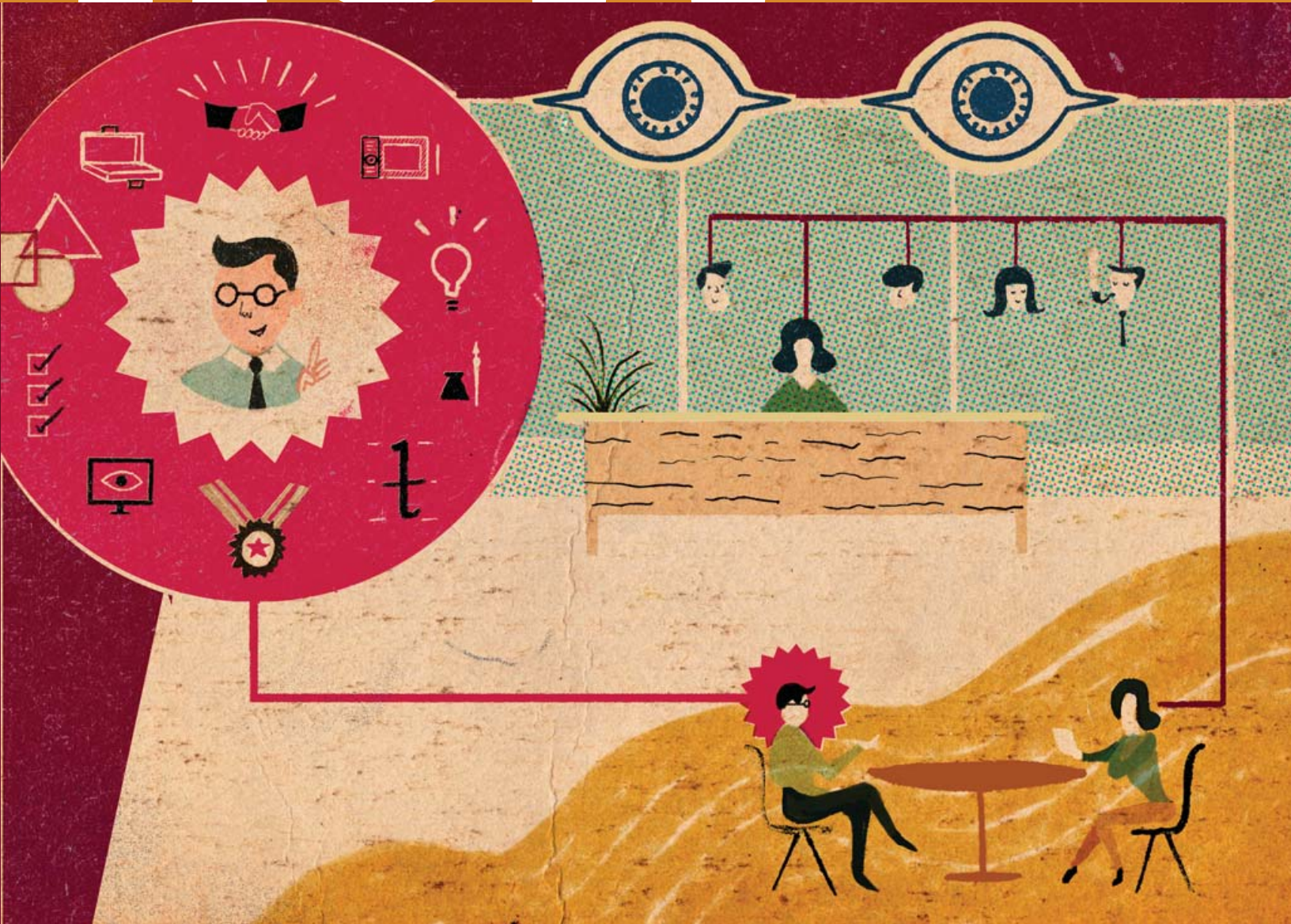
