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LEADERSHIP & BUSINESS PODCAST

EPISODE 90: ALICE DAVISON – THE JOB INTERVIEW

Ken White

From the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. This is Leadership & Business. The weekly podcast that brings you the latest and best thinking from today's business leaders from across the world. We share the strategies, tactics, and information that can make you a more effective leader, communicator, and professional. I'm your host Ken White. Thanks for listening. The summer, for many the summer months are dedicated to a job search, especially those who recently graduated from college. But for both rookies and experienced professionals, the job interview is a challenging and stressful part of the equation. Seems as though each interview is somewhat different from the one before. So what's the best way to prepare, and what do employers expect from candidates before and during the interview? Alice Davison has some great insight and experience when it comes to interviewing. She's Vice President, Global Business Services at the Capital Group in New York City. Where she manages global recruiting for investment roles in equity and fixed-income groups. She's had several roles in human resources throughout her career. Davison visited William & Mary for the Women's Leadership Summit and Stock Pitch Competition. During the break in the day, she joined us to share interesting and helpful advice, especially for the young professional, on the qualities employers seek and their expectations for the job interview. Here's our conversation with the Capital Group's Alice Davison.

Ken White

Alice, thank you for being here. So you're at the Capital Group, and you have been on the HR side most of your career, really, and so the young women you're going to be seeing today will be out there seeking jobs. So in terms of what you do from an HR standpoint. What's your role? What do you do?

Alice Davison

So I do a narrow. I hope I do it deeply and well. I do a really narrow role on our talent acquisition side where I manage global recruiting for our investment groups and a focus specifically on our investment analysts and the occasional portfolio manager. Most of our recruiting, and it's a small number of folks every year, is focused at the analyst level. Our analysts are really the primary folks who do the investment research and develop and

communicate the conviction and the model at Capital that all analysts manage money. So they are both analysts and investors, and that's the group that I focus on.

Ken White

What type of qualities, abilities, and talents are you looking for in the role of an analyst? For a young person who wants to do that or someone early in their career. What should they be focusing on?

Alice Davison

Cool thing about Capital is I think we all sort of have the things that we focus on, and there's a fair amount of overlap. Different people will look at some different things. You have to be passionate about wanting to do this. I don't do it.

Ken White

Right, right.

Alice Davison

My colleagues do it. It's really fun and really exciting. It's a ton of hard work. You're wrong a lot. You're wrong in ways that are public, and that can be costly. And so if you're going to do something that's interesting and hard and challenging and you're going to do it well over a long period of time, it's really important to like what you do. So I think early on, we look for folks who can demonstrate passion. It doesn't have to be because, again, there are a lot of people who've never done this. And there are a lot of women who've never done this. And so you look for passion, and it might be that somebody has done this or been exposed to it, and he or she can demonstrate and articulate passion around investing and looking at companies and stocks or bonds specifically, but it might very well be the case for somebody just starting out that they haven't done that yet. And so you'd look for passion in other areas. Are there examples where somebody has been excellent? Feel like our best candidates come out of an interview with somebody. These are high-bar people our folks are great. The interviewers are fabulous, and they'll say wow, I learned something from Susie or Fred or whomever so. So be passionate, be deep, and have some excellence, and sometimes that's around investing, and sometimes it's in other areas.

Ken White

Yeah.

Alice Davison

I think we look for folks who are analytical, and sometimes that's shorthand for, you know, sort of being quantitative. But I think broadly speaking, being an analytical not just being

numerate and quantitative, but this element of can you develop insights. Can you think about things in ways that other people might not? And based on that, can you develop insights and conclusions that might be different or nonconsensus related to that? It is interesting, and I think sometimes tougher for people who've been sort of on the path, so to speak, to be pushed to have sort of outlier ideas. Sometimes we ask folks sort of what in the world they see that sort of a consensus that they disagree with. And it's hard, you know, especially early on where so much is around, you know, are you sort of are you fitting in or are you part of the crowd just sort of say you know without judging what the example is where is something where you have an outlier view. So that ability or on the analytical piece, and I don't want to underestimate the importance of being able to do the numbers, the models,

Ken White

Sure.

