

WILY MANAGER

*Just-in-Time
Management
Advice*

How to Conduct an Interview



This is one of a series of booklets available at www.wilymanager.com

Conducting a Successful Interview

A great interview occurs when a mutually respectful conversation takes place that determines the quality of the match between a candidate's skills and the competencies required for a specific position. Conversely, a bad interview is more like an inquisition that provides the illusion of power to the interviewer, and a high level of anxiety to the candidate.

There are a variety of reasons why good managers should be concerned specifically about interviews, and about the recruiting process in general:

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- The interviewing process is fraught with potential legal risk if it is not done properly.
- Corporate reputation can be seriously compromised with bad interviews.
- You truly do “win it in the draft”, and a good interview process greatly improves the chances of landing the best possible hire
- Turnover is very expensive

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Conducting a Successful Interview, continued

How to Have a Great Interview

Conducting an effective interview is a key managerial function that does not happen by accident. The last thing you should do is “improvise” your way through an interview. Preparation in advance, and follow up afterwards are critical components of the interview process. Here are some other ideas on how to have a great interview:

Before the Interview:

- Know what you are hiring for.
 - What skills?
 - What experience?
 - What knowledge?
 - What attitudes/outlooks?
- Prepare your questions, and develop your shortlist based on the answers to the questions above about what you are hiring for.
- In advance, select five “killer-questions” that

A good interview is a mutually respectful conversation that determines the best match.

A bad interview is more like an inquisition.



you will ask every candidate, and score the answers you receive. The rest of the questions you may want to mix up somewhat.

- Prepare the candidate in advance by telling them what to expect:
 - who will be in the room.
 - the type of questions you will be asking.
 - what the dress code is in the work environment.
 - How to get to the interview venue.
- Read the candidate’s resume immediately before you interview him/her.

Leave your cell-phone out of the room when conducting an interview. The candidate deserves your full attention. Somehow, many people have erroneously concluded that pulling out your PDA to check your email while talking to some one is not incredibly rude.

During the Interview:

- Create a supportive and relaxed atmosphere.
- Turn off your PDA, forward the phone, and eliminate any other distractions that might prevent you from giving your complete attention to the candidate.
- Leave lots of time for the candidate to ask questions.
- Don't be afraid to probe. Follow up questions are usually where you learn the most.
- Close the interview by telling the candidate what to expect next.
- Always have at least two people conducting the interview.

After the Interview:

- Debrief the interview immediately afterwards.
- Use a scoring system to give the candidate a score from the interview.
- Don't book interviews back to back.
- Don't forget that interviews can be mentally exhausting, so if you can space them out over a few days, you may want to.
- Follow up with all candidates (successful, and runners-up) after the interview.

Keep your Interview Questions Within the Law

You should make sure you have some knowledge of employment law in your jurisdiction. As a guideline, it is usually best to stay away from any interview questions that that may be related to a candidate's:

- Age
- Race, ethnicity, or color
- Gender or sex
- Sexual Orientation
- Country of national origin or birth place
- Religion
- Disability
- Marital, family status or pregnancy

Examples of Bad (or Potentially Illegal) Interview Questions:

- How long have you lived in this country?
- Where did you grow up?
- That's an unusual name, what nationality are you?
- Are you a citizen?
- Do you have a physical, speech, or hearing disability?
- Have you ever filed a workers' compensation claim?
- How many days of work did you miss last year due to illness?
- Is that a glass eye?
- Are you planning to have a family?
- Do you have children?
- How old are your kids?
- Do you have childcare arranged for when you are at work?
- Do you go to church?
- Do you own or rent your home?
- What's your Myers-Briggs personality type?
The use of psychometric instruments for recruiting purposes is a very grey area in the eyes of the law. It is better to avoid such instruments in the recruiting process.

