting from illegal questions during an interview.

Beyond this basic, managers need to understand that effective interviewing is not an innate skill, as too many individuals believe. As this book demonstrates, effective interviewing involves multiple, complex skills that work together to get you the right hire. Joan's POINT system addresses the key essentials—from the job description, to planning and preparing for the interview, to creating the right behavior-based questions specifically targeted to the individual, to creating an open environment for a successful interview, and finally to fine-tuning highly focused listening skills. The following pages also provide you with the exceptionally valuable ability to assess yourself as an interviewer. With this unique component, you can continue to improve as an interviewer.

Effective interviewers whose knowledge, skills, and performance bring top talent to their organization are tremendously valued and respected. This book will teach you how to become one of those valued and respected people.

Patsy Hammett
Corporate Recruiting Manager, Milliken & Company
www.milliken.com

Introduction

Managers get things done through others. Can you accomplish that task without hiring smart? Martin Yate in *Hiring the Best* says, “No one knows how many managers have stalled their careers through an inability to make the right hires.”¹ Yet throughout my career as an instructor, coach, and consultant, I hear managers say, “Interviewing is not really my job. I’m an engineer (or I’m an accountant or I’m a whatever).” Too often managers rely on human resource personnel to conduct the interviews. When they see candidates, they think they can get away with just “visiting.” This is one reason companies waste billions of dollars on hiring mistakes. Hiring goes beyond human resource managers. They can screen candidates for you, but the actual selection falls on the manager. If you consider interviewing as a secondary part of your job, you are in grave trouble. Mornell, in his book *Hiring Smart: How to Predict Winners and Losers*, suggests that the cost of hiring mistakes is at a minimum one-and-one-half times the person’s annual salary.² He says *at a minimum* because he presumes the mistake will be rectified in six months. If it is not, the costs escalate.

As a manager, you can’t afford to make mistakes if you want to hire smart and keep those people you eventually chose.

WHY READ THIS BOOK

Imagine this scenario: You spend time writing a job description. You pull together a team of people to help you isolate job competencies. Then you pour money into placing the job listing in appropriate trade journals. You visit sites where candidates work or study. You might even hire a headhunter to

help you find the best people to interview. Once you find a pool of people, you screen through the hundreds of résumés and applications that come across your desk. In this tight job market, you can expect five times more applications than you received just a few years ago. You devote hours to culling out the best people to talk to. That accomplished, you assign a team of people to talk to the final two to four candidates. You put up money to fly in the candidates and house them in a nearby hotel. You and others take them to dinner the night before the interview. The next day is devoted to interviewing—you and several of your staff spend time talking to the candidate, taking her on tours, listening to her presentation. The day is basically shot. The same thing happens for each candidate. After completing the interviews, you and your team decide on the best candidate. Finally you make an offer.

The person arrives on the first day of work. As soon as the newbie begins, you realize you've made a huge hiring mistake. All that work has been for nothing and must begin again. This person will not suit. No wonder managers are frustrated.

Some managers decide to keep the bad employee simply because they don't want to go through the entire process again. It's too costly. They rationalize that the employee just needs a bit more time, a bit more support. The person stays, and other employees get frustrated, wondering why management hasn't gotten rid of this incompetent person. Soon your team gives up and begins to look elsewhere for work. You start to lose your best talent.

You've expended time, money, and resources. The company devoted endless capital to making sure the hiring process went well. How could everyone make such a mistake? What went wrong?

Unfortunately, what went wrong in this scenario goes wrong in offices throughout the country every day. *Managers know how to recruit, but they don't know how to interview. To hire smart, managers must do both.*

The purpose of this book, *Hire Smart and Keep 'Em: How to Strategically Interview Using POINT*, is to show managers *how to interview the right way*. When the door closes and you are sitting across from that candidate, what happens next? What skills do you need to make sure you uncover the truth behind the candidate's smile? How can you probe candidates until they tell you something they didn't intend to tell you? How can you hire someone who can do the job and not someone who simply knows how to interview?

Strategic interviewers using POINT practice the skills necessary to hire smart. This book will show you those skills. It will not provide a quick and dirty formula (as many books out there claim to do). It will illustrate the complexities of interviewing. Interviewing effectively takes skill and practice. *You cannot hope to hire smart and hire easy.* Just like with anything of value, you have to work to get it right.