Alice Davison

the quantitative piece, but the sort of more well-roundedness on the analytical piece differentiated insight is important. Our folks have to be commercial, so you this is not an academic exercise. It's not a research project. The end has to be an investment conclusion. So ideally, and people, especially early folks, you come in, you do an internship, you see how to bridge that gap, but ultimately you want to say, what does this how can I make money with this insight? What do I that ability, I think, and maybe that's a little more refined or nuanced down the road, but that's really important. You have to be able to communicate in a variety of different settings in a way that is straightforward and understandable, and succinct. And so I think, you know, at the end of the day, it's about developing and articulating an insightful conclusion helping people understand how this will help make money for clients and shareholders. Communicating that conviction in a relatively straightforward way across a variety of audiences. And you have to be self-aware because the job doesn't end there. You need to live with your recommendations. You need to understand what you've done well or less well and learn from that and do things differently. You need to communicate with people when things are going well. So it's a strong passion, well-rounded analytical skills, a commercial instinct, a straightforward way of developing and communicating conviction, and a level of self-awareness to sort of understand, react both on the upside and when things don't work well.

Ken White

Yeah.

Alice Davison

And for us, you have to be nice.

Ken White

That's always good.

Alice Davison

This is a place where you work with a lot of people. If you're good and you stay here, and that's our hope. Boy, it's a long life if people aren't open, respectful, nice to each other. A ton of disagreement. You want to see people who can take different sides of an argument. But at the end of the day, you want to work with people who are going to be supportive and open.

Ken White

Yeah, and respectful.

Alice Davison

And respectful.

Ken White

You mentioned something early on you know you're going to fail a lot. You can be wrong a lot, and it might be public. That takes some kind of resilience to be able to do that. How do you learn that? Because coming out of a grad program or out of school, you may not. People may not have that quality.

Alice Davison

Yeah, and I think some of it is we'd like to see the quality, and we'd like you know you get a lot when you talk to people. Interestingly I think you're right. I think some people, remarkably, nothing has ever wrong. In other cases people you will push people, and you'll hear about something that wasn't a first choice, or I think some of it is that people are very reluctant to talk about. You know, you sort of cast this lens in the rearview mirror, and everything seems perfectly scripted, perfectly as planned.

Ken White

Yeah.

Alice Davison

You can create this whole narrative. When you really push people, it's actually really interesting to learn about why you stopped playing piano or why you thought you were going to. You know, you were obviously pre-med when you came to school, and something changed, and then you can have a whole cool narrative around how you found something different, but sometimes you pull on that, and you hear that actually, it wasn't what the person wanted to do. We give people opportunities we hope to be honest and

authentic, and in talking about that, to hear them talk through times where they've, you know, as they say, sort of skin their knees and gotten up and bounce back, but I think you're on to something there's a lot of talk you hear in the schools about grit and resilience and there's an element of that that can be very important and positive.

Ken White

Yeah.

Alice Davison

We hope that people will be authentic as they talk about that.

Ken White

We'll continue our conversation with Alice Davison of the Capital Group in just a minute. Leadership & Business is brought to you by the Center for Corporate Education at the College of William & Mary's Raymond A. Mason School of Business. The Center for Corporate Education is once again offering its popular certificate in business management program in October. It's a five-day program designed for the working professional who wants a cross-functional understanding of business. Each day is devoted to one business-related topic, including communication, operational effectiveness, strategy, managerial accounting, and leadership. The five core topics taught in our highly ranked MBA program. To learn more about the certificate in business management, visit wmleadership.com. Now back to our conversation with Alice Davison, Vice President, Global Business Services at the Capital Group.

Ken White

I remember earlier my career, I was interviewing for a job, and one of the leaders said to me have you ever been fired. I said no, I haven't. And he said oh, that's disappointing. And that just took me by such a surprise at that stage in my career. I just looked at him, and he smiled. Hey, I want to see how you bounce back. And I thought, well, that makes all the sense in the world, but when you're younger, you don't necessarily quite, you know, quite get that.

Alice Davison

Yes. And we again the notion is look, if you've never failed, you're up, and chances are when it's your turn. It would be really nice if you had done that before you know before you join us. So there is so much about learning from mistakes. That's helpful. And so to the extent that we can cast that is what we're after as opposed to sort of dinging people in an interview process for mistakes, I think that can be helpful. Yeah, I'm sure you've heard them yourselves. Most places are now onto this, but we don't let people off the hook when they tell us that their biggest mistake is being too much of a perfectionist. We really

say, you know what? We know you can do better here. What's another example, so you do get the thing in the middle where people sort of turn the positive inclination into sort of an overused.

Ken White

Yeah.

Alice Davison

And we try to pull them back from that a bit.

