

Interviewee _____

Interviewer _____

Date _____

Abbreviated Topgrading Interview Guide

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"There's something rare, something finer far,
something much more scarce than ability.
It's the ability to recognize ability."

Elbert Hubbard

This Guide is a "beginner's Guide." After conducting about 10 interviews with it, progress to the complete 32-page Topgrading Interview Guide.

This Guide seeks to provide you with *the* most accurate, most valid, insights when assessing internal talent and candidates to hire. Companies can achieve a record of 90% success hiring high performers when a complete tandem (two interviewers) Topgrading Interview is conducted and the interviewers have been trained in the Topgrading Interview techniques. The complete Topgrading Interview Guide and other Topgrading tools are available at Topgrading Shop at www.SmartandAssoc.com.

Maximum benefits in using this Topgrading Interview Guide can be achieved through applying the principles stated in the book:

Topgrading: How Leading Companies Win By Hiring, Coaching, and Keeping A Players
(Dr. Bradford D. Smart, author; Portfolio Penguin Putnam, 2005)

If you haven't conducted a recent Topgrading Interview, consider watching the 1-hour video, available online through www.SmartandAssoc.com.

This Guide is intended to make the interviewer's job easier. It is a comprehensive, chronological guide, providing plenty of space to record responses. Experience has shown the following guidelines to be helpful when interviewing selection candidates:

1. Review the interviewee's **Work History Form** and **résumé**.
2. Be sure that the **Job Description, Competencies, and first year Accountabilities** are clear to you and the team the successful candidate will work with.
3. Circle the **most important competencies** in the list of 50 at the end of this Guide.
4. Review this Guide prior to the interview, in order to:
 - **Refresh your memory** regarding the sequence and wording of questions, for a smoother interview.
 - **Add or delete questions** based upon what previous information (résumé, Career History Form, Self-Administered Topgrading Interview Guide, preliminary interviews, reference checks) have disclosed about the individual.
5. Use a **tandem** (two-interviewer) approach.

A tandem interview is more valid than a solo interview, unless the Topgrading interviewer is highly experienced. Two heads are truly better than one when asking the Topgrading Interview questions, analyzing the interview responses, arriving at conclusions, and providing useful feedback and coaching.

6. After a couple of minutes building rapport, give the interviewee an idea of the expected time frame (3 hours?) and then sell the person on being open and honest. For an external candidate for hire, you might state purposes such as to:
 - “Review your **background, interests, and goals** to see if there is a good match with the position and opportunities here.”
 - “Determine some ways to assure **your smooth assimilation** into your new position, should you join us.”
 - “Get some ideas regarding what you and we can do to maximize your **long-range fulfillment and contributions.**”
 - “Tell you more about the **career opportunities** we have to offer and answer any questions you have.”
 - “**Understand your career history**, which will be thoroughly verified in **reference checks** we'll ask *you* to arrange with a minimum of all bosses you've had in the past ten years.”
7. Following the Topgrading Interview:
 - **Review** the completed Guide three times.
 - Conduct in-depth **reference checks** and accumulate opinions from coworkers who conducted interviews with the person.
 - **Write comments** about each Competency on the last three pages of this Guide, on the Job Description, or on a Candidate Assessment Scorecard.
 - **Make final ratings** of the Competencies.
 - **Write a brief report**—an Executive Summary, followed by a list of Strengths, Weak Points, and Developmental Recommendations.

EARLY INFLUENCES

1. Think of all the years up until you left high school. Who were the most influential people and experiences that might have affected your personality and values?

2. What were high points and low points during your school days?

3. What were your career thoughts at the end of (high school) (college) and what did you do next?

WORK HISTORY

For each full time job, complete a Work History Form, devoting the most time to the most recent jobs. Start with person's first full time job and come forward chronologically, so the last Work History Form is for the present job. The complete wording for each question is:

