

Preparing For a Behavioral Interview

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How Do I Prepare For A Behavioral Interview?

Conducting an effective interview could be the most important step you take when it comes to picking the best applicant. In order to make an informed decision about a candidate's qualifications for a job, it is important to gather as much information as possible during an interview. However, you want to make sure that you do not ask inappropriate questions that could be the basis for an employment discrimination complaint. That is why interview preparation is critical. In addition to reviewing applicants' resumes in advance of the interviews, you should also prepare standard job-related questions that will enable you to pick the best candidate.

Companies that employ behavioral interviewing have predetermined the skill sets they require for a particular position. These skill sets could include: decision making and problem solving, leadership, motivation, communication, interpersonal skills, planning and organization, critical thinking skills, team building and the ability to influence others. The organization determines the skill sets by doing a detailed analysis of the position they are seeking to fill. Job seekers must also go through this same process. During their analysis, the job seeker may ask questions such as:

1. What are the necessary skills to do this job?
2. What makes a successful candidate?
3. What would make an unsuccessful candidate?
4. Why have people left this position previously?
5. What is the most difficult part of this job?

Basic Outline of the Interview

1. Welcome the interviewee.
2. Formally begin the interview process.
3. Ensure the interviewee that this interview is in no way a test of their abilities or knowledge. Ensure the interviewee that if they feel they cannot answer a question, they can provide a 'no comment' response.
4. Conduct the formal interview.
5. End the interview by asking the interviewee if they would like to share any further information.
6. Formally end the interview.
7. Thank the interviewee

Things We Know You Know

1. Know your subject: find out everything you can about the person you are interviewing before making the initial contact. Show the person that you care enough to have done some research beforehand.
2. Keep the initial contact short and to the point. Identify yourself immediately and explain why you want the interview. Once the person has agreed to be interviewed, arrange a specific time and place convenient for you and your subject. Clearly state how long you expect the interview to last.
3. If you know you are going to be delayed, call the person with an explanation as soon as you are aware of the delay.
4. Decide if you will use a tape recorder, take notes, or both. If you plan to use a tape recorder, make sure you ask for the interviewee's permission beforehand.
5. Prepare questions before the interview. Have approximately ten well-constructed questions written out in advance.
6. Ask open-ended questions rather than asking questions that can be answered with "yes" or "no."
7. Don't be too structured; let your subject "chat". Sometimes a person will go "off topic" and chat. This is fine, to a point, and can often times reward you with extra tidbits of information that you otherwise would have missed. However, if you find your subject wandering too far away from the topic, tactfully bring the conversation back to the specific nature of the discussion.
8. End the interview in a professional manner. Conclude the interview as close to the specified time as possible. Ask permission for a follow-up call regarding dates or other facts that may not be clear from your notes. Assure the person that, if at all possible, you will notify him/her when the position is filled. Remember to thank your subject graciously, and assure him/her that you have enjoyed the interview.

Rules To Abide By To Avoid Legal Trouble

1. Don't ask about anything that the law prohibits you from considering in making your decision. For example, don't ask about an applicant's race or religion because you are not allowed to consider these factors in making your decision. Don't panic if an applicant raises a delicate subject such as disability or national origin without any prompting from you. You can't raise such subjects, but the applicant can. Please do not add additional follow-up comments.
2. Respect the applicant's privacy. Although federal law does not require you to do so, many state laws do.
3. Don't make promises you can't keep. If you exaggerate your organization's prospects in an effort to sell the applicant on your department, and the applicant accepts the job because of those statements, you might face a lawsuit for fraud. And, if you make promises about job security, for example that the organization doesn't fire employees who are performing well, you will have to keep them, or risk a lawsuit for breach of contract.

Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA)

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission is the federal agency that enforces the ADA.

According to the EEOC, you should **never** ask the following questions in a job interview:

- Have you ever had or been treated for any of the following conditions or diseases? (Followed by a checklist of various diseases or conditions.)
- List any conditions or diseases for which you have been treated in the past three years.
- Have you ever been hospitalized?
- Have you ever been treated by a psychiatrist?
- Have you ever been treated for any mental condition?
- Do you suffer from any health-related condition that might prevent you from performing this job?
- Have you had any major illnesses in the past five years?
- How many days were you absent from work because of illness last year?
- Do you have any physical defects that preclude you from doing certain types of things?
- Do you have any disabilities or impairments that might affect your ability to do the job?
- Are you taking any prescribed drugs?
- Have you ever been treated for drug addiction or alcoholism?
- Have you ever filed a worker's compensation claim?

According to the EEOC, you may ask the following questions in a job interview:

- Can you perform the essential functions of the job with or without reasonable accommodation?
- How would you perform the job functions? (If you want to ask any applicant this question, you should ask all applicants this question.)
- Can you meet the attendance requirements?
- What are your professional certifications and licensures?
- Do you currently use illegal drugs?

