
*The Hiring Interview at Wannabee Major League University**

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Time: The Future

Jones*: An employment officer

Smith*: A faculty candidate

*Names changed for legal purposes.

J: Ah, you must be Mr. Smith. Come in.

S: Thank you.

J: The president wants you hired. The provost has been leaning on me to push your materials through ASAP. The deans and some chairs have been fussing as well. They can have all the wishes in the world, but all applicants have to be screened in my quantitative system. I developed it after learning about the admissions system at University of _____. You might remember it and Supreme Court action right after the turn of the century. A true inspiration. In order to qualify for hire, you must surpass a threshold value of 300 points.

S: I understand. Tell me what you need to know.

J: Well, before even starting, we have a major problem. How are we supposed to find a suitable department for you? I'm not entirely inflexible. We can bend the rules a bit and arrange a joint appointment between 2 consenting departments. But a whole slew of them want you. For

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example, Nuclear Engineering, Metallurgy, Linguistics, Medicine, Anthropology, Astronomy, Biophysics, and Chemistry. And that's just to name a few. Numerically, an appointment in a second department involves a 10-point deduction due to extra paperwork. That deduction for a dozen extra departments puts you over 100 points in the hole. You better think about where you want to be placed.

S: I can imagine that I must be making circumstances awkward for you. But I also must submit that I have solid competency in all these areas, and would regret having to confine my activities to disciplines within just one or 2 departments.

J: Well, I certainly find that just a tiny bit hard to swallow. We can scarcely find people who are competent in a single field. But here you go, claiming to be an expert in a dozen areas. Sometimes the provost is pretty sharp; but you even fooled her. This is rather ridiculous.

S: Perhaps you need to understand that our normal lifespan is equivalent to approximately 780 of your Earth years. With our preventative health programs and discoveries of cures for major illnesses, we have managed to stretch that average span to substantially over 900 of your years. So even though there might be enormous amounts of information to learn in a single topic, there is time to be on the forefront of a field and make solid contributions. In a number of instances I came to feel that I had done what I could. When my interests shifted, I picked up an additional terminal degree and worked in that other field doing what you would call breakthrough, cutting-edge research.

J: Well (clearing throat and rolling eyes skyward), let's just let that matter rest for now. Turning to other matters, I notice on your resume that the only place of prior employment that you are listing is as a dishwasher for one of the local restaurants. And that for only 2 weeks. People who move here from highly prestigious positions get 50 points. Obviously, this prior employment does not qualify

for any points. If you have such “splendid” expertise and qualifications, why would you do that type of work? Can you explain?

S: Certainly. I needed to learn your language, and knew that a job where there was active interchange with people from a variety of social strata would best equip me for effective communication.

J: Hmm. Then why for only 2 weeks?

S: Because that was more than sufficient time for me to master your language and also to prepare for and pass the citizenship exam. I spent evenings in your libraries learning the levels of development in your various disciplines. The encyclopedias helped me place many matters into historical and social contexts.

J: 2 weeks, huh? Well, moving along, I also notice that you have a big gap in your scholarly output. You list hundreds of publications, scores of books, and thousands of presentations at a variety of professional organizations (all of which I’ve never heard of, by the way). Then there is absolutely nothing following this “stellar record” of enormous productivity. The maximum of 100 points available for exceptional scholarship is clearly in jeopardy, assuming that your record is not a fabrication.

S: That hiatus is easily explained. I had been holding an academic position for several decades before deciding to relocate.

J: Decades? What do you mean by relocation?

S: We did have a comfortable life. But we saw some political forces looming on the horizon that were highly disconcerting. We felt that society was going to become intolerable for us in about 1700 of your years, so a few families pooled their resources and searched for another place to live. In short, we emigrated.

J: But the gap is in decades.

S: True. Actually, we have been in suspended animation for approximately 8,000 of your Earth years. Fortunately,

because we were traveling at near-light speed, I estimate that in real time, expressed in your units, I have had only a 90-year absence from my writing and researching activities.

J: Are you actually expecting me to believe, sir, that you come from some distant planet? That your “people” had forms of medical and physical technology that are far in advance from our own here on Earth?

