

MOCK INTERVIEW SCRIPT (1)

Actors

I – Interviewer, Wallace

M – Manager, Gromit

S – Switchboard, Mr. Wrong Trousers

Scene

Interviewer is calling plant manager from CEP. Interview has already been scheduled and interviewer is calling at designated date/time to run the interview. The background information (i.e. informational letter, endorsement letters, press cuttings) has already been emailed along with an email/telephone reminder of the interview.

PART I – GREETING AND INTERVIEWEE DETAILS SECTION

(Interviewer calls, phone rings and someone answers the phone)

S: Good morning. Mr. Trousers here, how may I help you?

I: Hello, my name is Wallace and I'm calling from the London School of Economics. May I be connected to Gromit please?

S: I'm sorry, she's in a meeting right now and can't come to the phone. Would you like her voicemail?

I: Actually I spoke with Gromit two days ago and I have a telephone interview with her at this time. Is there any way you can try to connect me please?

S: Let me see if she's free. Please hold the line.

M: Hello?

I: Hi Gromit, this is Wallace from the LSE ... I spoke with you a few days ago regarding our management project you mentioned that 3pm would be a good time to reach you.

M: Ok, I remember you now. I don't have much time but you can start with your questions and let's see how much we get done.

I: That's great, thanks again for your help with this. Did you receive my email with some background information and endorsement letters?

M: Yeah I think I got it yesterday and looked over it briefly.



I: Very good. If you don't have any questions, shall we begin? And of course, feel free to stop me at any point if you do think of something.

M: Ok, go ahead.

I: Great. Just to double-check Gromit, your position is Plant Manager?

M: That's right.

I: And how long have you been in this post?

M: Ten years.

I: And how long have you been with the company?

M: Twenty one years.

I: That's very impressive. And you're located in Kentucky, correct? Could you tell me what county that's in?

M: Right. We're in Hardin County in Kentucky.

I: And how many major competitors do you have?

M: Eight.

I: Ok great, now I'd like to go through some management questions.

PART II – MANAGEMENT SECTION

1. Introduction of modern (lean) manufacturing techniques

I: Can you briefly describe the production process for me.

M: Well we manufacture furniture, specifically desks using fiberboard. We receive the wood from the Appalachian mountains. We have a contract set up with suppliers who are always on call. And we receive the wood pre-cut so then there's an assembly stage, a finishing stage, a polishing stage.

I: What kinds of lean (modern) manufacturing techniques have you introduced?

M: We're vertically integrated; we have set up a pull flow system, and have cellular manufacturing. We've used an operations research team from the University of Kentucky



to optimize the delivery time. We've really just scratched the surface and we'll be doing in-house training next month but we're getting there – it's very good.

I: And how do you manage inventory levels?

M: We use JIT delivery. We've pretty lean, don't you think?

2. Rationale for lean manufacturing introduction

I: That's great and can you take me through the rationale to introduce these processes?

M: I'd say it was mainly competition. We have a really long history in the industry so we wanted to make sure that we maintained that in the future. We worked with University of Kentucky as I told you before and got a team of 5 people who designed a process to optimize our delivery times, because we saw that we needed to stay on top of the competition.

I: What factors would you say led to the adoption of these practices?

M: I've been here for 20 years and I have a personal interest in lean. I'm always reading books and trying to learn new techniques and it was just time to take action. We just needed to cut out the waste. In about 3 years we should definitely be at 100% with lean.

3. Process documentation

I: And how do problems typically get exposed and fixed?

M: Well we have a good atmosphere here so the people can approach the management. The managers log this information in workstations located around the factory, which are then updated on the network. This allows us to keep a continuously updated record of the problems and solutions that have arisen in the past. We then try to fix the problems and discuss them in the daily meetings with the shop floor.

I: Can you please talk me through the process for a recent problem?

M: Well on Monday, one of our machines on Line C broke and the line manager called me up and told me that the finishing varnish was being applied unevenly. We stopped the line and I called the engineer who came right away, an hour later it was fixed.

