



Interview Questions for an Executive Director

The success of an organization relies upon the vision and foresight of its leadership. An executive director develops and implements strategic plans and establishes the culture for the organization as well as leads the workforce. It is crucial to invest the time in selecting an executive director that has the necessary skills, experiences, and motivations to be successful. The competencies and questions below have been developed to assist you in hiring the most qualified, best fit candidate.

Raising the Bar – Continuously raising expectations of team performance; motivating and supporting team efforts to achieve goals while upholding organizational values and standards; tracking progress toward goals.

1. Describe how you've worked with a department/unit to set specific and measurable objectives. How did you monitor progress toward achieving those objectives?
2. Describe a situation in which you motivated your department/unit to exceed the organizational standards. What strategies did you employ?
3. For a department to function effectively, every member must be committed to the department and its goals. Tell me how you've demonstrated your commitment to the department.
4. What are some of the typical obstacles or barriers you've encountered as a leader that have made it difficult to achieve your department's objectives? Can you provide a specific example that shows when you were successful in removing an obstacle as well as an example of when you weren't successful?
5. [Reference Check] Can you please provide a specific example when <candidate's name> effectively motivated a team to exceed an established goal?

Building Trust – Interacting with others in a way that gives them confidence in one's intentions and those of the organization.

1. How do you ensure that the unique potential of each of your direct reports is being realized in the workplace? Provide a recent example.
2. There can be many inequities (perceived and real) that exist at work (e.g., workloads, compensation, expectations, etc.). Describe some inequities you've observed and how you have dealt with them.
3. Describe how you have encouraged divergent perspectives in a group setting. Give a recent example of when you used this approach.
4. Often it is easy to blur the distinction between confidential information and public knowledge. Can you give me an example of when you were faced with this dilemma?
5. [Reference Check] Tell me about a time at work when <candidate's name> objectively considered others' ideas, even when they conflicted with his/her own.

Leading Through Vision and Values – Keeping the organization's vision and values at the forefront of associate decision making and action.

1. Tell me what you've done to imbed the organization's vision and/or values in the day-to-day operations of your direct reports.
2. Have you worked with your direct reports to develop a creative plan to support a new organizational initiative? If so, can you provide a specific example?
3. Describe how you improved productivity or profitability of your organization. How did you identify and implement these improvement opportunities?
4. What systems have you put in place to recognize or reward associates who suggest or make effective changes? Give me a specific example of how this recognition has affected others' innovations.

5. [Reference Check] What impact has <candidate's name> had on the organization? His/her department?

Empowerment/Delegation – Sharing authority and responsibilities with others to move decision making and accountability downward through the organization, enable individuals to stretch their capabilities, and accomplish the business unit's strategic priorities.

1. Describe a situation in which you gave a team the authority to handle a project, decision or initiative for which you were ultimately responsible.
2. When delegating a project or assignment, it's important to convey trust and confidence in the person's ability to do the job. Give me an example of how you communicated your trust and confidence in a recent delegation.
3. Sometimes it's difficult to know how much direction to provide when delegating. Tell me about a time when you didn't provide enough instruction or guidance for an assignment or task you delegated. How and when did you find out that things weren't going well?
4. Have you experimented with techniques that are different from those used by most other leaders in your organization? Give me a recent example of when you used those techniques.
5. [Reference Check] Providing guidance and sharing responsibility to a group, team or direct report will be essential in this position. Can you tell me about a time when you observed <candidate's name> successfully demonstrating these skills?

Navigating Politics – Actively maintaining a broad awareness of the internal and external environment by accurately perceiving organizational, political, and social dynamics; proactively navigating the stakeholder environment to avoid unwanted or unproductive reactions and consequences.

1. Organizational politics is a fact of life. What tactics have you learned to deal with the politics in your organization? How effective have these tactics been? Provide examples.
2. Adapting to different organizational cultures is sometimes difficult. Describe a time when you were most successful assimilating into an organizational culture.
3. Describe a time when you had to get the support of a wide range of stakeholders to a proposed strategy or plan.
4. Successfully navigating organizational politics can be very difficult. Subtle issues or potential obstacles can easily be missed. Describe a time when this happened to you. What political factors caused you problems?
5. [Reference Check] Describe how <candidate's name> fits into the organization's culture.

Motivational Fit – The extent to which activities and responsibilities are available in the job, the organization's mode of operation and values, and the geographic location provide personal satisfaction.

1. [Continuous Improvement] Describe one of your past employers that emphasized continual process improvement. How satisfied/dissatisfied were you with that?
2. [Intellectual Focus] What experience have you had with organizations that emphasized professional development, continuing education, and intellectual discussion/exchange of ideas? How did you feel about that?
3. [Interdepartmental Cooperation] Tell me about a time when the organizational culture in which you worked supported collaboration among departments. How satisfied were you with that?
4. [Planning for Long Term Success] Describe one of your past employers that emphasized strategic planning to achieve long-term goals. How satisfying was that for you?

For additional assistance, please contact a member of your HR Employment Team:
Phone: (859) 257-2608
Email: HiringEnhancement@uky.edu