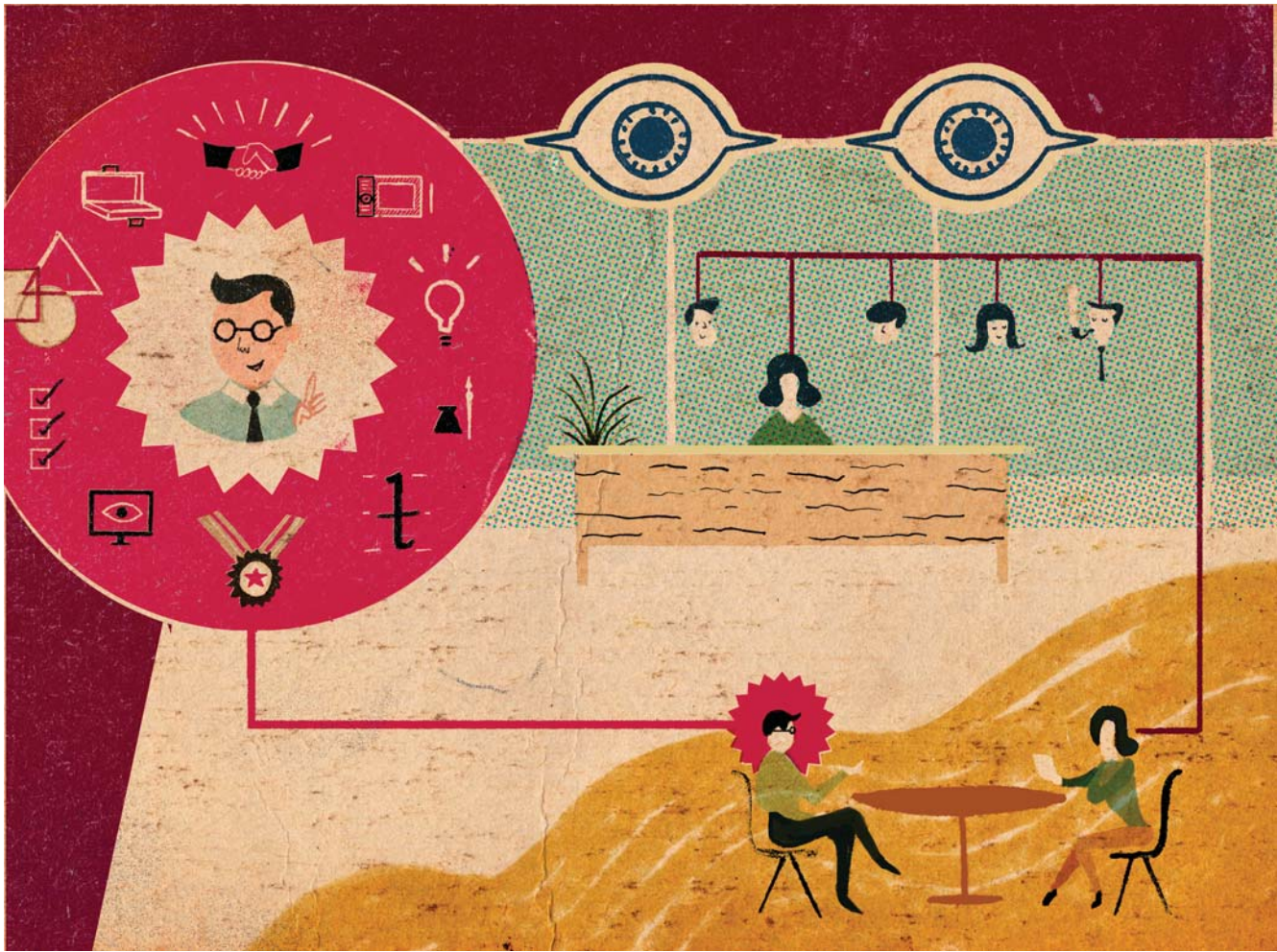


