

Interviewing Tips

Interviewing may sound easy, but it is very difficult for most of us to get the information we need in an interview. Here are some tips to help you conduct successful interviews that lead to the best hiring decisions.

Planning Ahead

1. Use a structured interview, in which you ask the same pre-planned questions of each candidate. When candidates are asked the same questions, you are giving them the same opportunity for response and you can more fairly compare their answers. And, structured interviews are much more likely to ensure fair and equitable interviews (and a defense against discrimination).
2. Review the job description and identify key knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) and the behaviors and competencies that are necessary for success in the job.
3. Develop open-ended questions that reveal whether the candidates possess the desired KSAs, behaviors, and competencies.

Don't ask:

- Questions that require a "yes" or "no" answer (except if necessary to verifying facts on the application.)
- Leading questions, where the answer you're seeking is obvious. (Example: Can you work with a wide variety of customers?)
- Unacceptable questions (see page 4).

Do ask:

- Questions that prompt discussion. Each question should require at least a sentence or two of response.
 - Only job-related questions.
 - Behavioral-based questions in which you ask candidates how they handled situations in the past (real experiences, not hypothetical). Keep in mind that past behavior is the best indicator of future performance.
 - Look for three items in responses: a description of the situation or task, the action taken, and the result.
4. Prepare a written list of questions, leaving room for notes by each. Use and follow this guide during the interview.

Before the Interview

1. Review candidate's resume and application. Note items that need clarification. Do not write directly on the resume or application. Using post-it notes is acceptable.
2. Be familiar with the candidate's prior experience and education. Questions can be somewhat personalized with that information (e.g.: When you worked at Ford Motor Company, what was the most challenging project you worked on and what was the end result? In your work as an administrative assistant, what computer platform and software did you use?)

During the Interview

1. Create an atmosphere that allows the candidate to speak freely. Remember that your primary goal is to gather information.
2. Try to put the candidate at ease. Comfortable candidates are more likely to share information with you. Try to not intimidate the candidate.
3. Tell the candidate the purpose of the interview and that the interview plan is to:
 - Review candidate's jobs/experiences.
 - Ask questions about jobs/experiences.
 - Share information about the job.
 - Answer candidate's questions about the job.
 - Explain that both parties will gain information needed to make the best hiring decision.
 - Tell the candidate you'll be taking notes.
4. Watch the candidate's body language and facial expressions, which can be as revealing as answers.
5. Maintain direct eye contact when the candidate is speaking, to the extent possible while taking brief notes.

Close the Interview

1. Glance through your notes and ask any additional questions.
2. Ask if the candidate has any questions.
3. A good final question is "What last impression would you like to leave with me, or what do we need to know about you that we did not discuss?"
4. Explain the next steps in the interview process (when they will hear from you, if second interviews will be conducted, when you plan to make a decision, etc.).
5. Thank the candidate.

After the Interview

Go back over your notes and make any additional notes while the interview is fresh in your mind. Do this before going on to the next interview.

Guard against

1. Judging candidates based on physical appearance.
2. Judging the candidate because he or she is nervous. A job interview is stressful. It may take a few minutes for candidates to relax.
3. Making a decision about the candidate in the first few minutes (which most of us tend to do) and then using the rest of the interview to substantiate that decision.
4. Hiring people just because you like them, not because of their answers/qualifications.
5. Trying to impress the candidate.
6. Talking too much about the job. Remember that the purpose of the interview is to gather information about the candidate.
7. "Halo Effect." Don't allow your overall decision be swayed by one or two impressive answers.
8. Making any implied promise of employment.

Do

1. Keep an open mind throughout the interview. Sometimes the final comments are the most revealing. Save some of the most important questions for the end of the interview, when the candidate is most comfortable.
2. Listen carefully.
3. Consider the total interview, not the answers to select questions.
4. Ask the same questions to all candidates, regardless of gender or other issues.
5. Take notes. After you've interviewed several candidates, you'll need them!

Acceptable and Unacceptable Interview Questions

When planning an interview, keep in mind that if a question is job-related, it is probably legal. But, it is easy to fall into asking illegal questions that deal with protected classes under various anti-discrimination laws—such as questions that address race, gender, family issues, sexual orientation, national origin or ancestry, marital status, disability, age, and religion.

Granted, there are times when questions generally considered unacceptable may be necessary due to specific, written job qualifications, or "bona fide occupational qualifications." For instance, candidates for a pastor position may be asked about their religious beliefs. If you believe a position has bona fide occupational qualifications that require inquiry into an otherwise unacceptable area of questioning, please contact Human Resource Services for assistance.

The following are generally accepted as unacceptable and acceptable questions.

Unacceptable Questions	Acceptable Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Are you a U.S. citizen? •Where were you born? •Where were your parents born? 	Do you have the legal right to work in the United States?
What is your maiden name?	Have you ever been employed under another name? <i>NOTE: Only ask this question if you will be verifying employment with a prior employer. Otherwise, it could be argued you were trying to determine ethnic background or marital status.</i>
What is your native language?	This job requires skill in (language). Do you speak and/or write (language)?
How old are you?	Are you at least 18 years of age?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Are you married? •Do you have any children? •What are your daycare arrangements? 	<i>No questions about family issues can be asked.</i> You can ask: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •What hours and days can you work? •Are there specific times you cannot work? •Do you have responsibilities other than work that will interfere with specific job requirements, such as traveling?
Are you pregnant or do you plan to have a child?	<i>No questions about family issues or medical conditions can be asked. Keep in mind that it is illegal to deny a female employment because she is pregnant or planning to have a child in the future.</i>
Do you prefer to be addressed as Mr.? Mrs.? Miss? Ms.?	<i>None. May be construed as a gender or family issue question. Hint: Ask candidates if you can call them by their first name. This may also serve to make them more comfortable.</i>
What clubs/organizations do you belong to?	What clubs or organizations do you belong to that are relevant to your ability to perform this job?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Have you ever filed a disability claim? •Have you ever filed a workers compensation claim? •Have you ever been injured on the job? 	<i>None. These questions should not be asked.</i>
Do you have AIDS or are you HIV Positive?	<i>There is no legal way to ask this or other medical condition questions.</i>
Do you have a disability?	Can you perform the essential functions of this position?
Do you smoke?	Our smoking policy prohibits smoking in University buildings. Can you adhere to it?
What is your height? What is your weight?	<i>None.</i>

When did you graduate from high school?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •What schools have you attended? •Do you have a high school degree or equivalent? •Do you have a university or college degree?
What religion do you practice? What religious holidays do you need off? Where do you go to church?	<i>None. No questions about these issues may be asked.</i>
Have you ever been arrested?	Have you ever been convicted of a felony or misdemeanor, other than driving violations? <i>Note: This question is on our employment application. You can use this question to verify the answer, but state that any conviction will be considered based on job relatedness.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Do you own a home? •How long have you lived in your home? •Do you own a car? •Have your wages ever been garnished? •Have you ever declared bankruptcy? 	<i>No such questions may be asked, unless specifically related to written job qualifications.</i> <i>NOTE: Human Resources will obtain a credit report if necessary due to job qualifications.</i>
What type of discharge did you receive from the military?	Did you serve in the military? What was the period of service? What was your rank upon discharge? What type of training or experience did you receive while in the service?