

# Increasing Interview Effectiveness

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**Description:** If you could change your interview process to improve your chances of making the 'right' hire, would you? Learn how to select interview questions and design the interview process to maximize your chances of success in hiring full-time staff.

## Learning Objectives:

After this session, participants will be able to:

1. Demonstrate their understanding of the effectiveness of interview questions by rewriting a selected interview question.
2. Identify at least one aspect of the interview process that they will consider changing to improve the chances of a successful hire.

## Outline:

- I. Interview Questions
  - A. Self-appraisal
  - B. Situational
  - C. Open vs. Closed
  - D. Follow-up Questions
- II. Reflection/Activity: develop the standard "What are your weaknesses?" question into a behavioral question. Small group sharing. (LO #1)
- III. Interview Format and Structure
  - A. Interview Schedule & Participants
  - B. Exercises/Activities
  - C. Cover letter, resume, references, and written questions
  - D. Communication
- IV. Transferability of this knowledge/strategy to Phone Interviews and/or Skype interviews
- V. Reflection – Think about a poor hiring decision you've made or been involved with (student, graduate assistant, professional). Knowing now what problems came up, what questions or activities could you have used to better elicit the type of information that might have revealed these types of problems before the hiring decision was made?) (LO #2)
- VI. Q&A

## Suggested Reading:

Falcone, Paul. (1997) 96 Great Interview Questions to Ask Before You Hire. American Management Association. New York, NY

## Presentation NOTES:

### Behavioral Interviewing

The importance of using a deliberate approach to interviewing...

- Asking the question is only half the equation. The other half lies in knowing how to state the questions and probe for more information.
  - Rehearsed answers to traditional queries go by the wayside when responses are tied to past actions.
  - The farther you get away from the initial, structured response, the more the candidate is called upon to employ their interpretative and evaluative decision making skills.
- Past behavior is the best indicator of future behavior.
  - We set patterns that become how we repeatedly act.
- Behavioral interviewing questions require candidates to self-assess and provide examples.
  - If the background or foundation isn't there, it is more difficult to exaggerate or fabricate when using actual experiences.

Developing effective interview questions entails...

- Analyzing the job.
- Identifying values, skills, and competencies necessary for success.

- Developing questions and activities to determine whether each candidate has the desired skills and competencies.
  - Asking questions to get at the candidate’s knowledge of the position.
  - Using activities to judge if the candidate really knows, and can convey, what they claim to know.

### Self-Appraisal Interview Questions

- Self-assessment of skills, knowledge, and abilities requires the candidate to utilize experiences and/or to dig out information that they may not have recently accessed.
  - The candidate must appraise their actions and their ability to understand themselves and articulate their qualifications.
- It will give you, as the interviewer, insight about motivation and reasons for behavior.
- Examples of Self-Appraisal Questions
  - If you could design your own job to require either more public speaking engagements or more written reports, which would you choose and why?
  - Why do you think you are a strong leader?
  - On a scale of 1 to 10, how do you rate your communications skills? Why?

### Apply TORC (Threat of Reference Checks)

- Reference checks are important, and reminding the candidate that you plan to contact their previous supervisor(s) results in a higher probability that the interviewee will be more honest with their answers.
- Examples of TORC questions
  - What is your best guess as to what your supervisory will say are your strengths, weaker points, and overall performance?
  - What was your boss’s reaction to how you handled that situation?
  - If I asked your boss to describe his/her feelings about you handled an incident (as a follow up to a question), what would do you think he/she would say?

### Situational Interview Questions

- These questions request concrete examples of past behavior and performance.
  - They allow you to seek feedback about technical skills, transferable skills, personal characteristics, etc. It is difficult to fake answers to these questions.
- Situational interview questions often start with, “Tell me about a time...” or “Give me an example...” or “Describe...”
- Examples of Situational Interview Questions
  - Give me an example of a time when you enforced a policy you did not agree with.
  - Describe situation when you assumed a leadership position.
  - Tell me about one of the biggest mistakes you made as a professional.
  - Give me an example of a time you strongly disagreed with your supervisor.
  - Describe the professional accomplishment of which you are most proud.

### Closed vs. Open Questions

- Closed Questions can be answered by a ‘Yes’ or ‘No.’ They are used to verify information (e.g., “so you left your last position in May?”), but don’t typically provide any additional valuable information.
- Open ended questions require a detailed response.
- Examples:
  - Are you committed to continuous learning? (closed)
  - Please give me some examples of your commitment to continuous learning. (open)

## Leading Questions

- Leading Questions broadcast the answers you want the candidate to give, and thus should be avoided.
- Examples:
  - You don't mind working late, do you?
  - Student involvement is a vital part of our department mission. How do you feel about involving students in the decision making process?
    - Drop the first sentence and simply ask the question.

