

CHAPTER 1

Bob Paul

BOB PAUL SAT STARING out his office window, angry and frustrated. He watched icy rain falling in sheets from clouds that were as dark as his disposition.

I've been the CEO of Community Hospital for less than a year, and to have this happen. . .

He sighed, shook his head in disbelief, and brought himself out of his musing.

How could everything have gone so wrong? How could he have been so wrong in his selection of these two key staff members? And now they were both gone.

He looked over at the clock on his desk and saw that it was 4:54 p.m.

Losing two key team members was going to cause turmoil and set his plans back for months. Yet neither of them seemed to have fit in with the staff.

Bob's mind wandered back over the last few weeks. Roger, who had been his Chief Operating Officer for less than six months, had

suddenly resigned. *Probably because the Chief Medical Officer and many doctors were up in arms and after his head*, he thought.

Then Marilyn, his Chief Financial Officer, had broken his trust by leaking bid information for the new addition to one of the vendors competing for the contract.

Bob Paul felt the weight of leadership on his shoulders. He certainly was not new to leadership. He had been in the healthcare field for eighteen years and this was not his first position as CEO. But the political nuances of this hospital were different than anything he had previously experienced and he was feeling the pressure of it. To lose two key players did not help.

The phone rang, shattering the silence.

He picked up the phone.

“Bob, Martha Payton is on line one, and she’s on the warpath,” warned his assistant, Ann.

“Thanks, Ann.”

I don’t need this now, he thought as he reached to punch line one.

Martha was a board member who had voted against hiring him. He was unsure why, though he believed there had been another candidate she had preferred over him. Bob had hoped his thoughtful way of approaching issues, energetic style, friendly manner, and innate intelligence would eventually win her over. But months had passed and Martha seemed as distrustful and antagonistic towards him as she had been on his first day.

“Good afternoon, Martha, what can I do for you?”

CHAPTER 8

The Questions

“BOB, REMEMBER LAST NIGHT I mentioned that the third step is to use past-event interview questions?” William asked.

“Yes?” responded Bob.

“Let’s talk for a few minutes about the quality of interview questions in general. Suppose you ask a question like, ‘Are you a CPA?’ What kind of answer will you get?”

“A *yes* or *no*,” replied Bob.

“That’s right. How can you know if they really have a CPA license?” asked William.

“I guess you wouldn’t unless you followed up and asked for a copy,” Bob said without a lot of confidence.

“That’s right, Bob. These are called closed-ended questions and closed-ended questions aren’t very useful in predicting job success.”

William continued. “So let’s move on. We have all learned not to ask questions that are often referred to as illegal questions about marital status, child care plans, age, religion, race, and national origin. So I won’t spend any more time on those.”

“I think I’m pretty clear on that topic,” Bob responded.

“Good. The next category of questions often used in interviews is what I call weird or unusual interview questions. Such questions as: Why do we park on driveways and drive on parkways? If you were a tree, what kind of tree would you be? Where does the light go when it goes out? Why are manhole covers round?”

“William, I can see how weird and unusual questions can put a candidate in an uncomfortable position. But isn’t that what we need to do, to test a candidate’s ability to deal with pressure?” Bob asked.

“I believe an interview should be a professional exchange of information rather than an effort by an interviewer to play junior psychologist,” replied William.

“That leads us to another kind of question that is often asked, called a hypothetical question. It would sound like this: What would you do if . . .? How would you handle a situation like . . .? Now Bob, what kinds of responses do you get to hypothetical questions?”

“Hypothetical answers?” Bob answered slowly.

“That’s right,” William confirmed. “And do you think hypothetical answers are useful in predicting the success of a candidate?”

“Probably not. I guess they would be textbook responses. So what kinds of questions should I ask?”

“Last night I said that the best predictor of future actions is past actions. Do you remember that?”

“Yes, I remember you saying that,” Bob replied.

“Well, the best way to do that is to ask questions about a candidate’s past experiences that are related to the competencies we have identified,” William pointed out.

Bob was a bit confused. "I'm not sure I understand what you mean by questions about a candidate's past experiences."

William continued.

"Questions about past experiences, that can be verified, tell us how a candidate works. We now know what competencies are important and the ratings we did on the behaviors tell us which behaviors are important . . . leading us to which questions are important.

"For instance, one of the leadership behaviors is, 'lead people past the status quo and achieve new levels of excellence.'"

He jotted something on a piece of paper and slid it over to Bob.

Leadership often means disrupting comfort zones in order to lead people past the status quo and achieve new levels of excellence. Describe a time when you were able to do this.

"This is a question that would correspond to that behavior."

The lights went on for Bob.

"I see. Questions about how someone has handled a previous situation can help me predict how they will handle similar future situations."

"When we are done today, I will send you a list of interview questions you can use to assess candidates for these competencies. But having a list of questions is only as good as the interviewer's skills in using them," said William. William paused for a moment to allow his last comment to sink in, then continued.

"Once you have the right questions, it's important to read them exactly as they are written. Don't paraphrase the questions. You need

to ask each candidate for a specific position each question the same way, to maintain the integrity of the process.”

“That’s interesting. So what else do I need to know about using these questions? How hard can it be?” asked Bob, sounding a bit frustrated.

“Let’s spend some time on this,” William responded.