I: And what happens when the engineer is unavailable or out.



M: We always have 2 engineers working full-time and a backup from our sister plant in Bardstown so we never have that problem. We have the machines regularly checked up so this doesn't happen often.

I: Very good and do your staff ever suggest process improvements?

M: Yes, all the time. We believe that the managers should nurture an environment where they encourage ideas from the staff and to be honest we could be doing a bit better in this area, but we're moving in the right direction of staff communication in this regard.

4. Performance tracking

I: What kind of KPI's do you use for performance tracking?

M: We have lots of KPI's – the main ones are delivery on time, yield, inventory, sales, labor, material.

I: How frequently do you measure these KPI's?

M: We measure them weekly. We have a meeting with our team every Monday.

I: And who gets to see this KPI data?

M: Myself, the line managers, shift supervisors, the workers... everyone is aware of this information. Before we started the lean training, we met monthly and I don't think our employees were that involved. Now we have weekly meetings and we're aiming to meet twice a week to look at KPIs and to discuss any new issues

I: So if I walked through your factory, how could I tell how you were doing against your KPI's?

M: Sure. The information is posted on the cafeteria doors so everyone sees it – they all eat their lunch there and from what I can see, are always taking coffee breaks. We're working on posting information at the various workstations in the plant and everyone will be able to log in to the network and see the updated performance records. We should have this in place by next year.

5. Review of Performance

I: You mentioned that you review your KPIs weekly?

M: Well we meet at 9am on Mondays except this week we met at 10 because we had that problem on line C. So we have a meeting room where I, the line managers, shift



managers and VP of Operations meet. We discuss the KPI's, state of the company, any problems and changes for the new week.

I: Can you tell me about a recent meeting?

M: This week we were focusing on improving the efficiency of the assembly line. We had slipped from assembling 45 tables per day to 42, and were trying to figure out why this happened.

I: Who gets to see the results of this review?

M: The secretary takes minutes and posts the results of this meeting on the cafeteria doors, so all the staff go through the cafeteria and if they don't see it, they must be blind...

I: What is the follow-up plan?

M: Well I assume the line managers are talking to their workers. In the meeting, everyone is made aware of issues and we look for opportunities to improve. When we need to follow-up, we make a log of this and look at it the following week.

6. Performance Dialogue

I: During these meetings do you find that you generally have enough data?

M: Too much data! Sometimes we're swimming in the Excel charts and files that are produced. At least we have the data, I remember back in the last company I worked for, we barely had enough information to run a ten minute meeting once a week. Wallace, let me tell you something about management. Are you a student? Well, you get things one way or the other. It's not they teach you in them books. It's hard out there...

I: Well getting back to the meetings, what type of feedback occurs in them?

M: We're like one big family here – everyone feels comfortable talking in these meetings. We encourage our people to be open and approach us with any concerns. We even had Randy give everyone on the table advice on how to prevent a hernia when you do a job like this.

7. Consequence Management

I: Let's say you've agreed to a follow up plan at one of your meetings, what would happen if the plan weren't enacted?

M: We troubleshoot the problem in the next weekly meeting and try to come up with creative ideas until it's fixed.



I: Would you be able to give me an example on this?

M: Well, we had a problem with a supplier about six months ago; the shipments were coming late because the trucks were having problems getting through those Kentucky roads in the downpour season. So, we decided to use smaller trucks to increase timely delivery. Next week when we came back to discuss this, it turned out they were using their smaller trucks for other deliveries. By this stage, the weather started becoming less of a problem, so we took the losses in terms of the number of desks

I: Was there another plan created to deal with the same problem in the future?

M: Well, you can't predict the weather. I'm just hoping that we won't have this problem in the future. George Bush said global warming is crap, so I believe what he says, him and Jesus are the real bosses, you know?

I: Sure, but getting back to these meetings. How long is it between when a problem is identified to when it's solved?

M: Well that's a tough question. It really depends on the type of problem – something small can get fixed in an hour and if equipment breaks down, it really varies. Or if it's the weather, then it's even harder to predict.

