A common phenomenon in candidate selection is a stubborn reliance by interviewers on their intuition. We would all like to believe our instincts are razor sharp and our gut reactions are in tune with reality. Interestingly, science may actually support this belief.

Research published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology found that first impressions tend to be incredibly accurate. In the study, undergraduates were shown muted thirty-second videos of instructors they hadn't met, teaching a class. The undergraduate's assessment of these instructors was found to be highly correlated (0.76) with the assessments made by a separate group of students who had taken a sixteen-week class with the instructors in person.

The phenomenon was dubbed “thin-slicing.” The idea that small windows of exposure allow for accurate assessments has been replicated in multiple studies with different demographics and controls. The discoveries in this area were the foundation for Malcolm Gladwell’s best-selling book *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*.

From an interviewing standpoint, this should be revolutionary. Everyone who has ever interviewed anyone has had an immediate first impression, usually within the first few minutes. Perhaps the gap

Over time, you will find yourself increasingly marking “I don’t know” at the start of the interview. Because if you did know, why would you waste time interviewing them? Through consistent use of this protocol, you will begin to more quickly notice your first impressions and will develop the habit of controlling them in the moment.

This is the shift you want. It allows you to cut through interference and focus on who the candidate is, not who you think they are.

Team Protocol

Once you've implemented this practice on your own, turn it into a protocol that all your interviewers can use. Include the following template as the first page in the question packet that your interviewers use for the interview.

Before beginning the interview, mark your answer to the following question. *On which side of the mid-line does your first impression of the candidate fall?*

- I think the candidate will do well.
- I’m not sure if the candidate will do well.

Now that you have logged your first impression, your job is to ignore it. Your first impression is a *single data point*—don’t allow it to impact the rest of the interview. During the remainder of the interview, *resist temptation* to justify your first impression. Only assess the candidate *on the questions* you ask them. The final result may or may not align with your first impression.
This book is about changing the way you think about interviews. It is about redefining what an interview is. It is worth asking, then, what is this tool we call an interview? A quick review of several dictionaries reveals an interesting pattern:

Merriam-Webster: n. a formal consultation usually to evaluate qualifications (as of a prospective student or employee)
Cambridge Dictionary: n. a formal meeting at which a person who is interested in getting a job or other position is asked questions to learn how well the person would be able to do it
Oxford Dictionary: v. to question (someone) to discover their opinions or experience • to orally examine (an applicant for a job, college admission, etc.)

The modern meaning of interview is tightly associated with assessing talent. As a result, these definitions provide little additional insight beyond what we already know. Let’s put those definitions aside and look to the original meaning of the word from the sixteenth century. The Middle French origin of “interview” is:
## CANDIDATE NAME

### EDUCATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME OF GRADUATE SCHOOL</th>
<th>GRADUATE DEGREE</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME OF UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOL</th>
<th>BACHELOR'S DEGREE</th>
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### EXPERIENCE

#### THIRD ORGANIZATION

**Managing Director**
- Member of the 4-person leadership team that...
- Manage a national program that...
- Oversight of an annual process that attracts 2,000...
- Manage three teams with four direct reports...

**Senior Director**
- Management of...with additional responsibility for 3 cross-organizational initiatives
- Led the creation of the organization’s first strategy for...
- Revamped the internal staff professional development plans
- Developed a formal career progression path for 400 employees

**Director**
- Managed two direct reports, consultants, and all aspects of...
- Implemented the first...More than doubled results from X to...
- Redesigned processes for...
- Created strategic partnerships to further...

#### SECOND ORGANIZATION

**Project Manager**
- Directed a team of specialists and a staff of 15 part-time employees
- Co-led expansion from 25 sites to 85 sites
- Pursued new business developments, increased the number of...
- Coordinated staff training, site preparation, and program evaluations

**Project Associate**
- Evaluated joint venture opportunities...
- Analyzed potential Fortune 500 clients...
- Wrote a comprehensive report detailing...
- Reported directly to Senior Vice President of the division...

#### FIRST ORGANIZATION

**Assistant Manager**
- Responsible for programs in 25 regions...
- Hired, trained, and supervised a staff of four to six part-time employees...
- Developed and administered...
- Researched, analyzed, and synthesized information related to...
- Consistently met the needs of over 150 clients on a weekly basis

### ADDITIONAL

- Conversational Spanish. Avid mountain biker. Familiar with Java.