You can ask people about their abilities, but you can't ask about their disabilities. This means that you can ask how an applicant plans to perform each function of the job, but you cannot ask whether the applicant has any disabilities that will prevent him or her from performing each function of the job.

One way to ensure that you stay within the rules is to attach a detailed job description to the application or describe the job duties to the applicant during the job interview. Then ask how the applicant plans to perform the job. This approach gives applicants an opportunity to talk about their qualifications and strengths. It also allows them to let you know whether they might need reasonable accommodations to do the job.

Some Rules to Keep in Mind With ADA:

1. If you have no reason to believe that the applicant has a disability, you cannot ask whether he or she will need an accommodation (special help or equipment) from you to perform the job.
2. If you do have reason to believe that the applicant has a disability (for example, the disability is obvious or the applicant has told you about the disability), you cannot ask about accommodations at this point in the process.

Basic Interview Question Guidelines

Item	Avoid	Permissible
Age: While it is legitimate for an employer to consider a job candidates' experience, the employer may not consider age unless there is a legal minimum, such as a position serving alcohol. Legal maximum ages, such as the one for commercial airline pilots, are very rare and seldom apply to educational institutions.	How old are you? What is your date of birth? What year did you graduate from high school or college? At what age do you plan to retire?	Are you 18 years of age or older? (To determine if the applicant is legally old enough to perform the job). If you were offered this position, could you establish that you meet the legal age minimum? How long do you intend to stay in the position you are seeking?
Alcohol or drug use	Whether candidate is an alcoholic or has been addicted to drugs in the past.	Whether candidate currently uses illegal drugs or has used illegal drugs in the past.
Arrest record	Inquiries about arrests.	None (may have a disparate impact on certain minority groups).
Citizenship	Whether candidate is a U.S. citizen. Where were you born? What is your native language?	Can you be legally eligible to work in the U.S? Do you speak languages other than English that might be helpful in performing this job?
Conviction record	Inquiries relating to convictions that are not relevant to the job being applied for.	Convictions that reasonably relate to performing the job in question. Consider the nature and number of convictions, facts surrounding each offense, and length of time since the last conviction.
Disabilities	Questions designed to elicit information about	How candidate would perform the job and whether the candidate

	a disability.	could perform the job with or without accommodation.
Gender	Candidate's gender, where gender is not a bona fide occupational qualification.	Candidate's gender, where it is a bona fide occupational qualification, such as actor, actress.
Height or weight requirements	Height or weight requirements not related to job.	Height or weight requirements necessary for the job.
<p>Marital and family status: Because of a long history of discrimination against women in the workplace, Congress passed numerous laws that prohibit questions about sex, family status, or pregnancy during the interviewing process.</p> <p>* Interviewers should not limit specific questions to male or female candidates only.</p>	<p>Questions about marital status, childcare, number of children, or pregnancy*.</p> <p>Are you planning to start a family in the near future?</p> <p>Do you have a spouse who would need relocation assistance if you are offered this job?</p>	<p>Questions about whether candidate can meet work schedule.</p> <p>Do you anticipate any absences from work on a regular basis?</p> <p>Have you ever used a different last name?</p> <p>Is your spouse employed by this employer?</p>
National origin	Lineage, ancestry, descent, native language, birthplace, and national origin of spouse or parents.	Whether candidate is legally eligible to work in the U.S. and can communicate well enough to perform the job's essential functions.
Religion	Religious preference or affiliation, except at religiously affiliated institutions when hiring faculty or ministerial positions that further the institution's religious mission.	Whether candidate can meet the work schedule with reasonable accommodation, if necessary.
Sexual Orientation	Candidate's sexual orientation.	None

Four Goals For A Successful Interview

1. Establish rapport. Research has shown that rapport between the interviewer and the applicant contributes substantially to the effectiveness of the interview. The interviewer should be a good host, alleviating any apprehension on the part of the interviewee that could impede the flow of useful information. A warm greeting and some “small talk” can relax both the interviewer and the interviewee and help establish mutual confidence.
2. Taking control of the interview. The interviewer should take control of the interview by letting the applicant know how long the process will take and the steps that will be involved. To keep control, the interviewer must have earlier reviewed the applicant's background materials and noted areas on which to follow up with questions. Ideally, the interviewer should take no more than 25 percent of the allotted time in asking questions of and providing information to the applicant. As long as the interviewer is talking, nothing about the applicant can be learned.
3. Gathering useful information. To gather truly useful information, the interviewer should take particular care in framing questions. The interviewer should also avoid asking leading questions, such as “We prefer a team-oriented environment, don't you?” or “Do you like to work with people?” Such questions defeat the purpose of the interview to obtain a clear and balanced picture of the applicant's qualifications in general, questions using words and phrases such as “why,” “how,” “what,” “describe,” and “tell me about” will yield the most revealing information. If the applicant provides irrelevant information in response, the interviewer can get him or her back on track by rephrasing the original question or moving on to a new question.
4. Treating all applicants in the same manner. To ensure that no federal or state equal employment opportunity laws are violated, all applicants must be treated exactly the same. Application of different standards to different candidates on the basis of gender or minority status is unlawful. Therefore, the interviewer should not indicate to the applicant his or her interest in hiring a woman or minority individual and the interviewer should not place undue emphasis on conditions of employment (such as travel, heavy lifting, long hours, and so on) in the hope of prompting the applicant to withdraw his or her application. However, the interviewer must review the essential functions of the job with all applicants.

