

GREAT INTERVIEWS

Interviews and Selection Process

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It can be helpful to have a list of several general and job-specific questions written out before each interview...especially the FIRST interview for every applicant. A structured interview form serves several purposes: it helps the interviewer remember key questions he wishes to ask; it assures that the SAME questions will be asked of each applicant; and it assures that all applicants are evaluated fairly in the phase of hiring that usually eliminates two-thirds or more of the candidates. Usually by the second interview a form is not necessary in that it may not be as structured.

Pre-determine specific behaviors and actions needed for a person to succeed in the position before conducting the second interview. Focusing on specific past behavior will likely show how the person will respond to situations in the position you are seeking to fill.

Since everyone has "free will" and the ability to make choice, any person can elect to demonstrate any given behavior at any given time. It is all about "making better choices." By using a structured, behavior-based interview, specific (not general) actions or behaviors from the past will help demonstrate if the person can once again demonstrate the behavior in the position he/she is applying for.

One key when starting is to clearly agree upon the behaviors or actions necessary for the position to be successful. There are two categories; competency-based and relationally-based. If you are not sure what behaviors are needed, if used properly various tools can give you valuable information. Tools such as accurate job description responsibilities and a position's key responsibility areas (goals and/or standards) coupled with tools that can give assistance such as expectation editions of Strength Finder (competencies) and the Portrait of Personal Strengths (relational).

Using Behavior-Based Questions

When asking questions of a candidate, the best approach is to seek out actual situations and/or approaches and/or attitudes that come out from past experience. These come about through BEHAVIORAL or ATTITUDINAL based questions. Hypothetical and leading based questions will only give you answers that you want to hear, not sharing who or what the person is all about.

Questioning Techniques

<p>Hypothetical or theoretical based <i>(avoid if possible)</i></p>	<p>Would this be appropriate...? Could this be the answer? Should you do this? As a rule...when possible stay out of the "woulds"</p>	
<p>Leading <i>(always avoid... these are "as a lawyer leading the witness")</i></p>	<p>Yes or no questions Give me an answer Multiple choice questions</p>	<p><i>(This is right...isn't it?)</i> <i>(Tell me what this is...)</i> <i>(Is it the right side or the left side?)</i></p>
<p>Behavioral or Attitudinal <i>(Great...use them always)</i></p>	<p>Past behavior Specific behavior Detective type</p>	<p>"what happened when..." "tell me about..." "how or why did this occur?" "help me understand..."</p>

► By using a structured, behavior-based interview, specific (not general) actions or behaviors from the past will help demonstrate if the person can once again demonstrate the behavior in the position he/she is applying for.

Follow-up questions to build complete answers:

- Describe a situation when...
- Exactly what did you do?
- What was the result?
- Why did you...?
- Describe specifically how you did that.
- How did it work out?
- What were the circumstances surrounding...?
- What did you do first...second?
- What problems-successes resulted from...?
- What was the most memorable time when that happened?
- Describe your specific role in the project.
- What feedback have you received?

Follow-up questions to assist with incomplete, non-specific answers:

- Can you give me a specific example of when this recently happened?
- Describe one particular time when...
- Walk me through the process step-by-step, explaining what your role was.
- Exactly what part did you play?
- How about another example of...
- Compare this situation to one in which you...
- Can you describe another time when you...

Questions to consider within a structured interview:

- Tell me about your work experiences... both past and present. What were/are your responsibilities on each job?
- Why are you considering changing jobs now?
- What did you like and dislike most about your past jobs (and present job) and why? Give specific situations.
- Do you prefer working alone or in a group? Why?
- Share with me examples of how you multi-tasked in your last (or current) position?
- What kind of people do you most like and dislike to work with? Give me examples of these type of people from your past (and current) position.
- Describe yourself working, your attributes and skills, while giving me specific examples of each one as they come up.
- What does it mean to "care" for your customer? Specifically share with me how you have displayed this in the past with your customers.
- What is the most appealing aspect of the job I have just described?
- What is the least appealing aspect of the job I have just described?
- How would you handle this specific situation...?
- What are your three greatest skills sets and why? Give me a specific example of each of them as found in your current (or immediate past) job. Specifically share how each has helped you in your job.
- Now for a more difficult question: what are your three weakest skills sets and why? Give me a specific example of each of them as found in your current (or immediate past) job. Specifically share how you are currently working to improve in each area.
- Do you feel it is your responsibility to adapt to your co-workers or their responsibility to adapt to you?
- With what types of employees do you get along best? Why is that?
- What types of employees cause the most problems for you? When this occurs, what do you do? ...share a situation in the past that supports your answer.

