

Interviewing Resources

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Tips for Conducting Successful Interviews

Your business' survival depends on hiring the right people. But finding the best employees can be tricky, and if you do not have the right interviewing skills, you risk losing a brilliant candidate — or worse — hiring a person that is not qualified for the job.

And in today's competitive job market, conducting effective interviews is more important than ever. While you are sizing up a candidate, that person is also considering you as a potential employer.

Here are some tips to help you effectively screen the candidate, make a good impression, and ensure that the candidate gets the information they need about the job and your company.

- **Understand the purpose of the interview.** Hiring the right person is the goal of interviewing, but not necessarily the purpose of an interview. An interview is your chance to collect information about the candidate sitting in front of you. It is your opportunity to find out if the applicant is qualified for a particular job, if they are truly interested in the available position and if they fit your company's culture.
- **Rethink your interviewing strategy.** General questions like "Where do you see yourself in five years?" will not tell you much about the candidate sitting in front of you. That inquiry and many other standard interview questions sidestep what you really need to know - how the person will perform in a specific role. To find and hire smart employees you have to adopt smart-interviewing tactics that uncover a candidate's abilities, talents, strengths, and weaknesses.
- **Develop a list of desired skills.** You cannot formulate insightful questions until you know what skills to look for.
- **Create a list of interview questions.** After you develop a list of skills, put together a list of interview questions that will help you learn more about the candidate. Construct open-ended questions that invite candidates to share information and talk about their experiences.
Today, many interviewers use behavior-based questions to discover how a person handled a situation in the past and to determine how they will react to a similar situation in the future. Try posing questions such as "Tell me about a time that you missed a project deadline. What happened and how did you manage the problem?"
- **Check your list twice.** Review your list of interview questions. You should have a good mix of opinion-based, credential-based, experienced-based and behavior-based questions that will provide a complete view of the candidate's background and personality.
- **Tell the applicant about the interview format.** After you introduce yourself, put the candidate at ease by telling them the basic structure of the interview. You want them to relax, speak freely and provide detailed answers to your inquiries.
- **Prepare for questions.** Make sure you have adequate information about the company to answer a candidate's questions. They may ask about your business' core functions, number of employees, future plans, culture, or a variety of other things. Bring a media kit to the interview, or prepare a fact sheet that lists relevant company data and history.
- **Take notes.** Interviewing requires superb listening skills, but listening is not enough. Capture the details of the interview on paper to jog your memory, noting essential actions, and outcomes. Taking objective notes and recording responses will help you compare candidates when it is time to make a hiring decision.

Using Behavior-Based Interviewing Techniques

To find top employees and hire the right job candidates, you need to use smart-interviewing tactics to uncover a candidate's true skills, strengths, and weaknesses. This means going beyond standard questions such as "What are your strengths and weaknesses?" and focusing on the work habits of the candidate sitting in front of you. One effective way to do this is to conduct behavior-based interviews.

Behavioral questions require a candidate to relate real situations and demonstrate how their strengths and weaknesses are manifested on the job. For example, rather than asking a customer-service candidate to describe their people skills or problem-solving abilities, ask them to explain a recent problem or situation they experienced with a difficult customer and how they handled it. The real-life answer is much more useful than a skill description because it provides insight about how the candidate applies their skills.

Behavior-based interviewing requires practice and preparation, but the results are well worth the time and effort. The following steps will help you compile a list of questions that will enable you to assess whether a person is a good fit for a particular position and for your organization.

Identify Essential Skills for the Job

Understand the type of skills a candidate needs to perform the job. Interview coworkers or brainstorm to develop a list of skills on which to base your interview questions. Break down your list into the following types of skills:

Technical — jobs skills and related knowledge

Functional — transferable skills, including managing and organizing people or information

Adaptive — personal characteristics, such as dependability or a strong work ethic

Develop Behavior-Based Questions

Develop questions around the list of skills you have created. For example, if you need to determine if a candidate has project-leadership skills, develop a question that requires them to:

Recall a specific project on which they worked

Discuss their role in the project

Talk about specific problems they encountered

Describe how they solved the problems

A response to a behavior-based question should clearly identify the task or problem, explain the candidate's response, identify the result of their actions, and describe the outcome of the task. In order to get all this information from a candidate, formulate questions this way: "Tell me about your involvement in a recent project. Describe any problems you encountered and the steps you took to overcome those obstacles."

Review Your Questions

Once you develop a list of questions, double-check to make sure they are open-ended. To avoid questions that allow for a "yes" or "no" answers, structure them to begin with "tell me about a time", "give me an example" or other phrases that invite a detailed response.

Finally, review your questions to ensure they provide you with a complete view of the candidate's background. You want to walk away from the interview with more than a list of the person's skills and a partial idea of their past performance. You want a comprehensive understanding of how they have performed in the past and a good idea about how they will perform in your work environment.

Questions About last Job

How did you get your last job?
What were your specific responsibilities?
What did you like about the job?
What did you dislike about the job?
What did you learn from the job?
Did you run into any difficult situations? How did you handle them?
Tell me about the types of interaction you had with other workers.
Tell me of an accomplishment you are particularly proud of and what you did.
What kind of supervision of other workers have you been responsible for?
Are there persons from your former job that would provide a professional reference?
Why did you leave your past jobs?
Why do you want to leave your current job?
What is the compensation at your current job? What is your salary expectation for this position?
Describe a typical day in your current job.

