

*We help build great companies... one hire at a time.*

## Reference Questions that Cut Through the Noise

As someone building a business, there is very little if anything more important to your success than building the right team - which starts with hiring the right people.

Talking to references not only helps you to make a better informed hiring decision, but can also be the source of valuable insight into how to help your new team member succeed. But how do you get candid responses from references who probably don't want to say something that can be perceived as critical, or worse ruin the person's chance of getting hired?

Here are some of the questions I ask in reference interviews that seem to elicit candid responses:

- We don't expect to hire the perfect person, but if Jen was hired, we would like to be prepared to reinforce her where needed. What do you see as an area of growth for Jen? In other words, what could she change with coaching or professional development that would make her even more effective?
- If you had to isolate the single most significant contribution that Hector made to your business, what would it be?
- What type of work environment would be the wrong setting for Chris?
- If I hire James, what is the most important thing that I should know about him?
- On a scale of 1 - 10, how effective was Tanya's work? (If an 8 or less, "What would have made her rate higher?" If the score is a 9 or 10, "What most stands out to warrant this assessment?")
- Most of us perform more effectively with certain types of support in place. What type of support did Rachel need to be most effective?

My favorite reference question, borrowed from Scott Cook, co-founder of Intuit, generally comes at the end. The response to this question supersedes anything else the reference may have said about the candidate:

- On a scale of 1 - 10 how does Rohan rank compared to others you've known in a similar role? (If less than a 9 or 10, I ask what would have made him a 9 or 10. If a 9 or 10, I may also ask what made him stand out from the crowd.)

I hope that this insight contributes toward building an extraordinary team.

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