## Follow-Up Questions

- Don't hesitate to probe further. Follow-up questions require the candidate to use their interpretative and evaluative decision making skills.
- Probing for more information after the candidate's initial response is equally, if not more important in gauging the real person behind the superficial response.
  - If a candidate doesn't directly answer a question, ask it again in a different way.
  - If a response is vague or contradictory, dig deeper with another question.
- Examples:
  - Tell me about a time you organized a program that failed. *What would you do differently?*
  - Tell me about a time when you disagreed with your supervisor. *How did you handle it? How did it turn out? What would you do different next time?*
  - *Why did you react that way?*
  - *Were you satisfied with the result?*
  - *What did you base your decision on?*
  - *What were the ramifications of your decision?*
  - *Could you expand a bit more?*

## Reflection Activity:

Develop the standard, "What are your weaknesses?" into a Behavioral Interview question. Possibilities:

- What is the most difficult part of your job? *Why?* (Self-Appraisal)
- In your last performance evaluation, what area for improvement did you identify? *What steps have you taken to address this area?* (Self-Appraisal)
- Tell me about a time when you realized you didn't know how to deal with something *and how did you handle it?* (Situational)

## Interview Format and Structure

### Interview Schedule & Participants

- Be deliberate about who to involve in the interview process: coworkers, campus partners, students, participants. Their involvement might be because their feedback on the candidates is valuable, or because it is important for the candidate to meet them, or because the relationship is valuable, or because of future collaboration potential.
- Develop a standard interview format for each candidate.
  - The selection committee will be able to more fairly compare candidates if the conditions in which they interview are the same. Consistency is preferred regarding the interview participants, the order of the interview groups, the length of the interview sessions within a group, and the questions being asked.
- Consider having the same person scheduled to open and close the interview day (preferably the supervisor or an experienced interviewer).
- Consider giving each interview group a primary purpose (one group might be charged with determining 'organizational fit' while another group might be tasked with determining if the candidate has sufficient technical skills), and each group should be given a list of questions to ask.

## Activities/Presentations/Portfolios

These are a valuable way to garner more information about a candidate:

- Presentations help a candidate show their knowledge, speaking skills, organizational skills, and creativity.
- Demonstrations help a candidate showcase specific technical skills.
- Portfolios allow a candidate to show examples of their work product, including range of skill, depth of knowledge, and quality of work.

## Written Questions

- If additional information about the candidates would be helpful in determining who to interview, consider asking your short list of candidates to submit responses to written questions or prompts (e.g., Describe actions you've taken to further your professional development. Give a detailed example of a time when you took initiative. Provide more detail about your most significant leadership role on campus).

## Communication

- Provide candidates with as much communication as possible, as allowed by your institution, regarding the search process.
  - Candidates should be notified when their application is received, and told about the expected timeline.
  - Candidates who do not make the short list, or who will not get an interview, should be sent a communication as soon as your institution allows.
  - Unsuccessful candidates who interviewed (whether by phone, Skype, or on campus) should be notified promptly by phone.

## Phone Interviews, Skype

- These are imperfect, but sometimes necessary, substitutions for face-to-face meetings. The suggestions regarding interview questions and interview format still apply.

## Effective Interview Questions

1. Give me an example of a time you strongly disagreed with your supervisor.
2. Describe the professional accomplishment of which you are most proud.
3. Tell me about a time you organized a program that failed. What would you do differently?
4. Describe a situation in which you assumed a leadership position.
5. What have you done to recognize/reward your employees over the past year?
6. Do you relate best with your supervisors, peers, or employees? Why?
7. Tell me about a time when you fired or disciplined an employee. What would you do differently next time?
8. Give me an example of a time when you showed initiative.
9. Summarize a situation in which you performed well under pressure.
10. What have you done to build your team?
11. What is the most difficult part of your current job? Why?
12. What would you change about your current position to make you more satisfied with work?
13. On a scale of one to ten, how do you rate your communication skills to those of your peers? Why?
14. Compare your professional experiences at your last two jobs.
15. What have you done to encourage a positive culture in your work environment?
16. What concerns do you have about this position, department or campus?
17. What motivates you to do your best?
18. What three things frustrate you more than anything else? What work-related situations cause you stress?
19. How can people tell if you are frustrated or angry?
20. What sets you apart from your peers?
21. How many hours a week do you expect (or expect your employees) to work?
22. How would your supervisor (colleagues, employees, students, coworkers) describe you?
23. Tell me how you have been involved in furthering the profession.
24. Give me an example of a time when you took a significant risk. What did you base your decision on?
25. Tell me about a time you worked with someone who was difficult to get along with.
26. Describe a time you made a critical decision in your supervisor's absence.
27. What is the most important project or task that you have ever delegated?
28. What have you done to continue your professional growth and learning?
29. During an interview everyone has a mental checklist of things they are looking for in order to accept (or decline) a job offer; what is on your list?
30. What did you learn in your last position? What are you hoping to learn in this position?
31. Tell me how you've grown your job responsibilities since you started your last job?
32. Tell me about a difficult ethical decision you have been faced with. What were the ramifications of your decision?
33. Give me an example of a time when you enforced a policy you did not agree with.
34. Describe your role in the development of a recreation program. What were the key components and who was involved in that development process?
35. Describe a situation where you instituted structural and/or organizational change. How did you work with all levels of staff to develop, communicate and implement the plan?
36. How have you gone about making connections and building bridges across campus? (What departments/areas would you start with?)
37. Why do you think you are a strong leader? Give supporting examples.
38. If you could design your own job to require either more public speaking engagements or more written reports, which would you choose and why?
39. Give some examples of how you have worked in the 'white spaces.'

### Tips:

- Determine what values and skills you are seeking in a position, then deliberately choose questions that are most likely to give you information about those values and skills.
- Rephrase leading questions (e.g., instead of asking "Do you work well under pressure?" consider asking "Tell me about a time when stress negatively impacted your work performance.")
- Think about questions you've asked in past interviews that didn't help you determine the successful candidate, and consider rewording or eliminating those questions.