How to Interview for Mission Alignment
Glassdoor’s Culture Codes of Best Places to Work eBook summarizes 5 key traits that top corporate cultures share. Among those traits is using the interview process to hire the best people who will live and breathe your culture. Put another way, hiring for culture fit means recruiting candidates that exude behaviors and characteristics aligned with the company’s core values and mission.

Doing so while maintaining a flexible definition of culture-meshing behaviors will ensure a robust and diverse employee base. This keeps a company chugging along: disrupting, innovating and growing.

For example, “compassion, empowerment and advancement” may be core leadership values your organization prizes.
Amy Miller,¹ Senior Tech Recruiter at Google, describes questions she asks to get to the heart of these traits.

**Leadership Style:**

“One of the things I really home in on is caring for the team. I ask about their leadership style, the last person they promoted and how they drive organizational health,” Miller begins.

**Team Motivation:**

“How do you make sure your team stays productive and happy, without micromanaging?” continues Miller. “Great managers light up when talking about their teams and the success they’ve helped their engineers reach.”

**Humble Transparency:**

“It’s not just about culling a candidate’s soaring successes, it’s also about identifying managers with the humility to admit their humanness, including mistakes made, initiatives that fizzled and actionable learnings from those situations.” In this vein, Miller seeks out candidates that “also recognize their own failures, and what they would do differently if faced with a similar issue.”

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¹ Amy Miller’s insights are her own and do not necessarily represent the opinions or strategies of Google.
How to Identify Specific Cues or Red Flags Within Candidate Responses

1. When a company values speed and innovation, as well as respectful communications, ask this:
   - **Interview Question:** Describe a project where you were partnering with a talented, quality-centered and key team member but they were also slow-producing and missed key milestones. How did you respond? Was the project an ultimate success? If so, why? If not, why not?
   - **Cues + Red Flags:** Blame and finger pointing may be a red flag. A positive cue, however, if they were able to describe having achieved the overall project goal despite the partner’s turtle pace.

2. When a company values continuous learning and focus on self-improvement, as well as exemplary customer care, ask this:
   - **Interview Question:** Think of a time where processes or methods that heretofore had propelled productivity suddenly were insufficient. Service delivery was falling behind and customers were disgruntled. What did you do?
   - **Cues + Red Flags:** Initiative and reaching out to others who may be able to help the employee get unstuck are positive behaviors to listen for. However, if the candidate indicates bulldozing through without seeking ideas from their team or manager, it may be a cue that they are lacking self-reflection or that their ego impedes progress.

3. When a company values risk takers who embrace uncertainty, as well as critical, long-view thinkers, ask this:
   - **Interview Question:** What is the greatest risk, with the greatest reward and/or result, that you have taken? What were the long-term impacts for the company?
   - **Cues + Red Flags:** If the candidate is unable to come up with an example, this may be a red flag. If they do provide a solid example, but are unable to connect the dots to the sustainable organizational impacts, this might be a cue for you (the interviewer) to keep probing for proof they understand their impact on the company’s long-range goals.
When a company values excellence in all they do. When they encourage every individual to strive for peak performance, ask this:

- **Interview Question:** What was a job requirement that required a long learning curve in your last role? How did you ramp up your skills and abilities? Did you master your skill? If so, how would you describe mastery?

- **Cues + Red Flags:** If the candidate’s response is not girded in enthusiasm for doing the best job possible, this will be a red flag. As well, their description of mastery will provide insights into their ingredients to such achievement. Their definition of mastery may even illuminate unique and value-add skills that will enrich your team.

When a company values diplomatic, group-imbued decision-making protocols, ask this:

- **Interview Question:** What was a difficult decision you were tasked to make? What processes did you undergo to come to a decision? If other people were involved, and some didn’t agree with your decision, how did you handle the scenario? If the decision ultimately didn’t lead to the intended outcome, what did you do?

- **Cues + Red Flags:** If the candidate appears overly flustered or frustrated in recounting the scenario, this might be a red flag. An inability to articulate how they navigate the complexity of groups of people involved in and opining in their ultimate decision also may be a red flag. However, if they can objectively — even positively — explain the reality of the situation and how they made the best of it and/or, learned from the outcome, then these are positive cues.
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