

# TOM PETERS On Achieving Excellence

## Pop Quiz: Do Your Employment Interviews Do the Job?

Many astute organizations involve their front-line teams in the critically important hiring process. But all too often, front-line workers — and human resource professionals — miss the boat when interviewing job candidates. They usually ask hypothetical or theoretical questions ("What would you do if...? What are your five-year goals?") that shed little light on the candidate's potential for energetic contribution.

Instead, suggests consultant Craig Pratt, you should ask about innovative, entrepreneurial, team experiences in their past jobs; these are the best indicators of future innovation, entrepreneurship and teamwork.

To up the odds of finding the right person for the job, says Pratt, pay attention, use your gut instinct, and ask questions that provide a meaningful basis to support your instinct. The following questions will help:

1. What unproductive situations did you find when you took your last job/assignment and what did you do about them?

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2. Give me some examples of work teams that you have served on and your role on those teams.

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3. What innovative processes or systems did you design/implement in previous jobs? What were the results?

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4. Have you ever taken the initiative for a project or assignment that failed? If so, what happened and what did you learn from it?

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5. What is the most significant limitation that you have realized about your working style and what did you learn from it?

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6. Which project/assignment has given you the most satisfaction? Why?

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7. What efforts have you made to share credit for your job accomplishments with your co-workers or subordinates?

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8. What have you observed about our organization and what steps would you take to help us improve either our selection process or other areas of our operation?

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There's no "right answer" to these questions, says Pratt. But they probe key issues of initiative and openness to change. And, because they're not found in the textbooks, they're likely to elicit spontaneous, unrehearsed answers — and give the candidate an opportunity to think on his or her feet. Says Pratt: "It's amazing how many people go through an interview without even being asked what they can contribute to the organization."

*Craig Pratt is an Alameda, California, consultant who helps organizations hire, retain and train their people. In particular, he works with smaller organizations that must compete with larger, higher-paying employers to attract talent.*

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