1. What results were achieved in terms of **successes** and **accomplishments**? How were they achieved? (As time permits, get specifics, such as individual vs. shared accomplishments, barriers overcome, "bottom line" results, and impact on career—bonus, promotability, performance review.)
2. We all make **mistakes**—what would you say were mistakes or failures experienced in this job? If you could wind the clock back, what would you do differently? (As time permits, get specifics.)
3. (For management jobs) What sort of **talent** did you inherit (how many A, B, and C players)? What changes did you make, how, and how many As, Bs, and Cs did you end up with? (For most recent two jobs, get name, title, A, B, C ratings, and strengths/weak points of each subordinate. (Get a full explanation of actions taken... hiring, coaching, firing, where replacements came from, etc.).
4. What was your **supervisor's name** and title? Would you be willing to arrange for us to talk with him/her? What is/was it like working for him/her and what were his/her **strengths** and **shortcomings** as a supervisor, from your point of view?
5. What is your **best guess** as to what (supervisor's name) honestly felt were/are your **strengths, weak points, and overall performance**?

NOTE: An easy transition to the next job can occur by asking why the person left, why the next job was taken, noting the employer/title/dates, and then asking **WHAT DID YOU DO, HOW DID YOU LIKE IT, AND HOW DID YOU DO?**

WORK HISTORY FORM 1

Employer _____ Starting date (mo./yr.) _____ Final (mo./yr.) _____

Location _____ Type of business _____

Description _____

Title _____ Salary (Starting) _____ Salary (Final) _____

1. Successes/Accomplishments (How achieved?) _____

2. Failures/Mistakes (Why?) (Do differently?) _____

3. Talent (topgrading) _____

SUPERVISOR

4. _____
Supervisor's Name _____ Title _____

Where Now _____ Permission to Contact? _____

Appraisal of Supervisor
His/Her Strengths _____

His/Her Shortcomings _____

5. Best guess as to what he/she really felt at that time were **your** strengths, weak points, and overall performance rating:

STRENGTHS	WEAK POINTS

Overall Performance Rating _____

What were your reason(s) for leaving this job?

WORK HISTORY FORM 2

Employer _____ Starting date (mo./yr.) _____ Final (mo./yr.) _____

Location _____ Type of business _____

Description _____

Title _____ Salary (Starting) _____ Salary (Final) _____

1. Successes/Accomplishments (How achieved?) _____

3. Failures/Mistakes (Why?) (Do differently?) _____

3. Talent (topgrading) _____

SUPERVISOR

4. _____
Supervisor's Name _____ Title _____

Where Now _____ Permission to Contact? _____

Appraisal of Supervisor
His/Her Strengths _____

His/Her Shortcomings _____

5. Best guess as to what he/she really felt at that time were **your** strengths, weak points, and overall performance rating:

STRENGTHS	WEAK POINTS

Overall Performance Rating _____

What were your reason(s) for leaving this job?

WORK HISTORY FORM 3

Employer _____ Starting date (mo./yr.) _____ Final (mo./yr.) _____

Location _____ Type of business _____

Description _____

Title _____ Salary (Starting) _____ Salary (Final) _____

1. Successes/Accomplishments (How achieved?) _____

4. Failures/Mistakes (Why?) (Do differently?) _____

3. Talent (topgrading) _____

SUPERVISOR

4. _____
Supervisor's Name _____ Title _____

Where Now _____ Permission to Contact? _____

Appraisal of Supervisor
His/Her Strengths _____

His/Her Shortcomings _____

5. Best guess as to what he/she really felt at that time were **your** strengths, weak points, and overall performance rating:

STRENGTHS	WEAK POINTS

Overall Performance Rating _____

What were your reason(s) for leaving this job?

WORK HISTORY FORM 4

Employer _____ Starting date (mo./yr.) _____ Final (mo./yr.) _____

Location _____ Type of business _____

Description _____

Title _____ Salary (Starting) _____ Salary (Final) _____

1. Successes/Accomplishments (How achieved?) _____

5. Failures/Mistakes (Why?) (Do differently?) _____

3. Talent (topgrading) _____

SUPERVISOR

4. _____
 Supervisor's Name _____ Title _____

Where Now _____ Permission to Contact? _____

Appraisal of Supervisor
 His/Her Strengths _____

His/Her Shortcomings _____

5. Best guess as to what he/she really felt at that time were **your** strengths, weak points, and overall performance rating:

STRENGTHS	WEAK POINTS

Overall Performance Rating _____

What were your reason(s) for leaving this job?

