

‘Tips & Tricks: Interviewing like a Sales Leader’

February 4th, 2025

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Today's Guest Speaker

/02

Welcome!

Today's Guest Speaker:

Stephen Milton, Director of Commercial Sales,
North America at Datadog



Stephen has worked at Datadog for over 7 years, rising through the ranks to his current position, as a manager of 40 staff.

Today's Host:

Tyler Kosanda, Sales Recruiter at Datadog &
Ambassador for The Launch Collective



Tyler has worked at Datadog for almost 5 years, supporting GTM hiring efforts across North America.

Q: How have you evolved your interview technique over the years?

- Number one mistake he used to make was **leading the witness**: at a first stage, if he liked how someone sounded, they were saying what he wanted to hear etc. he would give them breaks in questions / answers that maybe didn't align with the company's DNA profile because of that first impression and because he wanted them to succeed in the process. This is a bad mistake to make as it circumvents the whole reason why we have fair interview processes and can lead to bad hires.
- Second mistake would be **falling for the façade of the presentation of the candidate** – when you get someone in a room F2F, you are getting 150% of what that person will give you day to day. If you fall for the façade, you are falling for their sale.
- At the beginning you don't know your blind spots until you get some practice.

Q: What have you seen in an interview that translated differently once hired?

- This can show up in every area if questions aren't asked correctly.
- E.g. if you ask a surface level question (e.g. are you a gritty person?) you won't know much about that person based on the answer they give to that question.
- It is always better to **ask a question they didn't prepare for** that asks for a real-life situation, where they maybe worked with others in a difficult situation etc., that actually informs you of their grittiness by virtue of that story.

Q: What attributes do you look for when interviewing?

- These should be **specific to your company** – you need to connect with your HM and **align on DNA traits and skillsets** you are hiring for.
- At Datadog, they look for the below traits:
 - High EQ
 - High IQ
 - Integrity and character
 - Drive (gritty, goal orientated, growth mindset)
 - Comfortable in challenging situations - and a challenger themselves
 - Discipline
 - Humility
 - Coachability
- In terms of skills, they would be looking for evidence of high performance, pipeline generation experience, skills specific to Datadog systems / processes etc.

Q: What's your definition of Grit and how do you assess it?

- Grit is so buzzy in the SaaS space! Every candidate claims to have it, every company is looking for it.
- Example question: Walk me through a time there was someone you were competing against someone, and they were ahead of you, but you out-worked them to beat them.
- Looking for specific real-life stories will always be the best way to assess grit.
- Analyze their profile also – were they an athlete in college? Have they demonstrated promotions within a company, multiple times?
- Ask the person to talk to you about grit, how they self-identify with it, what experiences do they have in their life (personal or professional)?

Q: How do you understand fully why someone has left / looking to leave a company?

- Hoppiness can clearly be a red / yellow flag – you need to understand what were they expecting to get out of that role v how it played out.
- Ask them to walk through their CV bottom up – why they took that job, what they learnt, how they performed, why did they leave. All the way to now why do they want to leave and join you.
- Ask follow up questions throughout to get a better picture of this career journey – are there any patterns to be aware of?
- Is this person running from something or running to something?
- Running away from something can of course be a yellow flag – but its not always black and white, more of a scale.
- The question to resolve from the CV review should be why are they looking to leave (what is unfulfilled for them at their current role?) and why do they specifically want to join your company?

Q: How do you assess for coachability?

- Example question – When was the last time you sought someone out for mentorship? Why did you do that? What did you learn? What inspired you about that person? Are you still in touch?
- Example question: If I asked the person who sits next to you / your current manager, what are you known for? What are your strengths? What are your improvement areas?
- Try to ask a question someone won't have prepared for.
- If you have multiple opportunities to speak to someone during a process, give them some feedback / a specific instruction to action in between interview stages (e.g., ask them to learn more about the company / product) – check this has been actioned in the next stage interview. If this falls flat, they're not demonstrating coachability.

Q: Where do you start in assessing quota attainment?

- Example question – What was your attainment in the last 12 months?
- **Dig deeper** beneath the percentage they give (especially if answer 100%) – what did they do to hit that figure?
- **Understand their stack ranking** and competitive situation (e.g. if got 140% but 6th out of 10 sellers could be less impressive than someone who got 105% but was 2nd).
- **Contextualize and breakdown all the figures given.**
- **Headline question:** What was your quota attainment in in FY24?
- **Followed by probes** such as: How do you calculate attainment in your current role? How much did you close? What else did you get attainment for?
- **Use this information to assess** - do they know the detail? Is it adding up? Do they understand their path to success and how to reverse engineer?

Q: How do you decide whether to progress someone who has underperformed?

- People who have a fixed mindset will get defensive about discussing this – whereas **people with a growth mindset will be open** to discussing, analyzing, explaining the situation.
- Get people to break down the underperformance into the quarters – were there peaks and troughs?
- Example question: Take me back to Q1, knowing what you do now, what would you do differently? **Look for detail** in this answer.
- Assess: Have they reflected on this under-performance? Have they learnt from it? Are they better for this experience and challenge? Will they take this with them into their next role to help them succeed.
- Red flags: Surface level analysis, e.g. “I should have worked harder” or assigning blame to e.g. their SDR or the accounts / territory they had.