Strategic interviewing is an advanced method of *listening and questioning* designed to strip away the superficial to get at the truth about a candidate's

ability to perform the key tasks needed to do a job. The POINT process is a step-by-step approach to strategic interviewing.³ I coined the term in my first book, *Strategic Interviewing: Skills and Tactics for Savvy Executives*.

What can you expect from reading this book?

1. A clear understanding of what strategic interviewing is and how other kinds of interviews, structural and laissez faire, fail in their attempts to strip away the superficial.
2. An overview of how to write job descriptions, conduct virtual interviews, and set up a professional recruiting process, including tips for recruiting in online communities.
3. Examples of how communication and listening skills play a vital role in the interview itself. A clear understanding of behavior-based interviewing and how to create questions that are based on a person's past.
4. A healthy respect for the role of trust in the interview environment, with examples of ways the interviewer can establish trust by being open and using strategic icebreakers.
5. A step-by-step description of the POINT process to help discover the value of putting the interview at the center of any recruiting operation. Skill and practice in the six intentional listening skills: probe, paraphrase, summary, reality test, flipside, and reflection.
6. Guidelines for interviewing without breaking the law.
7. Tips for team interviewing and the skills necessary for conducting interviews with a partner.
8. Practice exercises to help you appraise your own listening and communication skills in the interview environment.

HIRE SMART AND KEEP 'EM

In this book we will give you examples and exercises to show you how to conduct a strategic interview using the POINT process. When you apply the system outlined in these pages, you will increase your chances of hiring smart and making sure those people you hire stay. The key is to take the mystery out of interviewing. We will open the interview up and reveal its underbelly. You will see the things that work and the things that don't work. You'll experience through real interview examples what goes on behind that closed door.

At the end of 10 chapters, you'll find exercises, cases, or assessments. If you work through these exercises, you will sharpen your ability to hire smart.

Remember, to hire smart, you must hire strategically. Each candidate brings to the table different knowledge, skills, and experiences. If you ask

the same questions of every person, you are not interviewing strategically. I've heard managers say, "I ask the same question to every candidate to see how their responses vary." What's the point of that? How can seeing varied responses strip away the superficial to get at the real person? Your goal is not to trick candidates but *to create a safe environment that encourages them to tell you something they had not intended to say*. In the planning phase of POINT the individualized, strategic interview plan takes shape. Managers identify target competencies and create suitable questions to probe those points. These questions vary from one candidate to the next.

One skill you will learn in POINT is how to dig deeper by piggy-backing questions. Rather than taking the interview in a totally different direction, you will learn the importance of piggy-backing to learn more and more. During my workshops I've watched countless interviews where each question the interviewer asks has nothing to do with the candidate's response. One time I stopped an interview right after the candidate spoke and asked the interviewer, "What did the candidate just say?" That interviewer didn't have a clue. No wonder we make hiring mistakes.

THE POINT PROCESS

The POINT process is a step-by-step approach to strategic interviewing. POINT takes the interview from the beginning to the end, with the heart of the process being the middle: *the actual interview*.

The *P* in POINT stands for *Plan*. It represents everything from the recruitment of appropriate candidates to the planning before the actual interview itself. Planning includes résumé screening, writing job descriptions, isolating competencies, and checking references. It also includes organizing the actual day of interviews. Planning means identifying what you will ask each candidate. Once you isolate your competencies, you compare those with the résumé. If, for example, you have a candidate that clearly demonstrates a competency you are searching for, there's no need to spend time probing that area further. This doesn't mean you believe everything on the résumé. You check it out, but not with the same intensity.

The *O* in POINT stands for *Open*. You cannot hope to strip away the superficial unless you create trust. The strategic interview uses intentional listening as a way to build trust and a sense of openness. Think about your own situations in which you've experienced trust. Were you across the desk, facing a potential employer? Probably not. The challenge of the interviewer is to turn the interview into a place of trust. This is the hardest job of the interview. Openness also means interviewing deeper than the superficial. *To strategically interview, you probe the entire person—not simply that person's work persona*. How would you like to hire a mass murderer who happens to be

INTENTIONAL LISTENING SKILLS DEFINED

Probe	An open question that seeks to find out more information about something.
Paraphrase	A statement that rephrases in your words what the person just said it; has an understood question mark at the end.
Flipside	A probe that forces the person to share an opposite side.
Reality Test	A series of probes and paraphrases designed to test the reality of what was said.
Summary	A series of paraphrases that summarize what was said.
Reflection	A statement that requires you to reflect (as in a mirror) the feelings you hear behind the words being expressed.

great at information technology? Most managers dwell on specific skills and abilities and forget about interests and hobbies. When you look beyond the superficial, you must dig deeper. In this book you'll learn why openness is important and how to create an interview environment that fosters trust.