WORK HISTORY FORM 5

Employer _____ Starting date (mo./yr.) _____ Final (mo./yr.) _____

Location _____ Type of business _____

Description _____

Title _____ Salary (Starting) _____ Salary (Final) _____

1. Successes/Accomplishments (How achieved?) _____

6. Failures/Mistakes (Why?) (Do differently?) _____

3. Talent (topgrading) _____

SUPERVISOR

4. _____

Supervisor's Name _____ Title _____

Where Now _____ Permission to Contact? _____

Appraisal of Supervisor _____

His/Her Strengths _____

His/Her Shortcomings _____

5. Best guess as to what he/she really felt at that time were **your** strengths, weak points, and overall performance rating:

STRENGTHS	WEAK POINTS

Overall Performance Rating _____

What were your reason(s) for leaving this job?

WORK HISTORY FORM 6

Employer _____ Starting date (mo./yr.) _____ Final (mo./yr.) _____

Location _____ Type of business _____

Description _____

Title _____ Salary (Starting) _____ Salary (Final) _____

1. Successes/Accomplishments (How achieved?) _____

7. Failures/Mistakes (Why?) (Do differently?) _____

3. Talent (topgrading) _____

SUPERVISOR

4. _____
Supervisor's Name _____ Title _____

Where Now _____ Permission to Contact? _____

Appraisal of Supervisor
His/Her Strengths _____

His/Her Shortcomings _____

5. Best guess as to what he/she really felt at that time were **your** strengths, weak points, and overall performance rating:

STRENGTHS	WEAK POINTS

Overall Performance Rating _____

What were your reason(s) for leaving this job?

PLANS AND GOALS FOR THE FUTURE

1. Let's discuss what you are looking for in your **next job**. (Note "Career Needs" section of Topgrading Career History Form.)

2. What are your long-term career goals and objectives?

SELF-APPRAISAL

1. We would like you to give us a thorough **self-appraisal**, beginning with what you consider your **strengths, assets**, things you **like about yourself**, and things you **do well**.
2. OK, let's look at the other side of the ledger for a moment. What would you say are your **shortcomings, weak points**, or **areas for improvement**?

STRENGTHS	WEAK POINTS

SUMMARY

RATING SCALE: 6 = Excellent 5 = Very Good 4 = Good 3 = Only Fair 2 = Poor 1 = Very Poor

COMPETENCIES	MINIMUM ACCEPTABLE RATING	YOUR RATING	COMMENTS
INTELLECTUAL			
1. Intelligence			
2. Analysis Skills			
3. Judgment/Decision Making			
4. Conceptual Ability			
5. Creativity			
6. Strategic Skills			
7. Pragmatism			
8. Risk Taking			
9. Leading Edge			
10. Education			
11. Experience			
12. "Track Record"			
PERSONAL			
13. Integrity			
14. Resourcefulness*			
15. Organization/Planning			
16. Excellence			
17. Independence			
18. Stress Management			
19. Self-Awareness			
20. Adaptability			
21. First Impression			

COMPETENCIES	MINIMUM ACCEPTABLE RATING	YOUR RATING	COMMENTS
INTERPERSONAL			
22. Likability			
23. Listening			
24. Customer Focus			
25. Team Player			
26. Assertiveness			
27. Communications—Oral			
28. Communications—Written			
29. Political Savvy			
30. Negotiation			
31. Persuasion			
MANAGEMENT			
32. Selecting A Players**			
33. Coaching**			
34. Goal Setting			
35. Empowerment			
36. Accountability			
37. Redeploying B/C Players**			
38. Team Building			
39. Diversity			
40. Running Meetings			
LEADERSHIP (Additional Competencies)			
41. Vision			
42. Change Leadership			
43. Inspiring “Followership”			
44. Conflict Management			

COMPETENCIES	MINIMUM ACCEPTABLE RATING	YOUR RATING	COMMENTS
MOTIVATIONAL			
45. Energy			
46. Passion			
47. Ambition			
48. Compatibility of Needs			
49. Balance in Life			
50. Tenacity			
OTHER COMPETENCIES			

*Resourcefulness is the most important competency. It involves passionately finding ways to get over, around, under, or through barriers. It is a combination of many Intellectual, Personal, Motivational, Management, and Leadership competencies.

**Topgrading competencies are Selecting A Players, Coaching, and Redeploying B/C Players.

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