INVITING INTEGRITY TO THE INTERVIEW
“What is your personal integrity statement?”

That got your attention, didn’t it? Many say “it is too personal to discuss;” others quickly respond “it’s always doing the right thing.” My favorites are stories of a parent, teacher, coach or mentor who shaped an individual’s values and spirit.

Integrity is the character trait that invokes the unspoken boundaries of personal life and business life. It is a sensitive topic, but one deserving of candid discussion. Today’s workplace has been defined by Enron, SOX and the cry for transparency. Like never before, corporate America seeks and demands leaders with courage, sound judgment and unwavering values. We are no longer afraid to discuss it and probe for it.

According to the Institute for Ethical Business Worldwide, hiring managers rank ethics and personal integrity among the most important attributes in a candidate. However, recent research uncovered that just five percent of employers include ethics questions in their interview processes. Today, potential candidates should be scrutinized more than ever before beyond technical skills and credentials to ethics, integrity and overall values. Organizations that embrace this movement and that live their companies’ codes of ethics, train and encourage hiring managers to interview for integrity, and employ candidates whose morals and values match those of the organization are the ultimate winners.

**DEFINE INTEGRITY.**

The “Golden Rule” is gaining popular recognition in corporate America. In today’s competitive environment, many professionals are faced with this moral dilemma: driving for results regardless of the cost to others versus upholding ethical and fair business practices and losing ground. Integrity is the backbone to a code of moral values. Simply put, integrity is doing the right thing – even when no one is looking.
While integrity is universally deemed one of the most important traits in a leader, a 2007 survey by Walker Information found that only 49 percent of employees believe their senior executives are of high integrity. Companies, as well as individual executives, must make a point to develop, implement and publicize integrity and ethics programs; and then they must reward employees who live out those values. Is there a mandate for “holistic professionals” – those who practice their personal values in the workplace and don’t compartmentalize (or compromise)? Many of us say “yes.” The imaginary line that once divided private life and work life is disappearing.

POSITION YOUR COMPANY.

The candidate of integrity you seek is putting you under the microscope as well. A distinct corporate brand conveys what your company stands for to both the outside world and to internal employees. Additionally, it serves as a recruitment and retention tool. Build a corporate brand that distinguishes your organization from others by emphasizing your company’s character, strengths and personality. Your corporate brand should also influence the decisions, attitudes and actions of employees. Integrate corporate citizenship, community and industry leadership, board member positions, and volunteer opportunities into this message. Remember that each member of your team is the face of integrity and your most powerful brand builder.

Woven into your brand is your company’s corporate culture.

Woven into your brand is your company’s corporate culture. There are multiple layers to corporate culture; some are visible and others are invisibly coded on a company’s DNA. Visible examples of corporate culture include dress code, benefits, job titles, work environment, a Corporate Integrity Officer post, a published integrity statement and consequences for those who lapse in ethical behavior. Living examples of corporate culture include the values, beliefs, standards and attitudes displayed in the elevator, the cafeteria and the conference room where respect, concern and humanness are the norm.

INTERVIEW FOR INTEGRITY.

Several talented candidates might interview for one coveted position within the same week. How do you determine who is best for your company? Qualifications and skill sets aside, a successful professional should hold personal values that are in sync with your company’s values.
At the interview table, it is the interviewer’s responsibility to distinguish which candidates are authentic and which merely recite the “right” answers.

Several interview techniques exist to assist interviewers in accurately and thoughtfully evaluating a candidate. The Integrity Check Interview is an interview strategy that asks questions related to what a candidate did in a particular situation, why he or she did it, and how he or she felt about doing it. Developed by UCLA psychiatrist Mark Goulston, this method is based on the premise that real concentration is required to tell a good lie. Most people cannot keep their stories straight if they have to deal with questions directed to three distinct parts of their brains: action, thought and feeling.

Another effective style of interviewing for integrity is the behavioral interview. Behavioral interview questions are designed to uncover past behaviors in order to predict future behaviors. These should reveal personal core values: what drives the candidate, what his or her current relationships are like, what is important to him or her, and what his or her expectations are of an employer and of him/herself. “Tell me about a time you made a mistake” or “describe a time you disagreed with your CEO” should reveal a candidate’s self-awareness, emotional intelligence and moral fiber.

**SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TARGETING INTEGRITY**

Describe a time when you disagreed with your boss or someone at a more senior level than you.

Describe a time when you had to confront someone else’s unethical behavior.

Tell me about a tough decision you had to make and what made it difficult.

**LOOK BEYOND WORDS.**

Actions can speak volumes at the interview table. In fact, body language is 65 percent of all communication. Train and encourage your hiring managers to pin down clues that a candidate may be dishonest or uncomfortable. Candidates should maintain eye contact and a relaxed, yet appropriate posture. Be aware of any nervous habits, as well as variations in tone of voice. Ask follow-up questions to their answers, seeking details and probing for examples; and listen for dishonest qualifiers such as “to be honest.” Additionally, advise the hiring manager to trust his/her intuition (it is usually a good judge of character), but to utilize a second opinion in crucial circumstances.

No matter where you sit in an interview, remember that interviewing is a dynamic two-way street. Beyond the formality and significance of the interview, you are engaged in a personal dialogue and are building a relationship. Give real world perspective. An emphasis on personal connection is key; this is the “right fit” we all
desperately seek. Discuss your organization’s code of ethics, as well as your personal code of ethics, and how ethics are demonstrated both inside the company and out in the marketplace. Inviting integrity to the interview table will allow your organization to create successful matches and mutually-beneficial partnerships.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Margaret Resce Milkint is Managing Partner of The Jacobson Group and handles executive management and actuarial searches on a national and international basis for the organization’s retained search division. Milkint’s expertise on career and recruiting issues is widely recognized throughout the industry. She was most recently called upon to share her perspectives with The Actuary, Best’s Review, Claims, Insurance & Technology, TechDecisions, and Diversity/Careers. She is based out of the firm’s National Headquarters in Chicago and can be reached at mmilkint@jacobsononline.com or +1 (800) 466-1578.
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For more information, please contact:
The Jacobson Group
+1 (800) 466-1578
www.jacobsononline.com