

## Podcast Transcription

### **Failing the Interview**

Interviewer: Betsy Piasente

Thought leader: Scott Erker, Senior Vice President of Selection Solutions, DDI

Pre-recorded opening: Welcome. You're listening to the DDI Podcast series, heard around the world by people who propel their organization's talent strategies. Turn to DDI to close the gap between today's talent capability and the people you need for tomorrow's business strategy.

Betsy: Thank you for joining us. I'm Betsy Piasente your host for today's Podcast. I'm here with Scott Erker, Senior Vice President of Selection Solutions at DDI. Today we'll be taking a closer look at interviewing practices and perceptions, the focus of DDI's new study, Are You Failing the Interview?.

Scott, DDI conducted this hiring research in an economic downturn. Why do you think it's still important to explore interviewing practices? And what were you looking to find in this research?

Scott: Thanks, Betsy, and it's good to be here. You know we did ask ourselves that very question carefully but when it comes down to it, the job interview is the number one hiring tool used worldwide. And so many organizations, even if they don't use a test or even have any structured process of looking at resumes they're at least going to do an interview and that's still relevant. And so what we decided to do is that in 2008 we surveyed just over 1,900 interviewers, actually from around the world, the same thing for interviewees but in that case we had just over 3,500 people so it was quite a sizable study. And one of the things that we found was that there is not a lot of acceptance of interviews in terms of quality. Candidates were not very happy with the way the interview was going, there were a lot of bad habits in interviewing that the study uncovered. So it turned out to be very interesting.

Betsy: What surprised you most about the findings in this study?

Scott: Well I think first, as no surprise, was that interviewer's have a healthy opinion of themselves. They're very confident that they're asking the right questions and so that was not surprising. What was surprising was that the quality of the interviews are actually quite poor. And while interviewers are confident, they are

concerned in other areas. And so, for example, they feel like they don't have enough information to make a good decision. They're not sure if they're making a good impression on the candidate. Things like that. The other thing that was really surprising was that, given the importance of hiring decisions, and I think that most companies would recognize that given the talent management movement, given the importance of that decision, many interviewers take less than 30 minutes to actually make the decision to hire someone. And to me, that's appalling. That's as fast as it takes to order a pizza from down the street or pick out that next camera that you want to buy online. But the investment that companies make, of course, is more than in a pizza or a camera when they're making a hiring decision. That could be a million dollar decision and if you think about how long it takes some companies to make decisions that cost them a lot less than a million dollars, this was just crazy. And so I think that one of the things that was most surprising is just how short amount of time is actually taken when deciding to hire someone.

Betsy: So why isn't 30 minutes enough?

Scott: Well the problem with just 30 minutes is that you end up jumping to too fast of a conclusion based on very little data. When you're making a hiring decision you should be considering more than just if a person has a nice smile and a handshake. You should be looking at things like their ability to fit with the culture and values of the team, their motivational fit to the job, and of course all those technical skills and ability and so on. So I don't think you can vet a person for a job in that amount of time, there's too many things to think about related to fit and comparing one candidate to the next even. And given that a bad decision is so costly, that's concerning to me.

Betsy: It's interesting that these interviewers are so confident but they still worry about missing key information. Why do you think they're missing these important details about the candidates?

Scott: Well I do think it comes down to that over-confidence. If you ask an untrained interviewer if they're good at making hiring decisions they'll typically very quickly say yes, and when you ask them how, they'll say, well I just know, I can feel it in my gut. And so that over-confidence is overshadowing what's really a big problem. I don't think it's a lack of competence, I think it's just a lack of understanding. Once you've trained someone to ask good questions, ask good follow-up questions, and train them in what's important in the job they'll quickly get to the side of needing to take

more time and take more rigor to make the decision. And so I think this just comes down to this question of training or not. Another thing is while we have had the talent management movement in human resources, I think that's been slow to trickle in to operations, in to the real business. Now senior leaders might understand the importance of making a good decision because they're stuck with the bill when you have to hire and train someone, they see the cost of that all the time. But when you get down to the middle management ranks and the first-line supervisor ranks, they're just not aware of the importance. And so I think there's education that's needed on the part of HR professionals to put pen-to-paper around the financial and business impact of these poor decisions so that we can get those mid-manager operational folks in to training, we get them to understand the problems, and then at training we can get them to ask the right questions and give them a good process for handling the important candidate interaction.

