

Applicant

Interviewer

Date

**Topgrading®**

**Interview Guide**

**(Formerly CIDS Guide)**

Bradford D. Smart, Ph.D.

"There’s something rare, something finer far, something much more scarce than ability.

***It’s the ability to recognize ability*.”**

**Elbert Hubbard**

This Guide seeks to provide you with *the* most accurate, most valid, insights when assessing internal talent and candidates to hire. Companies have achieved a record of 90% success hiring high performers when a tandem Topgrading Interview (two interviewers) is conducted, interviewers have been trained in the Topgrading Interview techniques, and this guide is used.

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)

This Guide is intended to make the interviewer’s job easier. It is a comprehensive, chronological “road map,” providing plenty of space to record responses. In case you need more space, have a pad of paper handy. Experience has shown the following guidelines to be helpful when interviewing selection candidates:

1. Review the candidate’s **Topgrading Career History Form** (or **Self-Administered Topgrading Interview Guide**) and **résumé.**
2. Be sure that the **Job Scorecard, including accountabilities and other competencies,** are clear to you and the team the successful candidate will work with.
3. **Review this Guide** prior to the interview, in order to refresh your memory regarding the sequence and wording ofquestions, for a smoother interview.
4. Use a **tandem** (two-interviewer) approach.

A tandem interview is more valid than a solo interview, unless the Topgrading interviewer is highly experienced.

1. 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 fit with the position and opportunities here.”
   * “Determine some ways to assure **smooth onboarding,** 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.”
2. Following the Topgrading Interview:
   * **Review** the completed Guide.
   * **Write comments** about each competency on the last three pages of this Guide, or on a Candidate AssessmentScorecard.
   * **Make ratings** of the competencies.
3. **Ask *candidates* to arrange reference calls** with bosses in the past decade. Knowing this requirement in advance ofinterviews, candidates will be more honest in responding to questions.
4. **Write a brief report**—an Executive Summary, followed by a list of Strengths, Weak Points, and DevelopmentalRecommendations. High performers hired or promoted will want feedback and development recommendations from the interviewers.

**COLLEGE**

So that I can get a good feel for your background, first your education and then work experience, let’s *briefly* go back to your college days and come forward chronologically, up to the present. Then we’ll talk about your plans and goals for the future.

Note to Interviewers: Start with college or first full-time job, whichever came first. Experienced topgrading interviewers start with high school (similar questions to college). If you feel comfortable starting with high school do it, but if you are not comfortable with it, don’t.

1. I see from the Career History Form (or Self-Administered Topgrading Interview Guide) that you **attended**

(college). Would you please expand on the information provided and give me a **brief** **rundown** on your college years, particularly events that might have affected later career decisions. We’d be interested inknowing about **work experiences**, what the school was like, what you were like back then, the curriculum, activities, how you did in school, high and low points, and so forth. (Ask the following questions to obtain complete information not included in responses to the general “smorgasbord” question.)

1. Give us a feel for what kind of **school** it was (if necessary, specify large/small, rural/urban, cliquish, etc.), and generally, what your college years were like.
2. What was your **major**? (change majors?)
3. What school **activities** did you take part in? (Note activities listed on Topgrading Career History Form, and get elaboration.)
4. What **grades** did you receive, what was your class standing, and what were your study habits like? (Confirm data on Topgrading Career History Form.)

GPA: / (scale)

Study Habits

6. What **people** or events during college might have had an influence on your career?

1. Were there any class **offices, awards, honors,** or **special achievements** during your college years? (Note Topgrading Career History Form or Self-Administered Topgrading Interview Guide responses, and get elaboration.)
2. What were **high points** during your college years? (Look for leadership, resourcefulness, and particularly what competencies the interviewee exhibits *now* while discussing those years.)
3. What were **low points**, or **least enjoyable occurrences**, during your college years? (Again, what happened back then is only important in relation to what is revealed about the interviewee *now*.)
4. Give us a feel for any **jobs** you held during college—the types of jobs, whether they were during the school year or summer, hours worked, and any high or low points associated with them. (Don’t spend much time on these jobs, but look for indications of extraordinary resourcefulness, motivation, etc.; if the person did not work during the summer, ask how the summer months were spent.)

11. (TRANSITION QUESTION) What were your **career thoughts** toward the end of college?

