

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



1472 The Showdown Throwdown Job Interview

Imagine, if you will, two people separated by a few feet, staring at each other across a table. One, a job applicant, waits for the interviewer to ask the initial question, to break the ice, to relieve the tension. The interviewer looks into the applicant's eyes and says, "Why did you leave your last job?" The applicant, caught off guard by the question, regains composure quickly and responds, "Why did your last employee leave you?" Silence grips the air. Both, stunned by the unexpected exchange, aren't sure what will come next. I'm Jerry Roberts, and we'll see which direction this showdown takes, when we continue on The Extra Point.

Several weeks ago, Ray sent me an image of two gunslingers in an old west town, pistols on their hip, ready to draw on each other. However, instead of bullets, they let fly with those two questions: "Why did you leave your last job?" and "Why did your last employee leave you?"

I've looked at that image a number of times, trying to decide how I wanted to play it here on The Extra Point.

What I gave you a few moments ago, with the applicant firing back at the interviewer, was for entertainment purposes only, as human nature dictates that we just answer the interviewer's question, and then get ready for the next one.

In fact, my guess is that most people would think a reply like that would be rude, and would ruin their chance at getting the job. In some Guam companies, they'd probably be right. They'd likely lose points doing that.

Not with me. I'd give them points for quick thinking and quick wit. I'd give more points for taking my question — which is a good old fishing expedition to see how they react — and then having the courage to turn the tables on me.

Job interviews are notoriously one-sided. The interviewer asks a page or two of questions,

and then gives the applicant a chance to ask some. Too often, the applicant doesn't have any questions, which is a huge mistake in my opinion; or they have very few.

I remember scheduling a dozen interviews over three days for one position, and I sat there probing for not just answers to my questions, but probing for a spark that would tell me there was more to this person. Maybe it would come in their answers, or maybe in their questions for me.

There were people who fielded my questions pretty well, but then had no questions to ask of me. I was disappointed.

Without that spark, without something that differentiates you from the pack, where's the compelling reason that I should hire you?

Even if the current job market has employers falling all over themselves to get people on the payroll as fast as possible, I want to make a great impression on the interviewer so I stand out, and lay the foundation as someone the company might keep an eye on for future opportunities.

If I was applying for a job, I'd ask questions about why the interviewer feel the company is a great place to work. If they answer that "it's just like a family here," I'd ask them to explain how it's just like a family.

"Uh, Miss Interviewer, a lot of companies claim they are like a family. I'd like your take on why that's the case here."

It's a fair question to ask. So is asking what the current employee turnover rate is, but I don't expect many people would do that. I would, but let's leave this point this way:

If you're going to a job interview, at the very least research the company online.

(Con't.)

You can ask questions about the direction of the organization, their short- and long-term goals, their leading products and services, how the job you're seeking fits into the puzzle, and how the company feels about training and growing talent.

I used to tell applicants to make sure they brought their questions to the interview. I never made it a requirement, but now I think I would.

If you're the interviewer, ask fewer questions you get from books and websites. Add in some like what the applicant wants and expects from you. Have them describe their work ethic. Ask what kind of work gets them excited.

I like the concept that you hire for attitude and you train for skill. If I'm in need of a brain surgeon or rocket scientist, maybe the skill part should come first. Go ahead, test for the skill level if you need to. That being said, the attitude is still important.

A good job interview, where both applicant and interviewer are prepared and ready to perform at a high level, can be a beautiful thing. I hope that's how yours go.

That's the Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3FM, the Ray Gibson Show, and First Hawaiian Bank, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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