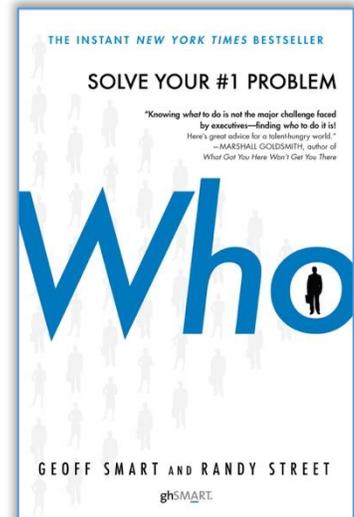


# The A Method for Hiring “A Players” for Hotels

The following strategies for hiring A Players for hotels are based on the best-selling book **Who: The A Method for Hiring** by Geoff Smart and Randy Street, and have been adapted for the hospitality industry by Jonathan Albano.

The A Method for Hiring is based on more than 1,300 hours of interviews with more than 20 billionaires and 300 CEOs. Their step-by-step interview methods help managers clarify their hiring needs and expectations, reveal more information about candidates, and help weed out B and C Players quickly.

Following this process ensures that your new hires not only have the right skills, they are a cultural match for your organization.



## In This Guide, You Will Learn:

- How to avoid common “voodoo hiring” methods
- How to source A Players
- How to clarify what you need
- How to ask the right interview questions to dramatically improve your ability to quickly distinguish an A Player from a B or C candidate
- How to attract the person you want to hire, by emphasizing the points the candidate cares about most
- Where you can get free tools from ghSMART to help you with the interviewing process

## Who, Not What

*“The most important decisions that businesspeople make are not what decisions, but who decisions.” ~Jim Collins, Author of Good To Great*

*Who* is your No. 1 problem, not *what*. *Who* refers to the people you put in place to make the *what* decisions. *What* refers to the products and services you provide, and the strategies and processes you use.

*Who* mistakes happen when managers:

- Are unclear about what is needed in a job
- Have a weak flow of candidates
- Do not trust their ability to pick the right candidate from a group of similar-looking candidates
- Lose candidates they really want to join their team

These *Who* mistakes are pricey. According to studies performed by the authors, the average hiring mistake costs 15 times an employee's base salary in hard costs and productivity loss.

## Your #1 Problem

The following techniques will help hiring managers at every level find the right *who* for any position that needs filling. However, for this process to be fully effective, you may have to break some bad hiring habits of your own.

### Voodoo Hiring

Why do even the most talented executives have such trouble finding the right people for their teams? Arguably, it's because few executives have learned an effective process for hiring.

Consider how you and your managers approach hiring. If you've ever wondered how certain people on your team were hired to begin with, you may be using one of the top ten "voodoo hiring" methods:

1. **The Art Critic** – Assumes you can "read" people; goes on "gut instinct"
2. **The Sponge** – Lets everybody interview the candidate; spends as much time as possible gathering superficial information that has nothing to do with the job
3. **The Prosecutor** – Aggressively questions candidates in an attempt to trip them up with trick questions or logic problems
4. **The Suitor** – Spends time and energy trying to sell the candidate on the position, rather than rigorously interviewing them
5. **The Trickster** – Uses gimmicks to test for certain behaviors, e.g. throwing a wad of paper on the floor to see if a candidate is willing to clean it up
6. **The Animal Lover** – Asks questions like "If you were an animal, what type of animal would you be?" in hopes of revealing something uniquely important about a candidate
7. **The Chatterbox** – Talks about the weather, the latest sports score, etc. While this is a friendly conversation, it does not help you make good decisions
8. **The Psychological and Personality Tester** – Presents candidates with psychological or personality bubble-tests with questions like "Would you rather be at a cocktail party or the library on a Friday night?" These tests are not predictive of success on the job, and savvy candidates can easily fake the answers and game the system
9. **The Aptitude Tester** – While tests can determine whether a person has the right aptitude for a specific role, they should never become the sole determinant in a hiring decision
10. **The fortune-Teller** – Asks candidates to answer hypothetical questions like "If you were going to resolve a conflict with a co-worker, how would you do it?" While this might result in a good answer, but there is no way of knowing the candidate will actually handle a situation in that way

### Finding A Player

An A Player is defined as *"a candidate who has at least a 90 percent chance of achieving a set of outcomes that only the top 10 percent of possible candidates could achieve."*

This A Player definition is broken down into two mathematical parts:

- Hiring people who have at least a 90 percent chance of succeeding in the role you have defined, and
- What only 10 percent of the possible hires could accomplish

How do you get an A team? The solution is called the “ghSMART A Method for Hiring,” or the “A Method” for short.

