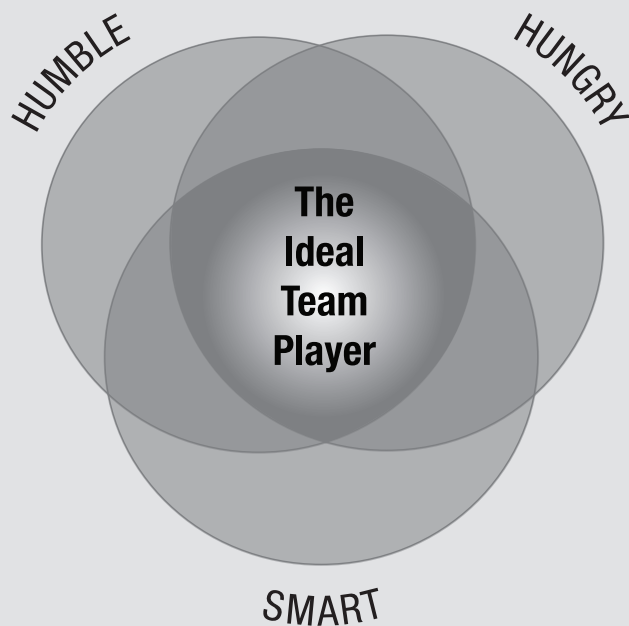


# **HIRING IDEAL TEAM PLAYERS:** AN INTERVIEW GUIDE TO HELP YOU IDENTIFY CANDIDATES WHO ARE HUMBLE, HUNGRY AND SMART



# HUMBLE

Humble team members are quick to point out the contributions of others and slow to seek attention for their own. They share credit, emphasize team over self and define success collectively rather than individually.

**Question:** Describe your current team. What do you like and dislike?

**Insight:** By asking a team related question, it may be apparent if he or she values a team effort and is willing to do what is necessary for the good of the team. Encourage the candidate to describe specific interactions with colleagues and experiences working on a team.

**Question:** What are the most important accomplishments of your career?

**Insight:** Look for more mentions of *we* than *I*. Of course, it isn't about being so simplistic as to count the responses. In the event that someone refers to himself or herself individually more than as a member of a team, probe for whether he or she was working alone or with others.

**Question:** What was the most embarrassing moment in your career? Or the biggest failure?

**Insight:** Look for whether the candidate celebrates that embarrassment or is mortified by it. Humble people generally aren't afraid to tell their unflattering stories because they're comfortable with being imperfect. Also, look for specifics and real references to the candidate's own culpability.

**Question:** How did you handle that embarrassment or failure?

**Insight:** Look for specifics about how the candidate accepted responsibility, what they learned from it, and if they actually acted on what was learned.

**Question:** What is your greatest weakness?

**Insight:** Yes, this is a seemingly tired question, but it's still a useful one. The key is to look for answers that are real and a little painful. Candidates who present their weaknesses as strengths ("I take on too much" or "I have a hard time saying no") are often afraid to acknowledge real shortcomings. To avoid this, it's a good idea to coach candidates with prompts like: "I really want to know what you'd like to change about yourself, or better yet, what your best friends would say you need to work on." The key to the answer is not what their weaknesses are (unless of course the candidate is an axe murderer), but if they're comfortable acknowledging something real.

**Question:** How do you handle apologies, either giving or accepting them?

**Insight:** Look for and ask for specifics. Humble people are not afraid to say they are sorry, and they accept other people's genuine apologies with grace. People who do this usually have specific stories.

**Question:** Can you tell me about someone who is better than you in an area that really matters to you?

**Insight:** Look for the candidate to demonstrate a genuine appreciation for others who have more skill or talent. Humble people are comfortable with this. Ego-driven people often are not.

# HUNGRY

Hungry team members are self-motivated and diligent. They are constantly thinking about the next step and the next opportunity.

**Question:** What is the hardest you've ever worked on something in your life?

**Insight:** Look for specific examples of real but joyful sacrifice. In other words, the candidate isn't complaining, but is grateful for the experience.

**Question:** What do you like to do when you're not working?

**Insight:** Look out for too many time-consuming hobbies that suggest the candidate sees the job as a means to do other things. That's not to say that there is one specific kind of activity that is an indicator of not being hungry. And it's certainly not to say that you're looking for someone who has no interests in life outside of work. But a long list of hobbies like extreme skiing, sled dog racing, storm chasing, and shark hunting might just be a red flag when it comes to someone who is not going to put the needs of the team ahead of personal pursuits.

**Question:** What was your work ethic like as a teenager?

**Insight:** Look for specifics, usually relating to schoolwork, sports, or jobs. And when it comes to sports, it's not about participation and having fun. Look for examples of difficulty, sacrifice, and hardship. Ask the candidate about how hard they worked in high school. Did they really strive to do well? Did they have a job? Did they train extraordinarily hard in a sport? You're not looking for one particular answer, but rather for something real that indicates the person has a work ethic. And a work ethic usually, but not always, gets established early in life.

**Question:** What kinds of hours do you generally work?

**Insight:** Hardworking people usually don't want to work nine to five, unless their unique life situations demand it. And if they do, they are usually getting additional work done at home. That's not to say that some people aren't stuck in dead-end, nine to five jobs and are itching to get out and do something challenging. But if a candidate is satisfied with a predictable schedule and talks too much about "balance," there's a chance he or she isn't terribly hungry. Again, not a litmus test, but a red flag. None of this is to advocate that people should prioritize their work over their families. Not at all. It's just that when a candidate focuses a lot on the hours that they're expected to work, they may not be the kind of hungry team player you need.

# SMART

Smart team members are interpersonally appropriate and aware. They have good judgment and intuition around the subtleties of group dynamics and the impact of their words and actions.

**Question:** Have you ever worked with a difficult colleague or boss? How did you handle the situation?

**Insight:** By asking the candidate about a difficult work relationship, you will learn if he or she can read situations and people and handle them skillfully.

**Question:** How would you describe your personality?

**Insight:** Look for how accurately the person describes what you are observing and how introspective he or she is. Smart people generally know themselves and find it interesting to talk about their behavioral strengths and weaknesses. People who seem stumped or surprised by this question might not be terribly smart when it comes to people.

**Question:** What do you do that others in your personal life might find annoying?

**Insight:** Everyone annoys someone, sometimes. Especially at home. Smart people are not immune to this. But neither are they in the dark about it. And they tend to moderate these behaviors at work.

**Question:** What kind of people annoy you the most, and how do you deal with them?

**Insight:** What you're looking for here is the candidate's self-awareness and self-control. Smart people know their pet peeves, and they own the fact that some of those pet peeves are their own issues. They also know how to deal with annoying people in a productive, constructive way.

**Question:** Would your former colleagues describe you as an empathic person? -OR- Can you give an example of how you've demonstrated empathy to a teammate?

**Insight:** Some people use the word empathetic. The issue is whether the candidate seems to understand what others are feeling. Now, there are certain personality types that are less empathic than others, and that's fine. What you're looking for here is an indication that the person *values* empathy and whether he or she has an understanding of his or her own strengths or weaknesses in this area.