I: How do you deal with repeated failures in a specific business segment?

M: We don't have repeated failures here. Our employees are well trained and if ever there were a repeated failure, we would sit down and talk with the individuals involved. Ultimately, managing is about people, I talk to my people and will fix and kind of failures that occur.

8. Type of targets

I: What types of targets are set for the company? Plant?

M: We have targets for growth, sales, profitability, efficiency and training – we're working on some targets dealing with waste stocks.

I: Tell me about your non-financial goals?

M: What are those?

I: Any goals you wouldn't consider related to finance or operations perhaps.

M: Well we keep an eye on safety issues. The employees have a safety training manual, but we're working on developing a more formal program.



9. Interconnection of targets

I: What is the motivation behind your goals?

M: We want to stay in business and stay competitive. Everything is being sent to China these days. (2 second pause) You're not Chinese, are you???

I: Great and how are these goals cascaded down to the individual workers?

M: After the weekly meetings, everyone in the plant is emailed the minutes so they should be reading them. Also we have annual meetings that everyone attends at headquarters where the CEO gives a speech. Annual goals are set then and communicated to all managers. Like I said before, the doors to the cafeteria are always open and seem to be used a lot, so they should see the targets there. When I talk to our staff, they know our targets.

10. Time horizon

I: What kind of time scale are you looking at with your targets?

M: We have annual goals and quarterly goals.

I: Which goals receive the most emphasis?

M: I would say the quarterly goals, we're more concerned with the short term goals at the moment, but we also keep our long term goal in mind of becoming lean and staying ahead of the game.

I: Are the long term and short term goals set independently?

M: No, the long term goals are broken down into the short term goals. It's all linked.

I: Could you give me an example?

M: Well with sales, we want to increase sales by 8% per year. In order to do this we try to increase our sales by about 8% during the educational desk purchasing season and maintain our sales during all other time periods. That should get us to where we want to go.

I: Could you meet all your short term goals but miss your long term goals?

M: Yes I suppose that could happen, but in reality it's not likely to happen.



11. Goals are stretching

I: How tough are your targets?

M: They're very difficult, and I feel very strained. After work I just look forward to hopping in my F-150 and getting home to a cold Miller. Is it Miller time in England, yet?

I: Do you feel pushed by your targets?

M: Yes, let's just say that the boss really makes you work.

I: On average, how often would you say that you meet your targets?

M: Maybe 60% of the time. Sometimes slightly higher.

I: Do you feel that on targets all groups receive the same degree of difficulty?

M: Well it's hard to compare across departments such as operations and sales/marketing.

I: And in your factory, do you think the goals are equally difficult for everyone?

M: To be honest, I would have to say no. We have a couple of lines which are more mechanized due to the shift in lean and these workers have less work due to the automation. But we're in a transition period, you have to understand.

12. Clarity of Goals

I: If I asked your staff directly about individual targets, what would they tell me?

M: They would tell you about their quarterly targets.

I: Does anyone complain that the targets are too complex?

M: Nobody has ever said anything to me. We're a very friendly company so if anyone had complaints, I'm sure they would come and talk to me. We'll put up boards that will be color coded by line so that every operator knows their targets for the day.

I: How do people know about their own performance compared to other people's performance?

M: The managers can compare worker performance but we don't make this public to the shop floor worker. It would create problems and jealousy, especially the women. You know how they can get...



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13. Instilling a talent mindset

- I:** Now I would like to ask you some questions about people management at your plant. Can you please tell me how senior managers show that attracting and developing talent is a top priority?
- M:** We talk about it when we need to hire a replacement, sure...
- I:** Do senior managers get any rewards for bringing in and keeping talented people in the company?
- M:** No but I think the managers know how important it is to hire good people. I guess, it's a topic that isn't formally brought up but, it's understood by all. You need to have some talented people in your company otherwise you're down the river without a paddle.