S: Precisely. It is exactly that knowledge, in a variety of disciplines, that I am able to bring to your university.

J: Well, that is neither here nor there. I must see compelling evidence in order to declare you qualified for hire. We still have this very suspicious lapse in output. No points. Let’s turn to other information that we need. What about teaching effectiveness? I failed to find student evaluations in your packet, and we’re talking about another 100 possible points.

S: I indeed did have decades of teaching experience. But we never collected such information.

J: Impossible!

S: It is true. All of our academic institutions operated under the assumption that if a person was qualified for hiring, then that individual would function in a responsible fashion and thus would self-regulate, ensuring that motivated students indeed would learn.

J: Ridiculous. How could there be no monitoring, no supervision?

S: Because we were treated like adults ... like professionals.

J: Perhaps. But the absence of student evaluation data is a serious deficiency, forcing me to score you at another zero. So far, the numbers don’t look very promising, I must admit. Let’s look elsewhere. Might you be handicapped in some way? I notice that you are altitudinally challenged.

S: I’m what?

J: Elevationally restrained. Have delimited stature? Oh, to be crude: You are short. Do you have a disability? If so, I

can put a big 70 points in your favor.

S: Not at all. All my people are short; our home planet had 3.7 times the gravity of Earth.

J: Hey, you had mentioned some hard times. Were you indeed discriminated against? Downtrodden? If you are an oppressed minority, you could gain as many as 500 points toward your hiring quotient. Is this a possibility?

S: Actually, it could be if you were to go by our predictive model. We actually escaped before being subjected to unpleasant treatment.

J: No evidence for discrimination. How about just plain race, irrespective of discrimination?

S: There's certainly no question that our race is different from any of the races on Earth. I could easily cite 84 gross differences in anatomy between us and any of Earth's racial groups. In any case, by sheer numbers we are clearly the tiniest racial minority on the entire planet.

J: Maybe so. But your race, whatever it is, is does not appear on my list of government-recognized minorities. Our commitment to affirmative action and for achieving diversity is dictated by that list of duly under-represented minorities. I do see that you are a "person of color." But "blue" is not on the approved list.

S: I really have to wonder about how that list was composed. My extensive readings indicate that the list was meant to appease individuals who were able to prompt reactions of shame and guilt while also posing a menace to the majority; groups who could whine about persecution, and groups that cited race as an excuse for failing to succeed in "mainstream" society.

J: My goodness, what an example of negative and cynical thinking. These oppressed groups are in dire need of bootstrapping.

S: How long ago did the oppression occur, and how many generations have "bootstrapping" programs been in effect?

J: That is immaterial. We're talking about empowerment,

here. Self-esteem.

S: In any case, those 2 weeks that I spent becoming a citizen, learning your language, acquainting myself with your history and culture, and assimilating to your society are actually working against me.

J: True enough. No points.

S: How counterintuitive and absurd that those steps, which seemed sensible if not necessary, would be an impediment. I have no basis whereby anyone on your planet could feel guilt for my situation. As for threat, I could easily annihilate all life and eradicate your entire planet.

J: Hey, you sound like a terrorist!

S: Relax. My moral constitution would never allow me to take such steps.

J: So you say. Well, the only other category is community service; 30 possible points. If you've only been on our planet for 2 weeks, spending the day washing dishes and scouring the library at other hours, you could not have served on any boards, flipped pancakes at fund-raisers, or pulled weeds on roadsides.

S: That's true enough. So it looks as though I've done what could be described euphemistically as "striking out." Clearly, I'll never come anywhere near the 300 points required for being hired.

J: Yeah. You catch on quick. I'll compose memos and send them in triplicate to the president, provost, deans, and relevant department chairs.

Epilogue

So ended the hiring interview. It is of interest that one month later, a new building suddenly appeared on the edge of the Wannabee Major League University campus, outfitted completely with the best available equipment, staff, and research tools. This institute was an interdisciplinary think-tank, supported by lavish funding for research, with Smith as director. Jones was no longer to

be found on campus, but instead was the director and sole employee at an institute in a new building that suddenly appeared near a coffee plantation in Brazil, which offered a seemingly limitless supply of beans to count. Both were content and felt that their lives were productive.