**GRADUATE SCHOOL**

Note: If graduate school occurred later in the interviewee’s life, complete this section later. Stay in chronological order.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1. |  |  |  |  |  | 2. | |
|  |  |  |  | School | |  | Degree |
| 3. |  | **Why pursue this school** and degree | | |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  | |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  | |  |  |
| 4. |  | **High Points** | |  | |  |  |
|  |  |  |  | | |  |  |
|  |  |  |  | | |  |  |
|  |  |  |  | | |  |  |
| 5. |  | **Low Points** | | | |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

1. **Work Experiences:** a.

b.

c.

1. **Career Thoughts/Opportunities**

**WORK HISTORY**

Now we would like you to tell us about your work history. There are a lot of things we would like to know about each position. Let me tell you what these things are now, so we won’t have to interrupt you so often. We already have some of this information from your Topgrading Career History Form (or Self-Administered Topgrading Interview Guide) and previous discussions. Of course we need to know the **employer**, **location**, **dates** of employment, your **titles**, and **salary** history. We would also be interested in knowing what your **expectations** were for each job, your **responsibilities/accountabilities**, what you **found** upon entering the job, what major **challenges** you faced and how they were handled. What were your most significant **accomplishments** as well as **mistakes**, and what were the **most enjoyable** and **least enjoyable** aspects of each job? What was each **supervisor** like and what would you **guess** each really felt were your strengths and weak points? Finally, we would like to know the circumstances under which you **left** each position. Please go back and start with your **first full time** **job** and come forward chronologically.

Note: If the person worked for a single employer six years and had, say, three jobs of two years each with that employer, consider each one of those a *separate* position and complete a Work History Form on it. Add as many Work History Forms as needed so you can complete one for every full time job. The following is suggested wording for information requested on the Work History Form:

1. What was the name of the **employer**, **location**, and **dates** of employment? (Get a “feel” for the organization by asking about revenues, products/services, number of employees, etc.)
2. What was your job **title**?
3. What were the starting and final levels of **compensation**?
4. What were your **expectations** for the job?
5. What were your **responsibilities** and **accountabilities**?
6. What did you **find** when you arrived? What shape was the job in—talent, performance, resources, problems? What major **challenges** did you face?
7. 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.)
8. 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.)
9. All jobs seem to have their pluses and minuses; what were the **most enjoyable** or rewarding aspects of this job?
10. What were the **least enjoyable** aspects of the job?
11. (For management jobs) What sort of **talent** did you inherit (how many As, Bs, Cs)? What changes did you make, how, and how many As, Bs, and Cs did you end up with? (For most recent two jobs, get A, B, C ratings and strengths/weak points of each subordinate.) See pages 14-15 for Topgrading questions.
12. What **circumstances** contributed to your leaving? (Always probe for initially unstated reasons.)
13. What was your **supervisor’s name** and title? **Where** is that person now? Would you be willing to arrange for us to talk with him/her? (Say you will want to talk with all supervisors in the past ten years.)
14. 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?
15. 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 simply determining employer/title/dates, and then asking **WHAT** DID

YOU DO, **HOW** DID YOU LIKE IT, AND **HOW** DID YOU DO?

**WORK HISTORY FORM 1**

This form is for the first full time job (usually following college).

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1. |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | Employer | | |  |  |  | Starting date (mo./yr.) | Final (mo./yr.) | |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | Location | | |  |  |  | Type of business |  |  |
|  |  | Description of company | | |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2. |  | Title | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  | Base | $ |  |  | Base $ |  |
|  |  |  |  |  | Bonus $ | |  |  | Bonus $ | |
| 3. | Salary (Starting) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | | | | Other | $ |  | Salary (Final) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | Other $ |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |



1. Expectations
2. Responsibilities/Accountabilities
3. “Found” (Major Challenges)
4. Successes/Accomplishments (How achieved?)
5. Failures/Mistakes (Why?) (Do differently?)
6. Most Enjoyable
7. Least Enjoyable
8. Talent
9. Reasons for Leaving

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | ***SUPERVISOR*** |
| 13. |  |  |
|  | Supervisor’s Name | Title |
|  |  |  |
|  | Where Now | Permission to Contact? |

1. Appraisal of Supervisor His/Her Strengths His/Her Shortcomings
2. 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