**Betsy:** Given the economic situation, what else should organizations be concerned about during the interview process?

**Scott:** Yeah, I'm glad you asked that question because the second most surprising thing from the study was around how many illegal questions are probably being asked and there's two sides to this story that are interesting. Number one, when we asked hiring managers, interviewers, what they were concerned about, they were least concerned of anything on our list about asking anything illegal. It's just not on their mind. But then when you ask those same hiring managers to identify whether a question is illegal or not, they're terrible at it. And so there's a lot of illegal activity going on that the hiring managers just aren't aware of. They're asking things about people's health. They're asking about religious background, ethnic background, asking women if they're married or not. And I think it's, in most cases, probably asked as harmless questions, sort of a get-to-know-you question but this is where we tie in to the current economic situation. In a down economy you're going to have more job seekers than there are jobs. There are stories every day about lines going out the door in job fairs or how hundreds of applicants are applying for one or two positions. And so coupled with the fact that you've got so many candidates, I think there's a bit of desperation in those job seekers, in that candidate pool. And so you can imagine if you've gone on your tenth hiring interview and you've gotten another rejection, you're going to potentially be quite mad at that and you'll be thinking back to the types of questions that were asked, running those through your head, and if you know that certain

types of questions are illegal as a candidate, you could actually challenge these hiring practices from companies. And so I think that there's going to be an increase in grievances just by the very nature of having more candidates than jobs and by this little bit of a feeling of desperation. And, in fact, the EEOC has reported over the last two years an increase in the number of grievances that have been filed. From 2006 to 2007 there was an 8 percent increase and from 2007 to 2008 there was a 15 percent increase. So we have this pattern of accelerating grievances, a terrible economic situation right now, and more interviews going on than ever and then we have hiring managers that don't care about it and don't know that they're breaking the law. I think that this should wake some people up.

**Betsy:** We've spent some time talking about the organization's perspectives, but what's happening on the other side of the desk?

**Scott:** Well even though there is a large pool of candidates, you still need to sell the job especially to those top candidates or passive candidates. You also see a lot right now out in the recruiting press about now is the best time to make an investment, just like you would be looking for stock that was undervalued, well looking for talent that's undervalued works in this space. And so you have to have the ability to sell your job and opportunity to those candidates and especially the passive candidates that I mentioned because turnover is very low right now, it's been reported as low as 1.6 percent by Society of Human Resource Management. And so it's hard to get people that are currently employed away from their jobs because they're afraid of that last in, first out rule that is sometimes applied in reduction in forces. So all of that work that we were doing through 2007 and in to mid-year 2008 on enhancing the candidate experience, getting our employment brand out there in front of candidates so they would choose our jobs versus our competitors, that's continuing. And so that's my first point from the candidate perspective.

The second is that if you look at the job seeker turn-offs, you know we did ask all those job seekers what they don't like about applying to jobs and what they don't like about the interaction with hiring managers, and they gave us an interesting list. Number one turn off for job seekers was that they feel like the interview was more like an interrogation. They would prefer a two-way interaction. Number two that it just takes too long for the organization to get back to me. And number three, the company's are not upfront about the details of the job. And so there are things in there that I think that we could learn from and we educate

hiring managers to conduct a professional interaction where it's a two-way conversation, to properly give information about the job and the company, I think that will serve companies well as they're trying to get those top people to take those jobs.

- Betsy: The study also explores the use of social media in the hiring process and it seems like we're discovering new social media applications every day. How is this impacting hiring?
- Scott: This is one of the hottest topics right now in the area of recruitment. And the story about social media goes two ways. From the company's perspective the question is: How we do use social media to provide information to the hiring process that might tell us about those candidates that are applying? From the candidate perspective, they're digging up dirt on companies that they would have never had access to before and so they're asking tougher questions in the interview. And we've got to be prepared for those and so I think there's a bit of advice that I would have for companies. First of all, on the side about using social media sites to check up on candidates. That's some uncharted territory. What we've found is that especially younger recruiters, they like to Google the candidate's name and then check out those candidates Face book pages, MySpace pages, other things that might be out there about the candidate. And the problem is that there's no structure to that. Candidates are not expecting to be reviewed in that way. They use those social media sites for just that, for social interaction, and the problem for companies is that if they discover things about candidates that are protected information like that a person might have a disability or be of a certain ethnic background you can't use that in the hiring process. So once you know it, how are you going to turn your brain off and not pay attention to that information? So I think there's more to come on that but I think companies need to be really careful about how they're applying those Google searches as part of their background check.

From the candidate side, this is an interesting one. As we've seen the explosion of the Internet and even blogs, the worse case is when you have ex-employees or imagine if you have employees that have been rift, they've lost their job, they're going to be putting things out about your company that you can't control. This recently happened to Google where some people are starting to perceive the company as big and bureaucratic and not having all the wonderful perks that it had when it was a small, exciting, kind of growing place. And so people were out saying bad things about Google and so the advice here is to take action on knowing what's

out there. And what Google did is they had a gentleman actually start to monitor those sites and provide a response and he was doing it just because he loved the company so much. I think that organizations need to know what candidates and ex-employees are saying about them and then get something in to the hands of hiring managers so that you can prepare them for those tough questions.

**Betsy:** Thanks for joining me today, Scott. If you'd like to learn more about today's topic you can download a copy of [Are You Failing the Interview?](#) at [ddiworld.com](http://ddiworld.com).

**Pre-recorded close:** You've been listening to the latest edition of the DDI Podcast series. Talk to DDI to close the gap between today's talent capability and the people you need for tomorrow's business strategy. Contact us at [ddiworld.com](http://ddiworld.com).