

Leadership and Management (Executive Level)

These interview questions have been compiled to explore the ability to lead business units and strategic initiatives for successful business results.

Interview Questions

Warm Up

- Briefly summarize your background with emphasis on the experiences and qualifications most relevant to this position -- should take no more than 3-5 minutes.
- Why are you interested in this position at this point in your career?

Leadership/Vision:

- When you examine your career, give us an example in which you have demonstrated strong leadership skills and vision. Give an example of leading change in an organization.
- Provide an example where you have made the wrong strategic decision. What have you learned from that experience that could potentially benefit this business unit/our coop?
- Where do you see your greatest learning curve in managing an organization like this business unit/coop? How would you approach it?
- Most organizational decision-making has a risk/reward ratio. Please tell us about a specific instance which demonstrates a high degree of risk in your decision-making and describe how your organization was impacted as a result.
- What approach would you use to overcome any learning curve you may experience with regards to our organization or industry? Describe a time you used that approach in the past and what you learned from it.
- Can you share an example of when you have successfully enhanced the reputation or raised the profile of an organization that you lead?

Relationship Building:

- Tell me how you would go about establishing yourself in the Executive Director role, building effective working relationships, partnering with [colleagues, management team, board, CEO] and creating an effective leadership approach for the team.
- Our cooperative has a broad and diverse membership and constituency. Can you give me specific examples of where you had to manage a diverse range of stakeholders, especially in situations where they did not agree? What did you do to manage those relationships to a successful outcome?
- Can you provide a few examples of how you sustain connection with other people in your organization, industry and profession?

Strategy:

- Describe your experience developing and implementing a strategic plan for an organization. What have you learned from that experience that could potentially benefit this business unit/our coop?
- Can you provide an example of a time where you lead the development of a strategy for an organization or new initiative? How did you go about it? What stakeholders did you involve and why did you involve them? What pitfalls did you encounter during the process and what was the outcome?
- Tell me about a time when you had to translate the organization's vision into a practical action plan. What steps did you take? What information did you consider?
- Please describe your experience leading a significant change initiative for your organization or team.
- Implementing change is always a challenge. Tell me about a time when you were unable to put in place an important organizational system (control, compensation, communication, etc.) to support a critical new directive. What happened? What difficulties resulted?
- Have you led the business case for a new product, service offering or program? What results did you achieve?
- Tell me about a time when you had to develop an alternative course of action to address a problem or capitalize on an opportunity. What decision criteria did you use to determine your course of action?
- How have you determined an appropriate course of action for achieving a long-range organizational goal? Give me a specific example. What options did you consider? Were your actions successful?
- What do you believe are the most critical measures our organization must take to ensure we remain highly relevant and financially viable?
- Describe your experience building strategic partnerships or alliances. Describe an alliance you forged that had the greatest impact on your ability to advance the goals of an organization.
- Describe your experience working with organizations that share a common agenda or members.

Board Management (for CEO or Sr. Executives):

- Describe your experiences working with a Board.
- What are three descriptors that the majority of a board you have worked with would use to describe the impact you have had on their organization?
- How would you leverage our cooperative's board in development of our strategic plan?
- Give me an example of how you've built consensus around a tough, divisive issue.
- How would you see your role vis-à-vis that of our cooperative's board?

Staff Management Engagement:

- How would your staff describe your management style? Why would they say that? Can you provide examples?
- How have you fostered a culture of teamwork and collaboration and effectively set goals for the teams you have managed?
- How have you attracted and recruited top talent?
- How have you retained top talent?
- What feedback would we get from your team members if we asked them about you as a leader? What would they cite as your strengths? What is one thing they would say that you could do to be even more effective?
- Please describe a time in which you've had to manage disparate teams and how you were able to increase effective collaboration amongst the teams.
- When as a leader have you inherited an existing team? Take me through your approach to integrating with, assessing and ultimately enhancing the performance of that team.
- What has been your most challenging management situation and how did you handle it? What would you do differently if you were presented with the same situation today?
- Describe how you have coached an underperforming team member. What was the result?
- If you were to hire one of the most important positions that best complements you, what would it be?
- Please give us some examples of how you have succeeded in motivating employees. Tell us of an occasion when you did not succeed. What did you learn from this experience?
- Describe a time when you have coached someone and helped them with an area of development. How would they describe the impact you had?
- Where have you had to make tough or unpopular decisions; how did you manage the situation? Can you give an example of where you tackled a major change initiative and/or conflict that you have had to manage? How did you manage the various constituents through the change effort?

Experience:

- What experiences have you had in your career that have prepared you for the leadership of this business unit/coop? What is it about the challenge of this opportunity that makes this job of interest to you?
- What do you consider your most significant management accomplishments?
- Give me an example of a time when you.....
- When you look over your career, what are three key areas where you think you have the greatest amount of skills and experience?

- Even though we try to be expert in our area of work, it's impossible to know and understand everything. Tell me about an aspect of your profession that you are still trying to master.
- We all make mistakes, even in our field of expertise. Give me an example of a mistake or poor decision and how you managed the outcome.
- Can you speak about your experience in managing a budget and the overall financials of an organization?
- Recognizing that this position is multi-faceted and multi-dimensional, and that no one can do everything perfectly, in what area(s) are you going to need the most support from the [management team, executive team, colleagues, the Board]? What would your staff say are your strengths and shortcomings?