**WORK HISTORY FORM 2**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1. |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | Employer | | |  |  |  | Starting date (mo./yr.) | Final (mo./yr.) | |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | Location | | |  |  |  | Type of business |  |  |
|  |  | Description of company | | |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2. | Title | | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  | Base | $ |  |  | Base $ |  |
|  |  |  |  |  | Bonus $ | |  |  | Bonus $ | |
| 3. | Salary (Starting) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | | | | Other | $ |  | Salary (Final) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | Other $ |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |



1. Expectations
2. Responsibilities/Accountabilities
3. “Found” (Major Challenges)
4. Successes/Accomplishments (How achieved?)
5. Failures/Mistakes (Why?) (Do differently?)
6. Most Enjoyable
7. Least Enjoyable
8. Talent
9. Reasons for Leaving

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | ***SUPERVISOR*** |
| 13. |  |  |
|  | Supervisor’s Name | Title |
|  |  |  |
|  | Where Now | Permission to Contact? |

1. Appraisal of Supervisor His/Her Strengths His/Her Shortcomings
2. 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

**WORK HISTORY FORM 3**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1. |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | Employer | | |  |  |  | Starting date (mo./yr.) | Final (mo./yr.) | |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | Location | | |  |  |  | Type of business |  |  |
|  |  | Description of company | | |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2. | Title | | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  | Base | $ |  |  | Base $ |  |
|  |  |  |  |  | Bonus $ | |  |  | Bonus $ | |
| 3. | Salary (Starting) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | | | | Other | $ |  | Salary (Final) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | Other $ |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |



1. Expectations
2. Responsibilities/Accountabilities
3. “Found” (Major Challenges)
4. Successes/Accomplishments (How achieved?)
5. Failures/Mistakes (Why?) (Do differently?)
6. Most Enjoyable
7. Least Enjoyable
8. Talent
9. Reasons for Leaving

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | ***SUPERVISOR*** |
| 13. |  |  |
|  | Supervisor’s Name | Title |
|  |  |  |
|  | Where Now | Permission to Contact? |

1. Appraisal of Supervisor His/Her Strengths His/Her Shortcomings
2. 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

**WORK HISTORY FORM 4**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1. |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | Employer | | |  |  |  | Starting date (mo./yr.) | Final (mo./yr.) | |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | Location | | |  |  |  | Type of business |  |  |
|  |  | Description of company | | |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2. | Title | | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  | Base | $ |  |  | Base $ |  |
|  |  |  |  |  | Bonus $ | |  |  | Bonus $ | |
| 3. | Salary (Starting) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | | | | Other | $ |  | Salary (Final) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | Other $ |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |



1. Expectations
2. Responsibilities/Accountabilities
3. “Found” (Major Challenges)
4. Successes/Accomplishments (How achieved?)
5. Failures/Mistakes (Why?) (Do differently?)
6. Most Enjoyable
7. Least Enjoyable
8. Talent
9. Reasons for Leaving

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | ***SUPERVISOR*** |
| 13. |  |  |
|  | Supervisor’s Name | Title |
|  |  |  |
|  | Where Now | Permission to Contact? |

1. Appraisal of Supervisor His/Her Strengths His/Her Shortcomings
2. 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

**WORK HISTORY FORM 5**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1. |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | Employer | | |  |  |  | Starting date (mo./yr.) | Final (mo./yr.) | |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | Location | | |  |  |  | Type of business |  |  |
|  |  | Description of company | | |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2. | Title | | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  | Base | $ |  |  | Base $ |  |
|  |  |  |  |  | Bonus $ | |  |  | Bonus $ | |
| 3. | Salary (Starting) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | | | | Other | $ |  | Salary (Final) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | Other $ |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |



1. Expectations
2. Responsibilities/Accountabilities
3. “Found” (Major Challenges)
4. Successes/Accomplishments (How achieved?)
5. Failures/Mistakes (Why?) (Do differently?)
6. Most Enjoyable
7. Least Enjoyable
8. Talent
9. Reasons for Leaving

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | ***SUPERVISOR*** |
| 13. |  |  |
|  | Supervisor’s Name | Title |
|  |  |  |
|  | Where Now | Permission to Contact? |

1. Appraisal of Supervisor His/Her Strengths His/Her Shortcomings
2. 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