The four steps are:

1. **Scorecard.** By defining A performance for a role, the scorecard gives you a clear picture of what the person you seek needs to be able to accomplish.
2. **Source.** Systematic sourcing *before* you have slots to fill ensures that you have high-quality candidates waiting when you need them.
3. **Select.** Selecting talent in the A Method involves a series of structured interviews that allow you to gather the relevant facts about a person so you can rate your scorecard and make an informed hiring decision.
4. **Sell.** Selling the right way ensures that you avoid the biggest pitfalls that cause the very people you want the most to take their talents elsewhere.

## SCORECARD: A Blueprint for Success

Scorecards describe the mission for the position, outcomes that must be accomplished, and competencies that fit with both the culture of the company and the role.

### **Mission: The Essence of the Job**

The mission is an executive summary of the job’s core purpose – why the job exists to begin with. For a mission to be meaningful, it has to be written in plain language. When candidates, recruiters, and other team members understand what you are looking for without having to ask clarifying questions, you’ll know you have a good mission.

Don’t hire the generalist. Hire the specialist.

### **Outcomes: Defining What Must Get Done**

The second part of a scorecard is the outcomes, and they describe what a person needs to accomplish in a role. Either a general manager can close \$2 million of business by the end of year three or he or she can’t.

Where job descriptions typically miss the mark is that they focus on activities, or a list of things a person will be doing. Scorecards work because they focus on outcomes, or what a person must get done, e.g. must grow revenue from \$1 million to \$2 million by the end of year three.

### **Competencies: Ensuring Behavioral Fit**

The final part of the scorecard, Competencies, defines how you expect a new hire to operate in the fulfillment of the job and the achievement of the outcomes. What competencies really count?

- Efficiency
- Honesty/integrity
- Organization and planning
- Aggressiveness
- Follow-through on commitments
- Intelligence
- Analytical skills
- Attention to detail
- Persistence
- Proactivity

In addition, you might want to consider some of the following competencies:

- Ability to hire A Players (for managers)
- Ability to develop people (for managers)
- Flexibility/adaptability
- Calm under pressure
- Strategic thinking/visioning
- Creativity/innovation
- Enthusiasm
- Work ethic
- High standards
- Listening skills
- Openness to criticism and ideas
- Communication
- Teamwork
- Persuasion
- Service-oriented

### **Cultural Competencies: Ensuring Organizational Fit**

To evaluate cultural fit, you need to begin by evaluating your company's culture. Try asking your leadership team: "What adjectives would you use to describe our culture?" Before long, you'll see how the company's culture is viewed by others.

One thing to note is that, once you're clear on your company's culture, you may realize that you need to remove people in your organization who are not a fit.

### **From Scorecard to Strategy**

Scorecards tie the A Players to A performance. It's not just about having A Players; it's also about making sure they deliver. A good scorecard process translates the objectives of the

strategy (e.g. your business plan), into clear outcomes for the CEO and senior leadership team. From there, the senior team then translates their outcomes to the scorecards of those below them, and so on. Scorecards set expectations with new hires, monitor employee progress over time, and allow you to rate your team annually as part of a talent review process.

## SOURCE: Generating a Flow of A Players

### Referrals from Your Personal and Professional Networks

The No. 1 method for sourcing candidates is to ask your personal and professional networks for referrals. Talented people know talented people, and they're happy to refer others. People you interact with every day are the most powerful sources of talent you will ever find.

### Referrals from Employees

While outside referrals are valuable, in-house referrals often provide better-targeted sourcing. Consider building internal sourcing into your employee scorecards, e.g. "Source [number] A Player candidates per year," then reward the effort by providing a financial or other incentive such as extra vacation time for those who achieve and exceed the goal.

### Hiring External Recruiters and Researchers

The more recruiters understand about who you are and what you really need, the more effective they'll be.

