

## AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

### “Ayers Institute Lunch & Learn” Podcast Episode 17 – July 2018

Title: *Powerful Interview Questions for Hiring Educators*

#### SPEAKERS

<b>JO</b>	Julia Osteen	Technology Integration Specialist, Ayers Institute for Teacher Learning & Innovation
<b>RM</b>	Rachael Milligan	Assistant Dean, College of Education at Lipscomb University and Managing Director, Ayers Institute for Teacher Learning & Innovation
<b>AW</b>	Aimee Wyatt	Career Academy Leadership Consultant with the Southern Regional Education Board

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##### *INTRODUCTION:*

**AW:** To me, what you're really trying to get to is for them to uncover what their most significant accomplishment has been. Because, when you start asking them, "What has been your most significant accomplishment?," it allows them to bring in so much more than a finite question can do. They can bring in experiences. They can bring in skills. They can bring in relationships. And it's really up to the interviewee as to what they bring in or don't.

**JO:** Welcome to the "Ayers Lunch and Learn" podcast presented by the Ayers Institute for Teacher Learning & Innovation at Lipscomb University where we're all about education. These podcast episodes are sponsored by Edsouth which promotes interest and awareness of higher education opportunities to students, families, and schools. Each Ayers Lunch and Learn podcast episode provides bite-sized portions of professional learning.

Today's topic is: "Powerful Interview Questions for Hiring Educators." We'd love to hear your thoughts on this topic as well using the Twitter hashtags #AyersLunchAndLearn and #HiringQuality. My name is Julia Osteen and I'm the Technology Integration Specialist for the Ayers Institute. Participating in our conversation today is Dr. Aimee Wyatt of the Southern Regional Education Board and Dr. Rachael Milligan of the Ayers Institute for Teacher Learning & Innovation.

**JO:** Welcome.

##### *EPISODE BODY:*

**RM:** Thank you Julia, and welcome back Dr. Wyatt.

When we were last together, we talked a lot about hiring high quality educators, what it takes to do that, and the framework around that. And, the thinking behind that. And today we'd like to dive more deeply into specific interview questions. So, I'd love for you to start out by talking about what's a question that you— for sure— want to ask when you're interviewing someone.

**AW:** Thank you for allowing me to be here again. I want to say, first of all, I think it's important to not ask questions that will give you subjective answers. Let's start there. I think there's a lot of questions out there. You can research all types of interview questions. But many of the questions that are provided bring subjectivity to them. Even a simple question is asking somebody's educational background. I've

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seen an interview where someone will ask "Well tell us about your experience or your background?" And based on that one question people's minds start getting made up automatically. They either don't like the university they attended or have a negative connotation or a positive connotation of a school that they taught at previously.

So, you have to be really careful when looking at those kinds of questions. It's not that they don't matter. They matter for points of certification and work experience, but they're really not going to get at the heart of what you're trying to get to.

To me, what you were really trying to get to is have them uncover what their most significant accomplishment has been. Because, when you start asking them, "What has been your most significant accomplishment?" it allows them to bring in so much more than a finite question can do. They can bring in experiences. They can bring in skills. They can bring in relationships. And it's really up to the interviewee as to what they bring in or don't.

But that first question about their most significant accomplishment, then allows me as the interviewer to bring up so many more subsequent questions to uncover their real strengths.

**RM:** Okay. So, that significant accomplishment question really helps you to gain an understanding of who they are— and then to launch into what more you want to know about them from there. If I'm understanding what you're saying.

So, I wonder, you know what surprises have come from that? I mean that's a broad question- what's your most significant accomplishment. And you're in an educational context. I imagine there might be times that you've been surprised or times that you've been almost in awe of what people do. Talk a little bit about what you've seen by asking that question.

**AW:** I have seen everything from asking that question. It also tells me a lot about how much skills they have, just in the interview process and understanding what we're asking.

I've heard people say my most significant accomplishment was having my children. I've heard my most significant accomplishment is the mission trip I took to build a house, you know, in a foreign country. I've heard my most significant experience or accomplishment has been creating an advanced academic's program at a school. You know, I've even heard things that were completely what I would consider off base- my most significant accomplishment was something they did 10 years ago. And I'm wondering to myself, what have they been doing the last 10 years? If this was 10 years? Or how did they grow from that? So, it's really it's a great question, because it tells you so much about what they choose based on how long ago it was, all the way to how much skill did it take to accomplish that.

**RM:** You've provided us a list of some questions that you often use as jumping off points, after the significant accomplishment question; and that will be available for our listeners.

One that stands out to me, is a question that you ask about examples when a candidate has had to influence or persuade someone. I'm wondering what your thinking is behind asking that question?