**WORK HISTORY FORM 6**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1. |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | Employer | | |  |  |  | Starting date (mo./yr.) | Final (mo./yr.) | |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | Location | | |  |  |  | Type of business |  |  |
|  |  | Description of company | | |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2. | Title | | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  | Base | $ |  |  | Base $ |  |
|  |  |  |  |  | Bonus $ | |  |  | Bonus $ | |
| 3. | Salary (Starting) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | | | | Other | $ |  | Salary (Final) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | Other $ |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |



1. Expectations
2. Responsibilities/Accountabilities
3. “Found” (Major Challenges)
4. Successes/Accomplishments (How achieved?)
5. Failures/Mistakes (Why?) (Do differently?)
6. Most Enjoyable
7. Least Enjoyable
8. Talent
9. Reasons for Leaving

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | ***SUPERVISOR*** |
| 13. |  |  |
|  | Supervisor’s Name | Title |
|  |  |  |
|  | Where Now | Permission to Contact? |

1. Appraisal of Supervisor His/Her Strengths His/Her Shortcomings
2. 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

**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 **other job possibilities**, and how do you feel about each one?
3. Describe your **ideal position** and what makes it ideal.
4. How does **this opportunity** square with your ideal position? What do you view as opportunities and advantages as well as risks and disadvantages in joining us?

Advantages

Disadvantages

**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**.

(Ask follow-up questions, and urge the person to continue. For example, you might say such things as “good,” “keep going,” “oh,” nod and ask questions such as: “What other strengths come to mind?” “What are some other things you do well?”

Obtain a list of strengths and then go back and ask the person to elaborate on what was meant by each strength listed— “conscientious,” “hard working,” or whatever.)

1. 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?**

Be generous in your use of the pregnant pause here. Urge the person to list more shortcomings by saying such things as, “What else comes to mind?” “Keep going, you are doing fine,” or just smile, nod your head and wait. When the person has run out of shortcomings, you might ask questions such as: “What three things could you do that would most improve your overall effectiveness in the future?”

Obtain as long a list of negatives as you can with minimal interruptions on your part, and then go back and request clarification. (If you interrupt the individual for clarification on one, there might be so much time spent on that one negative that the individual will be very hesitant to acknowledge another one.)

**SELF-APPRAISAL**

**STRENGTHS** **WEAK POINTS**

**TOPGRADING** **SUMMARY**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **RATING SCALE:** | **6 = Excellent 5 = Very Good** | | | | **4 = Good 3 = Only Fair** | | **2 = Poor 1 = Very Poor** |  |
|  |  | **MINIMUM** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | **ACCEPTABLE** |  |  | **YOUR** |  |  |  |
| **COMPETENCIES** |  | **RATING** |  |  | **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**

1. Integrity
2. Resourcefulness\*
3. Organization/Planning
4. Excellence
5. Independence
6. Stress Management
7. Self-Awareness
8. Adaptability

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **MINIMUM** |  |  |
|  | **ACCEPTABLE** | **YOUR** |  |
| **COMPETENCIES** | **RATING** | **RATING** | **COMMENTS** |
| **INTERPERSONAL** |  |  |  |

1. Likability
2. Listening
3. Customer Focus
4. Team Player
5. Assertiveness
6. Communications—Oral
7. Communications—Written
8. Political Savvy
9. Negotiation
10. Persuasion

**MANAGEMENT**

1. Selecting A Players\*\*
2. Coaching\*\*
3. Goal Setting
4. Empowerment
5. Accountability
6. Redeploying B/C Players\*\*
7. Team Building
8. Diversity
9. Running Meetings

**LEADERSHIP** (Additional Competencies)

1. Vision
2. Change Leadership
3. Inspiring “Followership”
4. Conflict Management

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **MINIMUM** |  |  |
|  | **ACCEPTABLE** | **YOUR** |  |
| **COMPETENCIES** | **RATING** | **RATING** | **COMMENTS** |
| **MOTIVATIONAL** |  |  |  |

1. Energy
2. Passion
3. Ambition
4. Compatibility of Needs
5. Balance in Life
6. 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.

**SMART & ASSOCIATES, INC.**

37202 North Black Velvet Lane

Wadsworth, IL 60083

Phone: 847-244-5544 Fax: 847-263-1585

www.SmartTopgrading.com

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