14. Building a high performance culture

- I:** How does your appraisal system work? Tell me about the most recent round.
- M:** The appraisals are yearly and for the managers only and it's based on a 1-5 scale matrix. We look at their performance on their targets, timeliness and then get a general sense of how their teams have performed. We also look at any complaints filed against by the shop floor. In general, everyone does quite well though.
- I:** How does the bonus system work?
- M:** The managers get an annual bonus of \$5000 at the end of the year if they perform well on their appraisal.
- I:** Are there any non-financial rewards for top-performers?
- M:** We have an annual Christmas party with lots of booze, does that count? I give my workers a pat on the back. Billy Bob was in the hospital last year and his son was graduating high school so we arranged for the company to pool money and raise about \$2,000 to send his son to community college. That's southern hospitality for ya.

MANAGERS BONUS

- I:** What is your bonus as a percentage of salary?
- M:** I'd say, 10 percent.
- I:** And if you were to break this down into your individual performance, team performance and company performance?
- M:** Mmmm... let me think, about 70 percent on individual performance and 30 on team performance.

15. Making room for talent

- I:** Ok, if you had a worker who could not do his job, what would you do? Could you give me a recent example?



M: We have a standard 3 step policy. First time around we sit with them and discuss the problem and try to come up with solutions. Second time it's a verbal warning that's kept on file and the final step is dismissal. Last month I had a guy who was underperforming; I brought him into my office and turned out his kid was in the hospital. We discussed a plan whereby he could have more flexible working hours for a month until his kid came home.

I: **How long would underperformance be tolerated?**

M: That depends, maybe on average 3-5 months.

I: **Do you find workers who lead a sort of charmed life? Do some individuals always just manage to avoid being fired/fixed?**

M: No. Because of our 3 step process, people are either reformed or they get the boot.

16. Developing talent

I: **Tell me about your promotion system please.**

M: We don't have too many openings but we're working on that. Once we get the lean in place, we're planning on starting contracts with some more offices in the area, so we'll need more lines. That means some people who deserve to move up will be able to.

I: **What about poor performers? What happens with them? Are there any examples you can think of?**

M: Poor performers don't get promoted. We give them a warning (this is logged by HR) and watch them for a while and look for any signs of improvements. After about six months, we review their file again.

I: **How would you identify and develop your star performers?**

M: When we see someone with a lot of potential, we try to work closely with them to guide them. If they want to get a degree, we pay up to 75% of their tuition cost and allow them to work while they study at night.

I: **So if two people joined the company 5 years ago, and one was much better than the other, would he/she be promoted faster?**

M: Given there was room for growth, the stronger performer would be promoted.

17. Creating a distinctive employee value

I: **What makes it distinctive to work at your company as opposed to your competitors?**

M: Well it's a small family run company. We have a lot of history; we've been around for 75 years.

I: **If you were trying to sell your firm to me, how would you do this?**

M: We have a rich heritage, an open/friendly family atmosphere. The benefits package is competitive. I really don't have any complaints about the atmosphere, so I think everyone is happy.



18. Retaining talent

I: Great and the last management related question is: If you had a star performer who wanted to leave, what would the company do?

M: In this instance, everyone has an exit interview with HR where they discuss their reasons for leaving. We try to see if we can help keep them in any way.

I: Could you give me an example of a star performer being persuaded to stay after wanting to leave?

M: Not really. But we had a shop floor worker last year who wanted to leave for another company. We tried to offer him a promotion and better benefits package because he was really good but we just couldn't match the growth opportunities – our company just isn't that big.

I: Thanks very much. Now I would like to switch over to some quick organizational questions. This shouldn't take more than 10 minutes, thanks.

M: I don't have much time, please hurry up. You said this would only take 30 minutes.

I: I do apologise – I will be as quick as possible and thank you again for your help.

PART III – ORGANIZATION SECTION

I: How many people are there in the firm?

M: About 400.

I: Great. Let's talk quickly about firm hierarchy. Who does the shop floor worker report to?

M: The line manager.

I: And who does the line manager report to?

M: The shift supervisor.