Summary Of The Interview Process

You should not ask any questions relating to age, family, marital status, pregnancy, gender, national origin and religion. These questions may seem ordinary and reasonable within a social setting. However, in an interview these questions are irrelevant and may be grounds for a discrimination lawsuit.

Interviewers, by human nature, will make subjective assessments of a person and form a perception of an applicant. However, by structuring the interview objectively, that is preparing a list of standard questions concerning the applicant's knowledge, skills and abilities for the job, an interviewer will avoid intentional as well as unintentional biases in hiring. Although employers will ultimately choose the most qualified candidate who fits within the employment setting, an interview should remain focused on the individual's qualifications and previous work experience.

It is fair game to inquire into an applicant's previous work experience. For example, an employer may ask why an applicant left his or her previous job and what he or she did or didn't like most about it. As a precautionary measure, employers should make questions as uniform as possible among candidates. This will serve as evidence of nondiscrimination in the event of a lawsuit since all candidates were objectively evaluated according to the same criteria.

In the event that an applicant believes that the reason why he or she was not hired for a job was because of discriminatory interviewing, a complaint will be filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. A claim may be filed in federal or state court alleging failure to hire because of the applicant's race, gender, religion, age, marital status or other characteristic. The claimant will usually be seeking monetary damages for emotional distress, back or front pay and lost benefits, or injunctive relief. Punitive damages may be sought as well.

Remember to treat all candidates fairly. Review each candidate's resume prior to the interview. Use the same list of standard questions for each interview. Be prepared to provide information about your organization and answer questions from the candidate. Look and act professionally during the interview and show an interest in every candidate you interview. Finally, do not approach the hiring process with preconceptions about the personal characteristics of the ideal candidate. It is generally unlawful to consider only women, minorities, or native speakers of a language for positions. In well intentioned but overzealous attempts to diversify, some institutions have committed reverse discrimination by excluding whole classes of people from consideration. Use the interview process to explore the talents that diverse individuals have to offer.

Guidelines For Checking References

- Tell each applicant that no employment offer will be made until satisfactory reference checks are made.
- Call each reference given.
- If you don't get a response to a written request to a local employer, call them. The conversation may reap more information than a letter would anyway, although you should be aware that many employers are reluctant to disclose much about a former employee because they are afraid of being sued, too.
- Document all information that you receive.
- Also document unsuccessful tries at gathering information, to protect you from negligent hiring claims.
- If the former supervisor won't tell you anything, record the fact that he or she refused to give any information about why you should or shouldn't hire the applicant.
- If you can't get the requested information from references, ask the job applicant for more information or to clear the way for you with the references he or she gave.

Calling The Former Employer

Calling is a better way to check references than writing because people will sometimes tell you information that they don't want to put in writing. Be sure that whatever you ask is job-related. You don't want to be accused of invading anyone's privacy or of discriminating against him or her. Here are some tips for successful over-the-phone reference checks:

- Call once to schedule the reference check, and call back when you say you will. This gives the employer time to remember specific facts about the worker, or look up that worker's file.
- Allot plenty of time in case you get a reference who will talk at length.
- Take good notes during the conversation.

Checking Personal References

Most employers don't check personal references, even when they ask for them. There is a common perception that personal references are usually friends of the applicant, and that they will not convey any negative information, in the event that it exists, because they are friends. If you do ask for and check personal references, keep these pointers in mind:

- Consider it a red flag if the applicant has lived in the area for a considerable period of time but cannot list any local references.
- Like employment references, personal references are more likely to say things on the phone than they are to put them in writing. So call rather than write, if possible.
- Have an information release signed by the applicant and ready in case the reference requests it. Applicants submitting the NC State application (PD107) automatically sign a release of information statement.

- Ask only job-related questions. Don't ask irrelevant questions that could be the basis of a discrimination claim, and don't ask questions that could support an invasion of privacy claim.

Checking Education Records

- The Human Resources Department verifies the job applicant's degree and/or dates of attendance for positions classified as SPA.

The Human Resources Department requests official transcripts for positions classified as EPA. Copies of transcripts can be requested in the application process.