Recruiting researchers, while not as common in hospitality, can identify names for your managers or internal recruiting team to pursue, but they won't conduct the interviews themselves. If you take the time upfront to orient recruiting researchers to your culture, business needs, you can tailor the flow of candidates to your needs.

### Sourcing Systems

The final step in the sourcing process is blocking time on your calendar every week to identify and nurture relationships with A Players. Don't overthink this - your sourcing system can be as simple as a spreadsheet. Sort your list by priority and begin making calls until you have at least one live conversation per week. Imagine the pool of talent you can develop over the course of a year if you have connecting conversations with potential candidates weekly.

### How to Source

Consider creating a list of the top 10 most talented people you know and commit to talking with one per week. At the end of each conversation, ask, "Who are the most talented people you know?" This allows you to continue to build your list, and continue to connect with talented people.

## SELECT: The Four Interviews for Spotting A Players

Traditional interviewing is simply not predictive of job performance. The best way to winnow the candidates is through a series of four interviews that build on each other:

- The screening interview

- The Topgrading Interview®
- The focused interview
- The reference interview

NOTE: The four interview process is designed to spot A Players for even the most senior positions. If you are hiring for a junior or line level position, e.g. housekeeper, consider condensing or combining some of these interviews (e.g. the Topgrading and Focused interviews) as appropriate, but do so with caution.

### The Screening Interview: Culling the List

The screening interview is a short (30 minutes or less), phone-based interview designed to weed out B and C Players from your list of candidates. The following four essential questions will help you build a comprehensive fact base for weeding out B and C Players:

1. **What are your career goals?** Allowing the candidate to speak first prevents the person from just parroting back what they heard you say about the company.
2. **What are you really good at professionally?** To build a complete picture of their professional aptitude, push the candidates to tell you 8-12 positives.
3. **What are you not good at or not interested in doing professionally?** Screen the candidate out if they come up short, or if the weaknesses they share are really all strengths in disguise.
4. **Who were your last five bosses, and how will they each rate your performance on a 1-10 scale when we talk to them?** Notice the language used in the question is “WHEN we talk to them,” not IF. Candidates will more inclined to be honest if they believe you will verify what they say with their previous bosses.

After a candidate answers each of the primary questions, dig deeper and get curious about the answer. Ask probing questions that begin with “What,” “How” or “Tell me more.”

Sample questions include:

- What do you mean?
- What did that look like?
- What happened?
- What is a good example of that?
- What was your role?
- What did you do?

### The Topgrading Interview: The Power of Patterns for Choosing Who

The Topgrading Interview is the key interview within the “Select” step of the ghSMART A Method for Hiring. It’s a chronological recount of a person’s career. First, you ask about the highs and lows of a person’s educational experience to gain insight into his or her background. Then you ask five simple questions for each job in the past 15 years, beginning with the earliest and working your way forward to the present day.

1. **What were you hired to do?** In a way, you are trying to discover what their scorecard might have been if they had had one.

2. **What accomplishments are you most proud of?** A Players tend to talk about outcomes linked to expectations. B and C Players talk generally about events, people they met or aspects of the job they liked, without ever getting into results.
3. **What were some low points during that job?** Don't let the candidate off the hook. Keep pushing until the candidate shares the lows.
4. **Who were the people you worked with?** Begin by asking candidates for their boss's name. Next, ask what they thought it was like working with John Smith. Now ask, "What will Mr. Smith say were your biggest strengths and areas for improvement?" Be sure to say will, not would.
5. **Why did you leave that job?** It is an important piece of the puzzle to figure out if somebody decided to leave a job after being successful (an A Player clue) or whether he or she was pushed out of a job by a boss who did not value their contribution (a B or C Player clue).

### **Conducting an Effective Topgrading Interview**

The Topgrading Interview takes three hours for a senior executive (and less for more junior people). It is recommend that you conduct the Topgrading Interview with a colleague, e.g. an HR representative, another manager, or team member.

### **Five Master Tactics**

Here are five master tactics to make the Topgrading interview as easy and effective as possible.

#### **Master Tactic #1: Interrupting**

You may have to interrupt the candidate if they get off track. You don't want to be rude or demoralize them. A broad smile, reflective listening and matching their enthusiasm is a respectful way to interrupt somebody.