Ken White

Well, that's a tough question. I think a lot of a lot of students and people looking for jobs wrestle with. They're going to ask me when did I fail or what's my weakness and they try to turn it into a positive. And your advice is let them have it right.

Alice Davison

And spend your time thinking about what you took away from that. What the lessons were and to the extent that you can. Ideally, you'll be asked, and if not, you'll volunteer to the extent that you can identify what you did differently. That's where to have the positive is to say oh my gosh, this was like so ugly and messy. And as a result, this, this, and this, and then the next time or in a similar situation, here's how I thought about it.

Ken White

Yeah.

Alice Davison

I feel like that's a better recovery than trying to say you don't delegate enough, or sometimes you.

Ken White

My problem is I just love my job too much. Right. One of those answers.

Alice Davison

I just can't get out of the classroom on the weekends.

Ken White

Yeah, one of the things right before we started recording, you mentioned, you know, a thing to think about is when you're interviewing, it's not going to be just one person. So how do you prep for that when there might be a room of six or seven people asking you questions and bringing in new viewpoints to the room?

Alice Davison

Yeah, in our context is, at least on the investment group side what, we don't do panel interviews. We might do them elsewhere at Capital. I'm not I'm honestly not aware, but in our context, it's typically we like to have two interviewers partly because you get. We like working with each other,

Ken White

Yeah.

Alice Davison

And you do get a bit of a how do people at Capital interact. But it's also important because you'll get if we do it well. You can get multiple perspectives too on similar answers and insights offered by a candidate, and then we do have a we have a people-intensive interview process on our investment group side. So you'll see multiple versions generally of one or two people, so anyways, that little bit of a lead in there, so it's not that we do the panel interview as much as you will meet many interviewers over the course of your interview process with us. And so I think some of it is actually thinking about why that might be. You know, so what does it tell me about a place and again, different firms will do things differently, but what does it tell me about a place as I observe their interview process? What insights can I gain because most candidates will say people will make the difference and the cultural will make the difference and when you actually say, well, what does that look like in some cases, it shows up in the interview process. Did I meet you know were my interviewers smart and on time, and engaged? Did they set a high bar? How did they work with each other? What is the process feel like? I think those from a candidate perspective, I'd say pay attention to the interview process, and actually, you can use that as a way to gain some insight into is it important who's involved in it. So that would be one piece. This is not going to be new news, but super easy to find out about your interviewers. Know a little something about them and not just the chit-chat, but people have interesting backgrounds. And it also helps you gauge the questions. None of this is tricky, but I think it would be tough to be in an interviewer with an investment analyst here or at another place and have a stock discussion without knowing that maybe that analyst covered the company. So something like that does sort of one-to-one if you're going to come in really excited about something sort of know whether you're talking to an expert or not just in terms of how the Q and A is going to go. I think, just stylistically, it's sort of be prepared for different kinds of interviews, at least with us, not necessarily interview formats but don't kind of say, yeah, I got this. My first interview was great. You know, expect to be on, which is part of it. Have questions and have questions for the last interviewer of the day. If you want a, I don't think we do it as a test necessarily, but this is a job that requires a lot of stamina. If it's 430 in LA, and you're wrapping up an interview, and you say to your interviewer, it's been a really long day. I don't think I have any

questions. Thank you so much. That's the most people are not having long days. So some of it is think of, you know, think of questions, and they don't have to be different for every interviewer. Sometimes you get really interesting perspective by asking the same question of multiple people.

Ken White

Absolutely.

Alice Davison

So know a little something about the interviewers. Think about the process and what that's telling you about the firm and possibly the culture and the people. Be prepared with questions and curiosity. Draw on different things that you've heard in your interviewers. That's a cool way to just let people know that you're paying attention. You know, I heard this earlier, or you know Ken said this. So how does that reconcile with what you just said those examples?

Ken White

Great advice.

Ken White

That's our conversation with Alice Davison of the Capital Group, and that's our podcast for this week. Leadership & Business is brought to you by the Center for Corporate Education at the College of William & Mary's Raymond A. Mason School of Business. The Center for Corporate Education can help you, and your organization meet and exceed your goals with business and leadership development programs that fit your needs and get results. If you're interested in learning more about the opportunities at the Center for Corporate Education for you or your organization, visit our website at wmleadership.com. And finally, if you have a suggestion or comment pertaining to our podcast, we'd love to hear from you. Please connect with us via email. Our address is podcast@wm.edu. Thanks to our guest this week Alice Davison and thanks to you for joining us. I'm Ken White. Until next time have a safe, happy, and productive week.