► *When asking questions to a candidate, the best approach is to seek out actual situations and/or approaches and/or attitudes that come out from past experience.*

- What type of work situation is personally most difficult for you? Why? Has this occurred in the past and if so, how have you handled it?
- What does it mean to be “flexible?” Are you describing yourself? Can you give me a specific example of when this recently happened?
- How do you like criticism shared with you? Why do you say that? When was the most memorable time this occurred?
- How do you define the difference between supervision and management?
- How would you describe the best manager you ever had? What were the circumstances surrounding them being “the best?”
- Tell me about a recent crisis you had. Walk me through the steps you took to address and solve it.
- What has been your biggest mistake while working? What was the result? How did you overcome the problem?
- Have you ever worked with a group of people that jointly resisted management’s authority? Exactly what did you do?
- Tell me about the worst manager you ever had.
- When have you been described as being inflexible? ...as being flexible?
- Why should I hire YOU for the open position?
- What questions can I answer for you?

Thoughts on the Selection Process

When a manager believes there is a need to fill a job opening, it is often helpful to be reminded of the basic steps so as to maintain both the consistency and integrity in hiring who you believe is the most qualified person for the position.

Throughout the hiring process I visualize each candidate as being a jigsaw puzzle. Each item associated with the selection process is a piece of the puzzle i.e. an “indicator,” adding a piece to the puzzle if an item is positive, not being added if it is a negative or neutral piece. Some selection items are larger pieces that carry much more weight (such as verbal communication skills for a management position) and some are very small indicators/pieces that would only have an impact in the event of two final candidates appearing to be “very close” to having the same job qualifications.

Every “piece” of the selection process is only one indicator and not the total answer to your challenge of selecting who you believe is the right person. One indicator alone does not give you a firm, substantial answer that a particular candidate is going to be the most qualified person for the job. You need many indicators that all point in the same positive direction to successfully select the “right” candidate.

Following is a checklist of my hiring thoughts ►

Preliminary items to consider

Have I carried out a needs analysis for the position i.e. *do I actually need to fill the position?*

Can I quantify the need? Sometimes what I “think I need” and what “I actually need” are totally different.

Do I have an accurate, easy to read, legally correct job description (JD) available for the position?

- Are the standards/goals clearly defined for the position?

How am I going to advertise the position opening?

- Newspaper
- Trade associations
- Websites
- Networking

Once I have received resumes, what next?

- A resume is an easy-to-read tool for securing an interview.
- Based upon the resumes that a) look “good”; and b) appear to have the skill sets needed for the position, I will set up a series of interviews.

The interview process

Do I have an application and job description available for candidates arriving for their interview?

As the candidates begin their first interview, are they appropriately “pressed” and dressed?

Do I continually remind myself that everything a job candidate says is an *indicator* or *test* (i.e. a puzzle piece) that is demonstrating some characteristic of the candidate?

Am I using a structured format for the first interview so as to treat everyone the same and eliminate any possibility of discrimination?

- The first interview focuses on one’s leadership strengths, character and how the person would fit into my organization.
- A non-structured interview format is used for any additional interviews, examining a candidates skill sets for a position.

► Every “piece” of the selection process is only one indicator and not the total answer to your challenge of selecting who you believe is the right person.

About the Author



Ronald F. Smedley, MS is president of Synergistic Resource Associates, a full service human resources consultancy that works with for profit and nonprofit organizations. In addition

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Making a decision

Continuing through the hiring process, have I considered the value of the following job indicators:

- management and leadership style
- communication skills, both verbal and written
- a candidate knowing their own character strengths and weaknesses
- past experience and/or education
- skill sets for the open position
- eye contact
- computer and software knowledge

If I am using any form of testing, do I have validity and reliability tests that demonstrate the test does not discriminate and when scoring "well" on it indicates a higher probability of success in the job?

If any background checks are carried out, do I know they are job-related and could impact the success of the person, if hired?

- Prior to carrying out the check, have I informed the candidate and when completed, given a copy of the report to them?

Have I verified all degrees, honors, past employers and salaries?

- If the candidate has something that cannot be verified or does not share the truth, this will eliminate the person from the selection process.

Do I meet with the other managers involved in the hiring process so that everyone can compare and discuss their information on the final candidates?

- We will list the positive and negative points for each candidate and discuss which candidate has the "greatest amount of their puzzle" filled in.
- Our discussion should lead to a consensus on who we believe is the most qualified person for the job.

I now can make a hiring decision based upon all the "indicators" presented by the final candidates.

- A job offer/letter will be presented, listing the specifics of the job, being clear as to the organization's at-will status.

When the need is present to fill a position, if a manager will take the time to align the right person to the right job by hiring who they believe is the most qualified person for the job, all parties will be both satisfied and motivated to move forward within the organization.