I: And the shift supervisor?

M: Me (plant manager)

I: And who do you report to?

M: The VP of Operations

I: And does he report to the CEO.

M: No, the VP of the company.

I: Ok, and then the CEO.

M: Yes, he reports to the CEO up in Cincinnati.

I: Great, thank you for that. So there are 5 levels between the CEO and shop floor.

M: Yes.



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I: Have these levels changed in the last 3 years?

M: Yes, we used to have an assistant Plant Manager but he was fired and they decided not to keep the position then. That's why I'm so busy here and how much longer is this going to take??

I: Just a few more short questions, thanks a lot. Ok, just to double check – there are 2 levels between you and the shop floor?

M: Yes, I just told you that a second ago.

I: And you mentioned that there are 400 people in the company. How many people are there in your plant?

M: 350

I: How many people directly report to you Gromit?

M: 8 Line managers, 2 Shift supervisors and 2 engineers.

I: Ok, that's 12 people. And how much do the managers decide how tasks are allocated across workers in their teams?

M: It's all handled by management.

I: Who decides the pace of work on the shop floor?

M: Also the managers.

(Scene: manager getting irritated on phone and doesn't seem to have more time).

I: Great, just a few more questions – these are very short. In terms of hiring, if you want to hire a full time shop floor worker, what sort of agreement do you need from CHQ?

M: I don't need an agreement, it's up to me who to hire.

I: And what is the largest capital investment your plant can make without prior authorization from CHQ?

M: No more than \$5000.

I: What about decisions taken on new product development? Is that done at CHQ or in the plant?

M: Headquarters does that. We just make the desks.

I: How much of the sales and marketing is carried out in the plant?

M: Sales and marketing departments are at headquarters, they work from there only.

I: How much independence do you have in running your plant?

M: They give me a good amount of freedom but major decision I have to discuss with Bob, VP Operations.

I: And sorry, where is CHQ located?

M: About 2 hours north of here in Ohio.



- I:** How many production sites are there in total?
- M: Just us.
- I:** And what percentage of the production is outsourced?
- M: About 10 percent.
- I:** Just a couple of questions regarding ownership. Who owns the firm?
- M: Mr. White, the son of the founder. Like I said, it's a family business.
- I:** How many family members are working in management positions in the firm?
- M: Well, you've got the CEO, the VP and myself. The VP of Operations was a cousin of the owner but he's in jail these days. Something about tax evasion...guy thought he was too smart but he got caught. Took away his Cadillac, his house, his boat...
- I:** When CEO control is passed through the family, is it given to the eldest son?
- M: That's right. Mr. White gave it to his eldest son Bill.
- I:** Ok great, I'm sorry to have gone over my time. I'm on the last part here and just a couple HR questions and then we're finished.
- M: I have to be in a meeting in 2 minutes.
- I:** What percent of the employees are managers?
- M: Maybe 5 percent if you include sales and marketing.
- I:** And what the percentage of managers who have a college degree?
- M: About half.
- I:** Is that the same also for non-managers and college degrees?
- M: No, most of them don't have college degrees – they don't need 'em for this sort of job. Maybe 10 percent have a BA.
- I:** And what percent of employees have left your plant in the last 12 months.
- M: Just one guy.
- I:** And do you have union members?
- M: No, thank God.
- I:** Roughly how many times bigger is the CEO's salary than a shop floor worker? Two times? Ten times?
- M: About five times.
- I:** Ok final question here, thanks again for waiting. Ignoring yourself, how well managed do you think the rest of the company is on a 1-10 scale? 1 being poor and 10 being very high.
- M: 8
- I:** And how about in terms of operations management?



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M: 7, we're still working on becoming lean.

I: And finally, what about people management.

M: 9, we treat our people really well, like one big family.

I: Excellent. Thank you so much Gromit, you've been very helpful. May I email you a copy of this report when it's finished in a few months?

M: Sure, that would be good.

I: Ok, I'll do that. Thanks again for your time and have a nice day.

M: Ok, bye now.