#### **Master Tactic #2: The Three P's**

To clarify how valuable an given accomplishment was in any context, try using the three P's questions:

- How did your performance compare to the previous year's performance?
- How did your performance compare to the plan?
- How did your performance compare to that of peers?

#### **Master Tactic #3: Push Versus Pull**

People who perform well are generally pulled to greater opportunities. People who perform poorly are often pushed out of their jobs. Do not hire anybody who has been pushed out of 20 percent or more of their jobs. After you ask, "Why did you leave that job?" you will hear one of two answers:

1. Push. "It was mutual." "It was time for me to leave." "My boss and I were not getting along." "Judy got promoted and I did not." "My role shrank." "I missed my number and was told that I was on thin ice."

2. Pull. “My biggest client hired me.” “My old boss recruited me to a bigger job.” “The CEO asked me to take a double promotion.” “A former peer went to a competitor and referred me to his boss.”

#### **Master Tactic #4: Painting a Picture**

When you can picture what a candidate is saying in your mind, you’ll know you understand. If they say they’re an excellent communicator, don’t assume you know that they mean. Get curious.

#### **Master Tactic #5: Stopping at the Stop Signs**

Pay attention to body language. If the candidate is covering their mouth, looking down, or shifting in their chair while saying, “We did great in that role,” that is a stop sign. Get curious.

#### **The Focused Interview: Getting to Know More**

The focused interview is about the outcomes and competencies of the scorecard. If, for example, the scorecard you created has four outcomes and six competencies that define success in the job, consider assigning a couple members of your team to perform focused interviews based on these outcomes and competencies. Each interview should take 45 minutes to one hour, depending on how many outcomes and competencies you assign to each interviewer.

#### **The Reference Interview: Testing What You Learned**

To have successful reference interviews, start by picking the right references. Consider the bosses, peers and subordinates identified in the Topgrading Interview, and ask the candidate to contact the references to set up the calls. It is recommended that you conduct a total of seven reference interviews; You should personally do four and ask your colleagues to do three.

The A Method uses five simple questions for the reference interview:

1. In what context did you work with the person?
2. What were the person’s biggest strengths?
3. What were the person’s biggest areas for improvement back then?
4. How would you rate his/her overall performance in that job on a 1-10 scale? What about his or her performance causes you to give that rating?
5. The person mentioned that he/she struggled with \_\_\_\_\_ in that job. Can you tell me more about that?

Pay very close attention to what people say and how they say it because people generally don’t like to give a negative reference. If they hesitate, it’s typically because they’re trying hard not to say something that will condemn your candidate, or put themselves at legal risk.

#### **Decide Who to Hire**

Your goal after the Topgrading and focused interviews is to decide whether to continue the process with a particular candidate. Begin by examining skill. When you believe there is a 90 percent or better chance the candidate can achieve an outcome based on the data you

gathered during the interview, rate him or her an A for that outcome. Next, evaluate will. Will has to do with the motivations and competencies a candidate brings to the table. Repeat the process for each competency.

How will you know when you have hit the skill-will bull's-eye? When (1) you are 90 percent or more confident that a candidate can get the job done because his or her skills match the outcomes on your scorecard, and (2) you are 90 percent or more confident that the candidate will be a good fit because his or her will matches the mission and competencies of the role. With all this great data, the decision should be easy.

Here is what you do:

1. Take out your scorecards that you have completed on each candidate.
2. Make sure you have rated all the candidates on the scorecard.
3. If you have no A's, then restart the process at the second step: source.
4. If you have one A, decide to hire that person.
5. If you have multiple A's, then rank them and decide to hire the best A from among them.

## SELL: The Top Five Ways to Seal the Deal

Sell is the fourth and final step in the A Method for Hiring. Make sure that you address each of these following areas – fit, family, freedom, fortune and fun – until you get the person to sign on the dotted line.

- **Selling Fit.** Fit means showing the candidate how his or her goals, talents and values fit into your vision, strategy and culture, and it is by far the most important point to sell.
- **Selling Family.** Sometimes it takes more than asking about a would-be hire's family to seal the deal. Make sure the family is onboard.
- **Selling Freedom.** A Players want to operate without micromanagement, develop their own leadership styles and prove their own worth. Show them that both you and your organizational culture will support their need for freedom.
- **Selling Fortune.** Research shows that money is rarely the key motivator, and it can be a disincentive if it is too low or not linked to performance. Linking bonuses to scorecard attainment ensures that you only pay top compensation when you get A performance.
- **Selling Fun.** Fun is closely tied to corporate culture.

