

Just Ask the Question!

I watched some of the confirmation hearings of Judge Samuel Alito before the Senate back in January. It did not take long before I found myself yelling at the television for the Senators to “just ask the question!” Of course that didn’t last too long because my wife was quick to point out to me that she was the only one hearing my frustrations.

If I had to grade the Senators’ interviewing skills during this hearing process, I would have given most of them an ‘F’ because 13 out of 15 of them spoke longer than the job candidate. I think their goal was to impress the public with their knowledgeable elocution rather than finding out about Judge Alito’s qualifications and beliefs.

That is the most common mistake made by interviewers--speaking more than the job candidate. Often, the candidate leaves the interview knowing a lot about the interviewer and the organization but the reverse is not true. Often the interviewer ends up rating the candidate highly when, in fact, they are judging how well they listened to the interviewer rather than having learned anything about the candidate.

As an interviewer, if your first impression is that you like the person, everything after that just reinforces the initial impression. Many times, job candidates pay a compliment to the interviewer, the office, the organization or something that distracts the interviewer and gets the whole process off track. Don’t take the bait. Politely thank them and then return to the prepared list of questions that are asked of every candidate for a particular job. If the candidate attempts to ‘hijack’ the interview by coming to it well prepared with their own list of questions, make them wait until you have gotten what you need from them and then let them ask what they wish.

Remember, a lot can be learned about a potential candidate by just letting them talk. And, the interviewer also needs to remember that there are many people who are much better at ‘selling themselves’ than they are at ‘delivering the goods’. So the interviewer needs to develop good listening skills to pick up on subtle clues provided by the candidate about how he or she truly behaves.

“Well done is better than well said.”
Ben Franklin

Best Regards,

John

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