

What Successful Leaders Get Clear About First

I ask every client the same two questions at the start of a search. What are the priorities in the first six months? What needs to be true a year from now for this person to be considered a great hire?

The answers tell me almost everything about how the search is going to go.

One client gave me vague answers. When I pushed for specifics, the hiring manager told me, “Just send me some people you think are good. I’ll know if it’s a good fit when I see it.” That search dragged on. It never got filled. The hiring manager didn’t have a clear picture of the problem they were solving, which meant I didn’t have a clear picture of what to screen for.

Another client answered the same questions with real specificity. They knew the pressing issues this person would tackle starting day one, and they knew exactly what success would look like at the one year mark. They knew the problem and the puzzle piece needed to solve it. That clarity gave me a sharp, well defined picture of who to look for. Within fifteen days I had four people submitted. Interviews were set up with three of them. An offer went out a few days later. The whole process took about three and a half weeks.

The clarity didn’t stop at the search instructions. It carried straight into the interviews. Candidates who interviewed with the first client described the conversations as rambling and confusing. They walked away without a real sense of the role or the expectations. The strongest candidates dropped out. With the second client, candidates were impressed by the team, understood the expectations clearly, and could see the company’s vision and mission. All three finalists wanted the role. The client hired someone they were genuinely excited about.

The first client never hired anyone, and given how the process went, wouldn’t have had a real choice between strong candidates even if they had.

What strikes me about these two situations is that this wasn’t really a story about interviewing technique. It was a story about clarity, and how clarity shows up

everywhere once it exists. A hiring manager who knows exactly what they need makes better, faster decisions. Candidates can feel that clarity in the room, and it makes them want to join. A hiring manager who's still figuring it out as they go makes the search take longer, confuses the candidates who show up, and often loses the best ones before an offer is even on the table.

Getting clear doesn't mean having every answer. It means knowing the two or three things that actually matter before you start the search, and being able to say them out loud.

Best wishes,

Jeff King, CPC

President | Talent Advisor, RQ Focus

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