### Five Waves of Selling

There are five distinct phases of the hiring process that merit an increased selling effort on your part. The waves are:

1. When you source.
2. When you interview.
3. The time between your offer and the candidate's acceptance.
4. The time between the candidate's acceptance and his or her first day.
5. The new hire's first 100 days on the job.

Selling during the interview process typically happens toward the end of each interview. The question time at the end is when you put on your sales hat, assuming you still see potential in the candidate. Backing too far away at the point between offer and acceptance can feel a lot like a cold shoulder. Stay in touch with candidates on a regular basis. Show them how much they will fit with and contribute to the company.

Woo their families. Commit to giving them freedom and autonomy to do their job. Address financial concerns. And involve them in the fun your employees are already having.

Finally, the big day comes when your new A Player joins the company. But guess what? You still aren't done selling. People get buyer's remorse during these early months and are tempted to cut their losses. The good news is that all the work you have done up to this point — the scorecard, sourcing and selection process — should have given you enough insight to create a program to ensure the new hire's success.

## Your Greatest Opportunity

Hiring is a serious business. Many managers get themselves and their companies into big trouble by ignoring basic principles. Work with your HR people and employment legal team to gain a thorough understanding of all the issues to be aware of.

### Legal Traps to Avoid

Respect these four areas of caution to stay well within the law:

1. **Relevance.** Do not reject candidates for reasons that are not relevant to the job.
2. **Standardization of hiring process.** A standard process ensures fairness across all groups.
3. **Use nondiscretionary language during interviews and in written forms.** Never use derogatory language toward anyone.
4. **Avoid asking candidates illegal questions.** In the United States, these questions include anything to do with marital status, intention to have children, whether or not candidates are pregnant, when they were born, where they were born, medical condition (unless specifically relevant to the performance of the job), race or ethnicity, sexual orientation, or physical or mental handicaps (again, unless directly relevant to the performance of the job).

## Thoughts on Building Your Team

Over the years the thought of hiring a full team of A Players can make many managers nervous. There are even managers who express their fears explicitly: "Aren't A Players the athletes who don't work well together?" or "Isn't there an inherent conflict because they all want to be the star?"

A Players get the job done while embracing the culture because the scorecard ensures that they fit the culture. Collectively, they form an A team because they know how to pull the oars together. While the A Players you bring in need to be attuned to your culture, the culture needs

enough elasticity to embrace the A Players who can challenge you in areas where you need to be challenged. Seeing it all come together is truly a beautiful thing.

## Resources

- Get the FREE [SMARTtools for Leaders™](#) - tools, templates, and guides to help leaders hire talented teams and run them at full power.
  - Buy the book, [Who: The A Method for Hiring](#)
  - Hear the [Lodging Leaders Podcast interview with co-author Geoff Smart](#)
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## About the Author

Geoff Smart, Ph.D. is co-author of the New York Times bestselling book, *Who: The A Method for Hiring*, which is ranked #1 on Amazon.com on the topic of hiring talented teams. He's also Chairman & Founder of ghSMART, a leadership consulting firm with 12 offices in the U.S. and one in London whose mission is to use its expertise in business and human behavior to help CEOs, boards, and investors build valuable organizations.



Geoff earned a B.A. in Economics with Honors from Northwestern University, an M.A., and a Ph.D. in Psychology from Claremont Graduate University, where he was mentored by Peter F. Drucker.

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## About the Book Summary

The *Who: The A Method for Hiring* book summary was prepared by Jonathan Albano, CHO as a free download for the Lodging Leaders podcast.



The Lodging Leaders Podcast brings together the best and brightest minds of the hotel industry to share their stories, insights and actionable advice. Each week, LodgingMetrics.com founder and entrepreneur Jon Albano interviews inspiring hoteliers and leading industry professionals that have produced amazing results to help you maximize profits, scale your portfolio, protect your investment, and so much more. Let the collective intelligence of hospitality lead you to better results.

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