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**Questions for Interview:**

- How does the role with our organization fit into your career path so far?
- You had some great accomplishments here. Tell me 2 or 3 things you were not able...
- When we do reference checks, which of the accomplishments in this organization...
- Tell me more about your role on this leadership team...
- And how about the top 3 skills you leveraged as Managing Director...
- What are the top 3 skills you leveraged as Senior Director...
- Tell me the top 3 skills you leveraged as Director...
- Why did you leave this organization? Why did you take the next role?
- You had some great accomplishments here. Tell me 2 or 3 things you were not able...
- When we do reference checks, which of the accomplishments in this organization...
- What lead to this expansion? Who worked on that with you?
- How about the top 3 skills you leveraged as Project Manager...
- Tell me the top 3 skills you leveraged as Project Associate...
- Why did you leave this organization? Why did you take the next role?
- You had some great accomplishments here. Tell me 2 or 3 things you were not able...
- When we do reference checks, which of these accomplishments will your managers be able to discuss as evidence of your skills?
- Tell me the top 3 skills you leveraged while in this role. Just share the skills, at this point I don’t need examples.
**PROVINCIAL INTERVIEW FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base Question: Think of a project you are currently managing, preferably one that involves or impacts multiple people.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In two or three sentences, what is the goal of the project?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your role?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who are the main people involved in the project? What are their names?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside of this project, how often do you interact with them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who do you know the best? Who do you know the least?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why do you know “NAME OF PERSON” the best?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why do you know “NAME OF PERSON” the least?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Interviewer picks a name the candidate mentioned.) Tell me something about “NAME” outside of their professional lives. You don’t need to share anything sensitive, but if you were describing this person outside of their work life, what defines them?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Base Question:** Think of a project you are currently managing, preferably one that involves or impacts multiple people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Interviewer picks another name and asks the same question.) Let’s do that again. Tell me something about “NAME” outside of their professional lives.</th>
<th><strong>Strong relationship building requires a personal connection and an understanding of people outside of just their work skills.</strong> Strong relationship builders connect with people as a whole, not just as coworkers.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How often do you meet with this team? Do you meet individually or as a group? Do you meet at the office or over lunch outside the office?</td>
<td><strong>There isn’t a right or wrong answer; external factors might influence this. However, strong relationship builders tend to break out of the normal flow of work to connect with others. They use lunch, coffee, off-site time to build relationships.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which of the people is most critical to the success of this project? What motivates him/her? How do you know?</td>
<td><strong>Strong relationship builders spend time (either naturally or deliberately) getting to know what drives others.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strategic Thinking

For more than thirty years the Management Research Group (MRG) has been a global provider of assessment-based human resource development systems. Their focus is the creation and application of assessment tools that combine business and science to help individuals and organizations excel and grow. MRG regularly conducts studies to gain insight on organizational practices. One such study, conducted across twenty-six industries and more than 140 countries, evaluated 60,000 managers for their leadership effectiveness.1 The managers were evaluated on twenty-two leadership competencies, included areas such as communication, results-orientation, innovation, and persuasion. Effectiveness in these competencies was measured across twenty separate characteristics such as credibility, people skills, business aptitude, and future potential.

The study found strategic thinking was up to ten times more important to effectiveness than any other competency and nearly fifty times more important than any tactical behavior. A follow-up study with ten thousand executives found that, when asked to identify behaviors most critical to the success of their organization, strategic thinking was chosen 97 percent of the time.

With those types of results, it’s no surprise that most organizations assess for strategic thinking. What is surprising is that most organizations

Sample Interview Assignment

You will discuss the following assignment with our team during your upcoming interviews next week.

One of our work streams/lines of business is “__________”

What we do well is “__________”

What we do not do well is “__________”

Our problem is “__________”

Here are some places online to learn more about this industry/our organization/how others are addressing this/etc.: __________

_________________________________________________________________

During the interview, we will spend twenty to twenty-five minutes discussing your solutions to our problem. The first five minutes will be dedicated to you asking us questions based on what you have learned so far. You can ask any question to better understand the problem, the history, the context, and so on. We will then use the remaining time to discuss your ideas for solving the problem.
Dr. Peter Salovey is a psychologist, founder of Yale’s Center for Emotional Intelligence, and President of Yale University. Dr. John D. Mayer is a noted author on the topic of emotional intelligence, psychologist, and professor at the University of New Hampshire. Thirty years ago, Mayer and Salovey pioneered research on “emotional intelligence” as well as coined the term itself. They continue to be leaders in the field and their current perspective is quite interesting: As it stands today, emotional intelligence is no longer a valid concept.

That’s putting it gently. After seeing how the topic of their research had evolved over several decades, they published an article on emotional intelligence (EI). Here are a few other ways they described its current usage:

- There is widespread misuse of the term to apply to concepts that simply are not concerned with emotion or intelligence or their intersection. . . .
- Only when researchers revert to using the term to refer to its legitimate meaning within the conceptual, scientific network can it be taken seriously. . . .

For qualities to be accurately assessed, they must be viewed by multiple people and in multiple contexts. It is rare that you will know if someone is emotionally intelligent from one interaction. There are many instances in life when we learned someone was different than we first assumed. In life, you can get to know people and correct those assumptions. With candidates you have a limited number of opportunities.

Implement a process that captures what all the other interviewers sense about the candidate throughout the entire interview process. Creating a process to capture what people sense may sound counterintuitive, but the form below is designed to do just that.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualities</th>
<th>Didn’t Notice</th>
<th>Did Notice</th>
<th>Potential Issue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Awareness</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Another quality</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Another quality</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Etc. . . .</td>
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