Questions About the New Job

What would be your specific goals for this job?
What experience do you have that you think will be helpful for this job?
This job will require a lot of [describe]. Will that be a problem for you?
This job will require interacting with [describe the types of people]. What experience do you have working with such people?
What would you like to get from this new job?
One requirement of this job is writing various types of reports -- e.g., weekly, monthly, projections, goals, employee evaluation, etc. What relevant experience have you had? Do you have any writing samples?
This job will require a certain amount of new-client development. Have you had much experience? Tell me how you have gone about this.

General Information Questions

What do you consider your strong points?
What do you consider your weak points?
What specific kind of work do you particularly enjoy doing?
What is your long-term career objective?

Questions Concerning Physical Condition

Do you currently use any illegal drugs?
If offered a job, will you submit to a medical examination?
This job requires annual medical evaluation, which includes urinalysis for drug testing. Do you have any objection to this?

Questions About Experience and Skills

What special skills do you have?
How proficient are you in using personal computers?
Are there software applications you are particularly familiar with?

Questions About Outside Activities

What kind of job-related organizations or professional societies do you belong to? (You may omit those that indicate your race, religion, color, national origin, ancestry, sex or age.)
How will your involvement in these activities affect your job here?

Questions About Nepotism Issues

Do you have any relatives already employed by our company? If so, who are they and what is their relationship to you?
Do you have any relatives employed by a competitor of this company? If so, who are they and what is their relationship to you?

The Best Way to Check References

Checking applicants' references is one of the most important procedures in the hiring process. Many job seekers misrepresent their backgrounds and credentials; others simply leave out important information. And no matter how honest applicants are, you can still learn a great deal by talking to other people who know them well.

Checking references takes time, but it can save you a lot of money and headaches down the road. A negative reference could save you from hiring someone who is woefully unqualified for a job or who has destructive tendencies that could land you in trouble. For example, you can be held liable for a new hire who becomes violent and injures an employee or customer, or commits fraud — if it's proven that a reference check would have stopped you from hiring the applicant. The best rule of thumb: Always check applicants' references before offering them the job.

These nine tips will help you get the goods on a job applicant:

1. **Tell all applicants that you will check their references** before you make any hiring decisions. Business owners often hire applicants because of a sharp-looking resume or a "good feeling" from an interview. No matter how quickly you'd like to get a position filled, always perform due diligence before you take the hiring plunge.
2. **Ask each applicant to sign a release form** permitting you to ask detailed questions of former employers and other references (sample background check permission forms are listed on this page). Make sure the form prevents the applicant from suing you or any former employers based on the information you learn during the reference checks. Without this permission, you may only be able to confirm employment dates, pay rate and position -- information that tells you little about a prospective employee's character.
3. **Fax over a copy** of the prospective employee's background check waiver and your personal credentials before you call a prospective employee's references. Many employers fear being sued for defamation if they say anything negative about a former employee. Your fax will ease their fears. Keep in mind that some states now consider employers' comments to be "qualifiedly privileged." That means the employer cannot be held liable for the information he reveals unless he knows it to be false or reckless. If that's true in your state (check with your lawyer), make sure the references know it.
4. **Verify basic information** such as employment dates, job titles, salary and types of jobs performed. If one of the basic checks don't match the prospective employee's resume or what you heard during an interview, you've got a clear sign that something may be amiss.
5. **Avoid vague questions.** Ask specific questions based on what you learned about the applicant in the interview. For example: How did the employee contribute to projects mentioned in the interview?
6. **Pay attention to neutral or negative comments** from references. Lukewarm comments or half-hearted praise speak volumes. Ask the former employer if they would hire the person back. If they hesitate, move on to the next applicant.
7. **Put less weight on positive references.** Most people can find someone to say something good about them. And some employers give positive references even to bad ex-employees because they are afraid of legal action or are tired of paying unemployment taxes on the applicant.
8. **Use former supervisors or senior coworkers as references.** An applicant might not want you to contact their current employer (who might not know about the job hunt), but there are always people who can provide a reference.
9. **Don't rely on prospective employees' verbal word regarding salary figures.** Ask for a current pay stub to verify employment and pay rate.

BACKGROUND CHECK PERMISSION (SHORT FORM)
FOR PROSPECTIVE EMPLOYEE

I hereby authorize all corporations, companies, credit agencies, schools, government agencies, persons, military services, and former employers to release information they may have about me to _____ or its agents and employees, and release all persons or companies from any liability or responsibility from doing so. Further, I authorize the procurement of a consumer report and credit check, and understand that such a report may contain information about my background, character, and personal reputation. I understand that this notice will also apply to any future update reports that may be requested.

Applicant's Signature

Applicant's Printed Name

Date

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR IOR

- Get him involved prior to commencement of work – so he can familiarize himself with plans & Specs. Get his input on his areas of concerns
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- Have him establish a checklist for himself and Deputy Inspectors to follow during different phases of construction
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- Have him keep a special record of certain phases of the construction procedures (process?). i.e. concrete placing operation, masonry work, welding operations, etc.
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- Have him come up with a list for all trades that require a pre-construction meeting
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- Have him come up with a list for all trades that require a mock-up for Architect & School District Approval
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- Have him come up with a list for all extra materials & extra stacks that are to be turned over to owner at end of project. I.e. carpet, tile, paint, fuses, etc.
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- Have him come up with a list for all manuals & training session for maintenance & Operations staff
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- All subs to submit an Inspection request form for approval of each section of work performed & Inspector to sign after all correction are made to his satisfaction and per plans & specs.
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- Inspector to establish a preliminary punch list for contractor prior to
- Architect's final punch list.
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- Verify all punch list items have been addressed & completed per plans and specs.
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- Assist Architect in establishing final punch list
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- Coordinate with local agencies for final occupancy permit & releases. i.e. fire alarm system, kitchen (health department), etc.