HOW



KNOW YOUR INTERVIEWER

by Julie Ann Sims



CAREER

KNOW YOUR INTERVIEWER

Learn how to land your next job by understanding the perspective of your interviewer. Armed with these 6 profiles of typical hiring managers, you'll ace your next interview.

User experience has become a red-hot design topic and for a good reason: You have to understand what makes people tick in order to develop seamless experiences for them. The same holds true on the job hunt. The more insight you have into a hiring manager's way of thinking, the greater your chances are of acing an interview and landing a new gig.

Yet, many people approach the search for work by blasting the same message to every hiring manager,

much like old-school advertising campaigns bombard broad audiences with their slogans. It's a strategy in need of a makeover, says Jose Caballer, founder and chief education officer of The Skool, an education company that teaches standard systems for managing UX and technology teams. Caballer has built a distinguished career as a designer, design firm owner and now educator by applying UX principles to design projects and day-to-day interactions.

One key principle Caballer espouses is getting to know as much about the hiring manager as you can before and during the meeting. “It will help you forge a connection and tailor your information to that person,” he explains. In fact, Caballer advises his students to approach the job hunt from a UX perspective. Just as UX designers develop “personas” to help them understand different audience types, you can do the same with hiring managers.

Different employers have different top priorities: Corporate creatives may seek out potential team members who are excellent brand stewards, for instance, while agency heads may be tuning in more to find raw creative potential.

Although nearly all employers strive to hire people who are talented and dependable with strong communication skills, they may weigh the qualities they’re looking for differently. By viewing the hiring process from their perspectives, you’ll be better equipped to build rapport and make the interview flow smoothly. The following are basic profiles for six different types of hiring managers that you may encounter.

1. SMALL DESIGN FIRM OWNER/PARTNER

The owner/partner/principal of a small design agency often seeks additional support because the firm just landed a new client, or business is brisk, and they’re under pressure to staff up quickly. She wants stand-out designers who can help build the business and won’t need a lot of direct supervision.

Pressing hiring concerns:

- Can I put you in front of clients?
- Will you fit in with my small team?
- Will your talents help differentiate my firm?
- Will you stick around?
- Will you need a lot of direction?

Pain points:

- Bringing in new business
- Managerial or administrative duties that detract from time for design work
- Balancing work and personal obligations

2. SMALL COMPANY MARKETING DIRECTOR

Naturally, the marketing and communication director at a small company manages the marketing, creative and communications functions within the company and is often a hands-on manager, both supervising others and tackling projects herself. She may report to the business owner or to another senior leader. Typically, someone in this role values professionals who are self-directed and can wear many hats.

Pressing hiring concerns:

- Will you grow with the company?
- Can you take on multiple responsibilities?
- Can you work autonomously?
- Will you get along with other team members?
- How strategic are you?

Pain points:

- Limited time and budgets
- Often hiring one person for what might typically be two or even three roles
- May not have deep understanding of design

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3. THE SMALL BUSINESS OWNER

This hiring manager is passionate about her business and tends to be pulled in many directions. Small business owners often seek someone who can design a wide range of projects, from websites to brochures to advertisements. She may know very little about the creative process.

Typical concerns:

- Will your work help me build my business?
- Will you be able to manage multiple projects?
- Will you be self-directed?
- Will you get along with other employees?
- Will you love my business the way I do?

Pain points:

- Limited design knowledge
- Many competing projects
- Tight budgets

4. LARGE COMPANY MARKETING OFFICER

The chief marketing officer or vice president of marketing at a large company oversees a large marketing and creative team and may report to the chief operating officer or chief executive officer. She often only interviews creatives at the director level or higher and is interested in someone with strong management and presentation skills.

