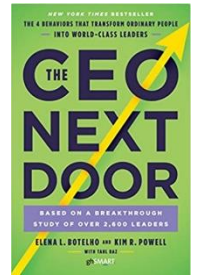


Access Insights Interviews: Finding Top Talent Through Behavior-Based Interviewing

Q&A with Kim Powell



Kim Powell is a researcher, writer and consultant with gHSmart, a leadership advisory firm specializing in private equity and corporate clients. She is one of the leading authorities on the topic of C-level leadership and she recently co-authored *The CEO Next Door*, a *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* bestseller.



In our second Access Insight, Partner Steve Chang sat down with Kim Powell to discuss best practices in hiring and finding top talent.

Steve: In your book entitled “The CEO Next Door”, you identify that successful CEOs are decisive, reliable, engaged and adaptive. How do you screen and recruit for this?

Kim: I’ve found that the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior so I screen heavily on what the individual has done in the past and in what context. I narrow in on what they achieved, results they produced and mistakes they made and evaluate against the expectations for a given role. It’s important to know exactly what you are hiring for. There should be some measurable outcomes and clear metrics that define success for a given role. As you gather behavioral examples, make sure you are digging into actual results and get numbers. Look for the relevant magnitude of results and the pace or rate of achievement.

I’ve also learned that there are a few common traps to avoid when evaluating talent including relying too heavily on likability, prosecuting on hypotheticals and spreading your candidate too thin across too many interviewers. You shouldn’t simply trust your gut when it says yes. Likability is NOT correlated with future performance but sometimes leads to a candidate getting hired.

Key Takeaways:

- Know what you’re hiring for
- Don’t fall victim to likability
- Go deep on results

Steve: What are some example questions that can be used to determine if an executive exhibits these behaviors?

Kim: I have a couple of ways to determine if a candidate has these behaviors. First, I take one or two roles from the candidate’s past experience that are similar to the context and role we are hiring for and I go deep into discovery using what/how/when/who questions like:

- What were the expectations for this particular role? How were they measured? What were the targets, and how did you perform?
- What did you do to deliver against these expectations?
- What didn’t go well?
- When were you surprised by the market or competition?
- Who was the most difficult executive or employee you had to work with and what made this challenging?

Another approach I take is to spend half of my time learning what went well and half of my time learning what didn't go well. The goal of interviews is to understand what you're getting so there are no surprises.

Steve: Can executives develop these core behaviors? How?

Kim: Yes, but the first thing you should assess is a person's level of self awareness. If a candidate is self aware, they have the ability to recognize their strengths and weaknesses and will be open to addressing gaps or hiring people who complement themselves.

One of the tactics I use to assess self awareness is to ask and understand how much truth telling happens around them or how much feedback they hear. Do they know how they are perceived? Are their employees comfortable providing them with feedback? It's important that they want to hear the truth about themselves, not just the positives. Candidates who are self aware are typically sensitive to the implications of their actions and aware of how their actions affect employees. When you ask questions like: "What would that team (or boss) say

frustrated them about working with you?" you are looking for a self aware candidate to articulate clearly a few examples.

Steve: How has the crisis impacted the critical leadership skills that companies seek when recruiting executive talent?

Kim: I think the crisis has magnified the importance of certain evergreen leadership skills while elevating a few new ones - e.g., digital strategy. Certainly, the ability to manage through uncertainty and the ability to adapt to change are critical at this time. This is a prolonged crisis and we are all navigating the "new normal" which requires focus, adaptation, communication and other important leadership skills. During these times executive skills are magnified, and it's crucial to screen for these while interviewing.

Good leaders aren't just good at driving business, they are good at driving teams and sparking innovation. Key things to look for in the "new normal" include the extent to which a leader is adapting and driving digital solutions while developing new skills across an organization. During these uncertain times, effective leaders keep their workforce engaged and informed. This helps to reduce ambiguity, while creating consistency in a world where things are constantly changing.

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