The *IN* in POINT stands for *intentional listening*. Listening with intent is the heart of the POINT process and strategic interviewing. Notice what this means. You not only listen with your full antenna alert, but you also listen for the competencies you have identified in the planning phase. You might ask a question about leadership, and the candidate tells you about a conflict situation. Conflict management might be one of your competencies. Your attention rises, and you probe conflict as well as leadership. *Intentional listening requires you to be on full alert throughout the interview*. You cannot allow your senses to relax. It requires the highest form of communication and listening.

The intentional listening skills that we will address in this book are the probe, paraphrase, summary, reality test, flipside, and reflection.

The *T* in POINT stands for *Test*. Once the interview is over, it's time to test its effectiveness. Many books talk about how to evaluate the candidate and how to test the recruiting process. These two components play a significant role in the interview testing process. Few books, however, talk about how to test the interview itself.

Imagine a scenario where you attract a candidate with excellent credentials, incredible communications skills, and the highest references from previous

work experiences. On the surface, he looks like a perfect fit for your job. You take the candidate through a very professional recruiting system. Unfortunately, your interviewers do not dig or strip away the superficial. They talk about themselves. Each one asks the same or similar questions. At the end of the day you offer the candidate the job—after all, the person had great communication skills and wonderful references—even though you learned little more from the interviews than you knew from the résumé and references. The candidate comes to work. Once he arrives, the candidate realizes this job is not a good fit. He leaves within three months of the hire. Oops. Did you hire smart?

Testing the interview and its effectiveness is as important as testing the recruiting process and the candidate. This third prong will cause the best system to collapse if it is ignored.

Chapters 1 and 2 will define strategic interviewing and introduce the POINT process. You will understand the basic communication skills and the power of the nonverbal message. You'll read about all aspects of the preinterview, including the recruitment process. You will learn the components of a good job description and how to establish clear competencies. These chapters will also address recruiting in the virtual world, including telephone interviews and appropriate use of tools like Skype, Google Talk, or other technology for recruitment and preliminary screening, as well as the power of LinkedIn as a recruiting tool.

Chapters 3 and 4 will define behavior-based interviews and team interviews. You'll see how a behavior-based focus enables the interviewer to strip away the superficial. Rather than spend time talking about a person's projection of what she can do in the future, you will learn how to talk about what she's actually done in the past. Chapter 4 will introduce team interviews and give you tips for interviewing with a partner. The skills you need for team interviewing require even more strategic planning than a one-on-one interview. You'll see how to diminish the power of perception by interviewing in teams and how teams can increase the chances of hiring smart and keeping them.

Chapter 5 will give you a clear-cut view of all the legal issues surrounding interviews. You'll learn what not to ask. You'll also learn why interviews have become so legally sensitive and how the POINT process works to keep your interview legal.

Chapter 6 will look at opening the interview. You'll learn why trust and openness are important to strip away the superficial. You'll get a clear idea of how to balance questions related to work and outside interests. You will experience the power of the Johari window and see how trust and respect affect the interview while you learn how to create strategic icebreakers.

Chapter 7 through 9 will look at intentional listening in the POINT process. You'll understand how important it is to listen with intent and the skills

needed to do so. You'll have an opportunity to practice each of the skills and see them in action. You'll see which intentional listening skills play the strongest role in interviews and which are less prominent. Timing and balance are essential to effective use of intentional listening. You'll become a skilled listener who pays attention when someone lets slip something he didn't intend to say.

Chapter 10 will examine the testing part of POINT. You'll learn how to evaluate yourself as an interviewer. Did you ask too many closed questions? Did you piggy-back your questions? Were your questions legal? Did you uncover something that you did not expect? In this section you'll have an opportunity to evaluate other interviews for effectiveness using guides for testing the strategic interviewer and the strategic interviewing process.

Chapter 11 will examine sticky situations in interviews. Not all candidates are professional. Not all candidates play by the rules. What do you do when you encounter someone who tries to force your hand on something that may be legally sensitive? How do you deal with a candidate who openly flirts with you or asks you to do something that may be unethical? You'll learn how to stay professional when faced with these sorts of situations.

