Booz Allen Hamilton’s HR chief reveals the question she asks job candidates to see if they’re invested in their career. Here’s what she wants to hear in response.

Shana Lebowitz

- Booz Allen Hamilton, a government-focused consulting firm, is hiring.
- If you want a job there, you may have to show HR chief Betty Thompson that you’re deeply invested in your career.
- Thompson likes to ask job candidates how they managed their last job change. What she really wants to know is whether they’re proactive about their professional development.
- Many top employers say they look for people who take ownership of their career – and that will help job-seekers stand out in the current labor market.

Booz Allen Hamilton is hiring.

Unlike many professional-services organizations, which have paused their growth plans during the pandemic recession, the government-focused consulting firm wants to buy more businesses and ramp up recruiting.

If you want a job there, the best way to stand out is to show you’re proactive about your career development.

So when Booz Allen Hamilton chief people officer Betty Thompson sits down with an interviewee, she’ll often ask them how they managed their last job change.

As she listens to the candidate’s answer, Thompson will try to suss out: “Did they have a network? Did they seek out experiences that prepared them for that [job change]? Did they take a course that would better prepare them?”

Thompson added, “That proactive nature helps people be successful here.”

Betty Thompson is the chief people officer at Booz Allen Hamilton.

It’s your responsibility to keep your skill set sharp

Booz Allen Hamilton is hardly the only company that prizes proactivity in job candidates. Top employers like Microsoft and Mondelez say they look for entrepreneurial professionals who take ownership of their work and their career growth.

Kathryn Minshew and Alexandra Cavoulacos, cofounders of The Muse, put it succinctly in their 2017 book, “The New Rules of Work”: “In today’s workplace, it’s not your manager’s job to make sure you have the necessary skills you need to advance; it’s yours.”
And in the current labor market – millions of people are unemployed in the US alone – taking advantage of opportunities to learn new skills and keep pace with shifts in your industry will help you shine.

**Booz Allen Hamilton looks for job candidates who want to keep learning**

Thompson said Booz Allen Hamilton is mainly interested in hiring technical talent.

But hard skills will only get you so far.

One of the qualities Booz Allen Hamilton values in its employees is the desire to “self-improve and continually learn.” Its website reads: “Relentlessly seek out experiences that sharpen your skills and expose you to new ideas.”

The company vows to let employees “Be You,” which Thompson said translates to, “be empowered.”

To that end, the firm has invested in technology to facilitate internal mobility, or employee transfers between roles or teams. (A 2020 LinkedIn report found that internal mobility opportunities were increasing across industries.) Booz Allen Hamilton employees who are interested in exploring new opportunities can input their skills and the kind of job they’re looking for; hiring managers can scan those entries and see who might be a fit. Thompson said 98% of employees have completed a profile.

In Booz Allen Hamilton job interviews, it comes down to the candidate’s desire to keep growing. Overall, Thompson said, she’s “looking for the things that they did that moved them forward.”