**AW:** So, that question really allows for the interviewee to take it in multiple ways.

First of all, I'm looking for their talent in influencing others and the members of a team. So, in other words, can they rally the team around something? What is their ability to persuade a student who doesn't

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really want to work hard that day to do it? You know those are those skill sets. So, have they been able to get somebody over a hurdle, over a hump, move forward?

I'm also looking to see— kind of, I want to say the negative side of that, but the alternate side of that is— are they pushy or demanding? Or are they, do they confuse influence with coercion? What is that skill that they're bringing to the table? Is it really one of a positive persuasion or is it really heavy handed when they're dealing with others in that task that they're working on?

**RM:** Yes, that's really interesting. So, that question gives you insight into how they would work with other colleagues, as well as how they would interact with students, too. Another question that stands out to me on your list, is you ask— What type of recognition did you receive for a particular project, and was it appropriate in your mind? That's really interesting to me. Will you talk about that a little bit?

**AW:** So, when you ask someone about recognition, a couple of different things come up. Sometimes you find out they were teacher of the year. Right? And so, it's really exciting: you get to hear all about how that happened and how their colleagues voted on them. And you start to really get a sense that they were really valued where they were.

In other cases, again, on the flip side of that, sometimes some bitterness can emerge. “I wasn't recognized. Nobody cared about what I did. I just worked all by myself.” Woah! You know. So, I'm going, “wow.” But what I'm really looking for is— do they feel the need to be thanked for everything they do? What kind of person is this? Do they need that constant affirmation? Did they work in a place or was the task they were working on something that they only did for the glory?

Or was it something that— because it was so strong— multiple people were thankful for it? Is this something that so many people were thankful for that now I can follow up on their references and ask their reference, “I see that this person got this recognition. What do you think?” You know. And then their former principal or their former supervisor might say, “Oh yes, they completely changed everything for us when they created that.” You know, that's a positive affirmation. It really gives me almost more follow up to ask in a reference call.

**RM:** I would love for you to share what other questions on here are really those ‘big bang for your buck’ questions? I know that your number one is, “What is your most significant accomplishment?,” and things branch from there. But are there others that really stand out to you as ones that you often ask, or you've gotten really impactful responses after asking?

**AW:** So, the first one that I pretty much always ask, was I asked, “What were the actual results obtained?” Because what I want to know is: does this person measure and monitor their work? I want to know if they understood the outcome. If they just do to do, or if they actually are looking at did they achieve their goal? And what did they learn from that experience? That is one that I am- and I also, looking at that data analysis factor three, that really provides how they measure work or goals. And if they can do that because today in schools that's what we're having to do a lot of, is measure our goals and do those formative and summative assessments at all times.

**RM:** And I know you mentioned the last time we were together, that the data analysis was very important in thinking through what you're looking for in that candidate. That observation, and that data analysis, and that looking at student work. So, are there others that you would like to highlight?

**AW:** Yes. I think another one that I ask often is, “What was the toughest decision you had to make?” I really want to see how they were challenged and how they overcame a challenge. Did they just— did

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somebody say well they couldn't do this part so they just stopped? Did they keep trying did they find another way around? Did they work through it? Did they get other people to help them work through it? Did they ask for help? Those are things that come up in that dialogue.

And then I think lastly the number one thing that I always end with was, “In retrospect what would you do differently if you could?” Because the person that I'm looking for will always have an answer to that, because they're not satisfied with doing it one way. They're always looking to offer a way to either do it better, be more efficient, get better results. And I want to hear that somebody really analyzed what they did and grew from it.

**RM:** Thank you so much for sharing those insights into interview questions. Those are really practical tips for those who are looking to hire the best possible people for their team.

### *CONCLUSION:*

**JO:** In our conversation today, Dr. Wyatt and Dr. Milligan highlighted the importance of asking the kinds of questions that uncover who people are. They have certainly provided us with a lot to think about. A probing question for you and your colleagues to explore is: “To what extent do the interview questions you ask help you know if an educator is the best fit for your team?”

As we close today's episode, we would like to encourage you to continue the conversation on powerful interview questions with your colleagues. There is a graphic organizer file available for download as you continue thinking about this topic. The graphic organizer, along with links to resources, are found on eduTOOLBOX – at eduTOOLBOX.org.

Don't forget. We'd love to hear your thoughts on powerful interview questions using the Twitter hashtags #AyersLunchAndLearn and #HiringQuality. Also, follow and like the Ayers Institute on Twitter and Facebook @AyersInstitute.

We hope your appetite for bite-sized portions of professional learning was satisfied with this podcast presentation sponsored by Edsouth. Look for other episodes of the Ayers Institute Lunch and Learn Podcast at <http://podcast.ayersinstitute.org/>.