Chapter 12 will explore retention. Even though using the POINT process will increase the likelihood that you will keep the people you hire, there are other issues you need to consider. In Chapter 12 we'll look at those issues to enable you to not only hire smart but also to retain those people you do hire.

Finally, after you finish reading *Hire Smart and Keep 'Em*, you will be in an ideal position to conduct your first strategic interview. This book will prepare you to tackle the challenge of hiring smart every time. It will give you what you need to diminish hiring mistakes. It will equip you with the skills to hire the right people on your team and thereby enable you to get the job done. Basically, it will take the mystery out of interviewing and tell you *how to do it*.

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ONE

What Do You Know about Interviewing?

What does it take to pick the right person for the right job? What prompts you to make that all-important selection? The psychology of the interview process has mystified managers for generations. They've spent countless hours searching for clear-cut guidelines to help guide them through the murky waters.

To understand the complexity of interviewing, we must start at the beginning and look at a bit of history. Some managers see interviewing as an intuitive process that cannot be learned. "The biggest blind spot hiring managers have in our recruiting experience is that they believe that their 'intuition' will guide them to the correct hire. They look at a strict process as being 'cold,' time consuming, or just not worth the effort,"¹ wrote Dan Erling in *Match*. That kind of thinking has led to costly hiring mistakes and endless confusion about the interview. It's that kind of thinking that has led many managers to skip training and toss their new managers out there, saying, "Here's a candidate. Talk to him and if you like him, start him to work on Monday."

Indeed, most of us have had no training in interviewing, which, by the way, is one of the most important jobs you'll have as a manager. Lou Adler tells us in *Hire with Your Head* that when he landed his first job in a Fortune 100 company with no interview training, he was sent on a corporate recruiting trip. In other words he was a newly hired employee with no training in recruiting sent out to find people to hire for the entire company! The head of human resources gave him three minutes of interviewing advice.² You might think this example unusual, but unfortunately it represents the norm. *Your success in hiring can make or break your career*. Instead of beginning with the assumption that you know how to interview and what an interview is, let's assume you know nothing and start at the beginning.

DEFINING THE INTERVIEW

Richard Olson defined interviewing as, “A set of verbal and nonverbal interactions between two or more people focused on gathering information to decide a course of action.”³

This definition tells you that your decision—to hire or not hire—is based on “a set of verbal and nonverbal interactions.” If you are a manager, you are probably thinking, “what does that mean?” Indeed, sets of verbal and nonverbal interactions are not clear; they are vague. Imagine telling your boss you want to hire someone because you liked her set of verbal and nonverbal interactions. What response might that evoke? Clearly, then, the decision to hire someone is not based on sheer fact—whether he went to Harvard or has experience flying super jets. The decision to hire someone is based on much more, and that much more is not something you can put your finger on. *This is our first clue that interviewing is not a straightforward process lending itself to a spreadsheet and numbers. Instead, it is a challenge that must be faced with a healthy dose of respect.*

The second thing you notice in the definition is the term *interaction*. What does interaction say to you? As a manager you know that one of your biggest challenges is dealing with people. You may have lots of knowledge about the particular fields you are in, whether it’s medicine, law, or academics, but when you add people to the mix, everything turns topsy-turvy. A fantastic surgeon who demands that people respond to his every need, disregarding what is best for the patient, leaves staff frustrated, angry, and polishing up their résumés. These kinds of problems—interactions among and between people—cause more trouble than anything else you face. *Interviewing is all about interaction—interaction between the interviewer and the candidate and vice versa, as well as interaction among fellow interviewing colleagues.*

The third important component of Olson’s definition of interviewing is the insistence that you make a decision. With most other decisions in management, you can postpone your decision by spending time gathering more information or by asking others to look into the matter for you. But once you exit an interview, you must make a decision; time is of the essence. Thumbs up or thumbs down—should you hire or not? This puts tremendous pressure on the interviewer. Adler advises waiting before making a decision. He says time will help improve the selection success. Unfortunately, as most managers know, candidates don’t wait. If you are not quick to decide, the good candidates disappear. Waiting alone will not guarantee success.

The final and most important aspect of Olson’s definition is the concept of verbal and nonverbal interactions. Nonverbal interactions are sensations, not particular information you hear or see. *Putting nonverbal cues in the mix means the interview decision is not based on fact but on feeling.* How can a manager make a professional, clear-headed decision when the basis for that decision is feeling?