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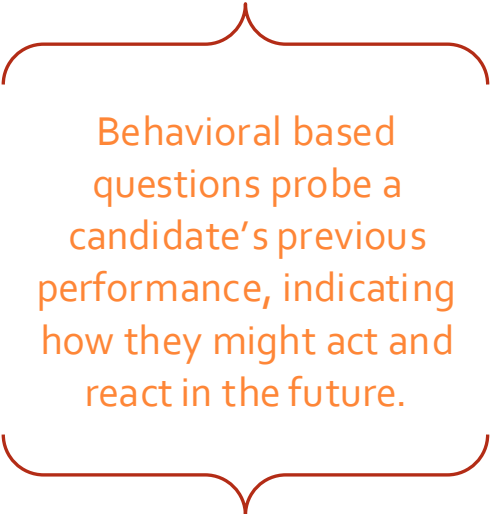
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Behavioral Based Interview Questions

Behavior Based interview questions are designed to get the candidate to talk about specific events in their past where they have dealt with situations similar to those he or she will find in the job for which you are interviewing them. The idea is that how a candidate performed or behaved in the past is a pretty good indicator of how they will behave or perform in the future.

Some examples of Behavior Based Questions:

- Tell me about a time when you were confronted by an angry or upset customer. (Customer Focus, Service Orientation)
- Describe a decision you made that was unpopular and how you handled implementing it. (Communication Skills, Change Management)
- Talk about a time when you disagreed with a co-worker. (Communication Skills, Handling Conflict)
- Give an example where you made a significant contribution to improving a process or the quality of work done in your department or on a project. (Innovation, Initiative, Results Orientation)
- Have you ever had to fire someone or deliver particularly bad news? Please tell me about how you did that. (Leadership, Communication Skills)
- Talk to me about a time when you felt overwhelmed by the multiple or competing priorities you had to deal with. (Priority and Time Management, Planning)
- Tell me about a time when you had to analyze facts quickly, define key issues, and respond immediately or develop a plan that produced good results. (Thinking Skills, Analytical Skills, Problem Solving)
- Tell me about a time when (insert the appropriate job skill, competency, ability here)




Behavioral based questions probe a candidate's previous performance, indicating how they might act and react in the future.

Situational Based Questions


A situational question is intended to assess a candidate's judgment or give some indication as to the candidate's thought process. A version of a situational question might include asking the candidate to role-play. Candidates are provided with a specific, hypothetical situation or problem and they are simply asked how they would handle it or to describe a potential solution.

Some examples of Situational Based Questions:

- Imagine we've just hired you. What's the most important thing on your to-do list on the first day of work?"
- Say a coworker tells you that he submitted phony expense account receipts. What would you do?
- Your manufacturing facility shipped the wrong order to one of your important customers. Describe how you would solve this problem both internally and externally.
- Pretend for a moment that I am one of your customers and you are selling me this mobile phone.
- Your boss has just come to you, and asked you to do something you know is against company policy. What do you do now?
- One of your employees has claimed that she has been sexually harassed by one of her male co-workers. You interview the male co-worker, and he has denied it, and there are no witnesses. What do you do now?



Situational based questions tests a candidates thought process for various scenarios.



Avoid These Interview Mishaps

- Not knowing what you're hiring for. You need to understand the competencies required for the vacancies, and then seek to fill those competencies.
- Not having a standard process and/or questions. While every interview should be unique, a standard process and core set of questions helps to compare candidates in as even terms as is possible.
- Doing more talking than listening. As the interviewer, your job is to establish whether the candidate is an appropriate match to the position. This requires that you articulate what the position is about, but you should NOT be the one doing most of the talking
- We all "hire in our own image". You can't hire someone just because you like them. What competencies are you looking for? What competencies does this particular candidate possess?
- Avoid the "extrovert" trap. Unfortunately, interviews naturally bring out the best in extroverted candidates and minimize the advantage for more introverted candidates.
- Avoid gravitating to those that are most articulate. Use behavioural-based or experientially based questions to determine how people respond to work situations and pressures.
- Not allocating adequate time. Interviews are labour intensive, but they are very important. You need to take time to prepare in advance and debrief after an interview. These requirements take time.
- Power-Tripping. An interview is not a place for you to feel superior by exerting control over others. It is the place where you try to closely match competencies required to those of the candidates you are interviewing. If an interview looks and feels like an inquisition, you are doing it wrong. It should feel like a conversation.
- Not reading the candidates resume before the interview. It is difficult to keep multiple candidates straight. You should read the CV before the interview – preferably immediately beforehand.
- Doing an interview alone. Always try to have two people in an interview so you have someone to compare notes with during the debrief.
- Not taking notes. You need to take comprehensive notes during an interview
- Taking inappropriate notes. Your interview notes are subject to subpoena, so make sure you don't write down anything that is inappropriate. For example, if you write "too old", "too ugly", "too pregnant" you could be subject to a discrimination charges.

