

BBC 2020 A Team Succeeds Against the Odds Interviewing Guide

This guide assumes you are stepping into the breach to rescue a project on an accelerated timeline.

According to Gallup, “In times of crisis, there are two directions human nature can take us: fear, helplessness and victimization—or self-actualization and engagement. On the latter, if leaders have a clear way forward, human beings are amazingly resilient. There is a documented ‘rally effect.’”

Points to Keep in Mind

- The team knows they are currently failing, whether they admit it or not. Your job is not to determine who is at fault, but to lead your team to a successful outcome.
- Gallup meta-analytics have found four universal needs that followers have of leaders:
 - Trust
 - Compassion
 - Stability
 - Hope
- You must lead with compassion and understanding to get the team to trust you and provide you with the facts you need to design a plan.
- Only if they trust you and their team members will you be able to bring the team together and succeed.

- You must provide the team with hope that the goal can be successfully achieved. The best way to do this is to design a plan, communicate it to all parties, and maintain an environment in which the project team knows that you have their back no matter what happens. It is like the Three Musketeers—“One for All and All for One.” Your team may be viewing it more like the Titanic—you are all sinking together. It’s up to you to rally their spirits and lead them down a path to success.

Approach

- Conduct one-on-one interviews with each team member and sponsor to get a holistic view of the status of the project.
- Start each interview by assuring the individual that your conversation is confidential, and we are all in it together. Also emphasize that only by knowing all the facts and circumstances will you be able to devise a plan to lead to a successful outcome for everyone.
- Use active inquiry questions during the interview—use *What* and *How* questions. Do not ask *Why* questions—that leads down a path of recriminations and blame, which is unhelpful for the team.

Sample Interview Questions

Here are some questions you should be asking in your one-on-one interviews and why you should be asking them. You should allocate two hours per interview.

What are the goals and objectives of the project?

From this you should find out if the team members have the same understanding of the project and its goals. Frequently, you’ll find that the issue can be a lack of understanding of the project itself.

What is your view of the project?

If you have created an open environment, you should learn a lot about the project, its status, and perceptions of the project from all angles.

What is working well?

This allows the team member to toot their own horn about what they have been doing well.

What could be improved?

Here, you should be able to find out what departments are not working well together, and the roadblocks perceived.

How is team communication?

Find out the frequency, method, response rates to gauge effectiveness.

What conflicts exist among the team?

Some people will spill their guts, as they are frustrated and feel they have not been heard. By listening carefully and patiently, you are building trust and empowering them.

What are the top three problems the project team needs to address to deliver the project successfully?

It is always very illuminating to compare what each person considers to be the three top problems. Hopefully, you will have themes here, but if not, you need to dig deeper.

If time were not an issue, what would you do to make this work?

This helps you to determine what the real gaps are in the project. The combined responses of this question give you an idea of an ideal future state, which can be compared to the previous responses related to status and problems. It often leads to innovative solutions that had not been previously considered.

If you had to give yourself advice in this situation, what would it be?

With this question, you will learn what each person truly fears.

What roadblocks are you facing that you need cleared?

This should give you some insights to the politics around the project and the priority it has been given by management.

What is the morale of the project team?

You may gain invaluable insights by understanding this from each team member's perspective.

How are you feeling?

Here, you exhibit your compassion and continue to build a bond of trust. This is one of the most critical questions you will ask.

If you were sitting in my seat, what question would you want me to ask you right now?

This may lead you to many things that have been swept under the rug.

Is there anything else I need to know or you want to tell me?

A critical question that you should always ask as it can lead anywhere.

In Summary

These questions should get you started, but there are many more that you may need to ask, depending on the circumstances. The success of the interview will also be influenced by the skill of the interviewer and their ability to make connections, and then adapt their questions as they move from one person to the next on the team.

I wish you all the best in completing your challenging projects! If I can help in anyway, please feel free to contact me.

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References:

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