Pressing hiring concerns:

- Will you get along with the higher-ups?
- Are you a strong manager of people and budgets?
- Can you work well with agencies?
- Will you be able to work in a system with multiple layers of approvals?
- Will you understand the brand and develop strategies for promoting it?

Pain points:

- Office politics
- Frequently shifting budgets
- Keeping pace with new industry developments

5. LARGE AGENCY CREATIVE DIRECTOR

The manager or creative director at a large agency focuses primarily on creative potential and wants to hire people with fresh ideas and insights. She may oversee a large creative team and seek someone with a very specific skill set.

“The magic question that nobody asks me is, ‘What are you looking for in a designer?’”

JOSE CABALLER

Pressing hiring concerns:

- Can you come up with fresh ideas?
- Are you strategic?
- How familiar are you with the latest design tools and technologies?
- Can you switch direction on a dime?
- Are you service-oriented?

Pain points:

- Needing to move quickly to address changing demands
- Pleasing sometimes difficult clients
- Fluctuating workloads

6. CORPORATE CREATIVE DIRECTOR

This individual oversees a team of creative professionals and manages relationships with outside design agencies. She may report to the chief marketing officer or vice president of marketing. This hiring manager tends to seek out individuals who are highly creative but can thrive in a corporate environment.

Pressing hiring concerns:

- Will you fit into a corporate environment?
- Can you be creative and follow brand guidelines?
- Will you stay inspired in this role?
- Will you get along with our internal partners?
- Can you take direction?

Pain points:

- Conflicting direction from people in various parts of the organization
- Competing with agencies for talent
- Managing a wide variety of projects

FROM THE PERSONA TO THE PERSONAL

Although personas can help you understand hiring managers on a broad level, you also want to do some digging to find out more about the individuals you'll be meeting with. Most people know that social media profiles and Google searches are a logical and good place to start. Observe the types of connections the hiring manager has on LinkedIn and Twitter, as well as how they interact with others. Specifically, try to identify the following:

Educational background. What school did they go to? Does their career align with what they studied? The type and quality of their education may reveal how much emphasis they put on hands-on education versus book learning.

Career path. Have they moved up quickly within the organization or was their career path slow and steady? Did they change jobs a lot to move up the ladder? This can help you assess their ambition and drive, as well as their appetite for risk-taking.

Professional affiliations/groups. What groups do they belong to? How active are they? This gives you information about their professional interests and whether they are “joiners” by nature or prefer to fly solo.

Hobbies/interests. What do they like to do outside of work? Play competitive sports? Design jewelry? Hang out with their kids? This will enable you to find common ground.

Your findings can help you strike up a good conversation. For example, if you find that you both play tennis, you can bring up the latest Wimbledon results. Or, perhaps you're both AIGA members and can talk about an upcoming event. Before a job interview, come up with two or three conversation starters to get the ball rolling.

Along with putting you at ease, a great conversation will help you zero in on what a hiring manager is looking for. For instance, Caballer pointed out that when hiring for his design firm, he targeted professionals who were process-driven. “I wanted to know that the designer understood the ins-and-outs of working in an agency, so I looked for people who were process-oriented,” he says. Knowing about Caballer's penchant for procedure would help a job-seeker move the conversation toward this sweet spot and hit on her own ability to follow procedures and create systems.

That's all well and good, you might be thinking, but how do you get a hiring manager to reveal what they're looking for? Just ask, Caballer says. “The magic question that nobody asks me is, ‘What are you looking for in a designer?’” he says. “As a designer, you're going to be an advisor, so you should act like one.”

By asking the right questions and contemplating the hiring process from an employer's perspective, you'll be able to create a better job interview experience for both of you. The conversation will flow easily, and you can actively address the hiring manager's pain points, ensuring that she knows about the most relevant qualities you bring to the table.

And you don't have to wait for the next big meeting to get started. Practice makes perfect. “Try it out at a party or on a date,” Caballer says. “The same strategies of getting to know people and asking them about themselves work in any relationship.” **HOW**

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