Sample Interview Questions – Hospitality/Retail Industry

General

- What do you know about our company, and why do you want to work here?
- What interests you about the job, and what skills and attributes can you bring to it?
- What are the most important skills and attitudes that a strong leader brings to an organization?
- Tell us something we wouldn't learn by reading your resume.

Skills

- Exceptional interpersonal skills
 - Describe a conflict you've had at work, and how you handled it.
- Excellent verbal, listening, and written communication skills
 - How well do you write and make presentations?
 - What's the most effective way to communicate with employees?
 - If you're making an organizational change, how do you communicate it?
- Excellent organizational skills
 - Describe a situation where you've been in danger of missing a deadline. What did you do to address the situation?
 - How do you manage stress?
- Flexibility & patience
 - Describe a situation that tested the limits of your patience. What was the outcome?
- Excellent teacher and mentor
 - Describe a situation where you've been required to train another employee. What challenges did you face?
 - How would your employees describe you?

Attitudes:

- Positive and inspirational to others
 - What kind of feedback have people that report TO you given you?
 - How would people describe your leadership style?
- Open to feedback and ideas
 - Describe a situation where you were asked to adjust your work performance.
- Brings out the best in others
 - Tell us about your best boss. Worst boss
 - Describe a situation in which you have been particularly frustrated at work.
- Collaborative and team oriented
 - When you have worked in a team environment, what role did you play on the team?

- Describe a situation where you've had to work with someone you didn't like.
- How would your peers describe you?
- Entrepreneurial
 - How do you think we can differentiate our product offering in the marketplace?
 - Where do you think our business model is most vulnerable?
 - Which is better: to make rational, well thought-out choices based on good information; OR is it better to act NOW and deal with the consequences later?
 - Describe a situation where some system or process didn't work, and what you did about it.
- Relentlessly Customer Focused
 - How would you define customer service?
 - Why is customer service important?
 - Tell me about how you've handled a disgruntled customer?

Educational/Developmental

- Relevant post-secondary education or training preferred but not mandatory
 - In the context of this industry, would you value experience and education equally, or place greater emphasis on one or the other?
- Must have a history of self improvement
 - Based on what you understand about the job currently, what do you think your biggest challenge will be?
 - How have your career aspirations changed over the past few years?
- Sets personal goals (books to read, fitness, classes)
 - How do you stay current?

Experience

- History of progression and achievement
 - What has been your biggest professional success?
 - What has been your most significant professional challenge?
 - Where do you see yourself professionally in 3 to 5 years?
- 7 years, preferably in the industry:
 - What are some things that either your past employer(s) or the industry in general can do better?
- Diversity of experience within the industry, or comparable experience.
 - How many different areas of the industry have you worked in? Which one was the most satisfying?
- Experience in a leadership role
 - Tell us about your current job. What do you like, and why are you considering leaving?
 - What does a typical day look like currently for you?
 - Describe an important decision you've had to make in the course of your work. How did it turn out?

Closing

- If this were your first annual review, and we were all sitting around the table, what would I/we be saying to you?
- What are your salary/benefit expectations
- Can you provide references for both someone you have worked for, and someone that has worked for you.

Evaluating Resumes and Interviews

When interviewing for a position, you should have some objective criteria by which you evaluate candidates. You can use these criteria to effectively screen people, so you end up interviewing the highest quality available candidates.

Use the provided **Resume and Interview Scoring Tool** to help you. It can be used for both telephone interviews and in-person interviews. Instructions are provided in a separate document.

Finally, do not discount the value of your **intuition** in the interviewing process. It is an important tool, but you cannot use it as your only tool. The Resume and Interview Scoring Tool is intended to confirm or challenge what your intuition may be telling you about a candidate. Ultimately the best recruiting practice relies on a combination of intuition, and the tools presented here.

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