

How to Interview?

Questioning Beyond the Image



The Basics of an Interview

A job interview is very much like an audition for an acting role. The point - in both situations - is to project the best image possible.

As a hiring manager who is responsible for recruiting talent, you are presented with job candidates who excel in projecting a desired image. These new sophisticated candidates are savvy and confident with the interview process. With all of the books and social networking information on the web and in the market we see a change in who is interviewing who. Today it is geared toward interviewing the interviewer; many job seekers are better prepared than the manager asking them questions. They are eager to impress you; but, simply because these candidates can present themselves well, does not guarantee they will be suitable employees. The professional image they present might fool you.

The hiring process is a critical component of a manager's/owner's job and is one of the more important decisions to the success of your company. The people that you hire are a reflection of the interviewing process. The truth is that the unique parameters of the job interview put a lot of weight upon a relatively brief conversation between you and individual candidates. It is crucial that you design the interview so that you gain the most appropriate information in the shortest possible time. This is not quite as easy as it might appear. Ask anyone who has made a wrong hire and the consequence of that on the company and their own job.

The best way, of course, to find out about a person is to ask a series of questions. But the kind of questions - the particular way in which they are worded - is what you want to pay close attention to.

Remember: applicants come to an interview with the explicit goal of giving you answers they think you want. The point here is that neither the interviewer nor the interviewee has

a necessarily conscious, sinister desire to mislead or “play games”. But you, as a potential employer, would like the most honest, candid information you can extract from an applicant. And this can best be accomplished by framing questions so that they address these fundamental areas:

1. Job Experience / Skill Set & Leadership qualities
2. Personal Integrity
3. Motivation and Dedication

You will want to begin by first asking broad questions, followed by increasingly specific question that focus on revealing details.

This step includes “Behavioral Based Interviewing”. What is a “Behavioral Interview”? Behavioral based interviewing is interviewing based on discovering how the interviewee acted in specific employment-related situations. The logic is that how you behaved in the past will predict how you will behave in the future. I.e.: past performance predicts future performance.

Job Experience and Skill Set

Work History

- What special aspects of your work experience have prepared you for this particular job?
- Can you describe for me one or two of your most important accomplishments to date and why is that?
- How much supervision have you typically received in your previous job?
- Describe for me one or two of the biggest disappointments in your work history?
- Why are you leaving your present job?

How to Interview?

Questioning Beyond the Image



Job Performance

- Everyone has strengths & weaknesses as a team member. What are your strong attributes for this job?
- What would you say are your job skills that need improvement/enhancement?
- How did your supervisor on your most recent job evaluate your job performance? What were some of the good points & what are the areas needing enhancement?
- When you have been told, or discovered for yourself, a problem in your job performance, what have you typically done? Can you give me an example?
- There is nothing greater than job satisfaction. In your career what stands out as a highlight for you? What other team members were involved in this?
- Define success in a job.
- What kind of people do you find it most difficult to work with? Why?
- Starting with your last job, tell me about any of your achievements that were recognized by your superiors and peers.
- Can you give me an example of your ability to manage or supervise others?
- What are some things you would like to avoid in a job? Why?
- In your previous job what kind of pressures did you encounter?
- What would you say is the most important thing you are looking for in a job?
- What were some of the things about your last job that you found most difficult to do?

- What are some things you particularly liked about your last job? Provide an example?
- Do you consider your progress on the job representative of your ability? Why?
- If I were to ask your present (most recent) employer about your ability as a _____, what would he/she say?

Education

- What special aspects of your education or training have prepared you for this job?
- Since graduation of university/college, how have you invested in yourself since that time?
- What have you done in the last 2 years for continuous improvement in your skill set?

Career Goals

- What is your long-term employment or career objective?
- What kind of job do you see yourself holding five years from now? What do you feel you need to develop in terms of skill & knowledge in order to be ready for that opportunity?
- Why do you think you will be successful in that type of job?
- How does this job fit in with your overall career goals?
- Who or what in your life would you say influenced you most with your career objectives?
- Can you pinpoint any specific things in your past experience that affected your present career objectives?

How to Interview?

Questioning Beyond the Image



- What would you most like to accomplish if you had this job?
- What might make you leave this job?

Self-Assessment

- What kind of things do you feel most confident in doing?
- Can you describe for me a difficult obstacle/task you have had to overcome? How did you handle it? How do you feel this experience affected your personality or ability?
- How would you describe yourself as a person? How would your peers describe you? How would your supervisor describe you?
- What do you think are the most important characteristics & abilities a person must possess to become a successful? How do you rate yourself in these areas?
- Do you consider yourself a self-starter? If so, explain why (and provide examples) ?
- What do you consider to be your greatest achievements to date? Why?
- What things frustrate you the most? How do you usually cope with them?
- What type of technology have you used in the past to help you grow as a person?

Creativity

- In your work experience, what have you done that you consider truly creative?
- One being low ten being high ... how would you rate your resourcefulness?

- Can you think of a problem you have encountered when the old solutions didn't work & when you came up with new solutions?
- Of your creative accomplishments big or small, at work or home, what gave you the most satisfaction?
- What kind of problems have people recently called on you to solve? Tell me what you have devised and why?

Decisiveness

- Do you consider yourself to be thoughtful, analytical or do you usually make up your mind fast? Give an example. (Watch time taken to respond)
- What was your most difficult decision in the last six months? What made it difficult?
- The last time you did not know what decision to make, what did you do?
- How do you go about making an important decision affecting your career? (look for their methodology).

Range of Interests

- What organizations do you belong to?
- Tell me specifically what you do in the civic activities in which you participate. (Leading questions in selected areas. i.e. sports, economics, current events, finance.)
- How do you keep up with what's going on in your company / your industry/ your profession?

How to Interview?

Questioning Beyond the Image



Motivation

- What is your professional goal this year?
- Can you give me examples of experiences on the job that you felt were satisfying? Is fun on the job important to you?
- Do you have a long & short-term plan for your department? Is it realistic?
- Did you achieve it last year? If so how? If not why?
- Describe how you determine what constitutes top priorities in the performance of your job.

Work Standards

- What are your standards of success in your job?
- In your position, how would you define doing a good job? On what basis was your definition determined?
- When judging the performance of your subordinate, what factors or characteristics are most important to you?
- From an industry standard do you know “What Best Practices” are?

Leadership

- In your present job what approach do you take to get your team members together to establish a common approach to a problem?
- What approach do you take in getting your team to accept your ideas or department/company goals?
- What specifically do you do to set an example for your employees?
- How frequently do you meet with your immediate team members as a group?

- What sort of leader do your people feel you are? Are you satisfied?
- If you do not have much time & they hold seriously differing views, what would be your approach?
- How would you describe your basic leadership style? Give specific examples of how you practice this? (Your looking for a candidate that understands situational leadership).
- Do you feel you work more effectively on a one to one basis or in a group situation?
- Have you ever led a task force or committee or any group who doesn't report to you, but from whom you have to get work? How did you do it? What were the satisfactions & disappointments? How would you handle the job differently?
- What type of succession planning have you designed for your department? If not why not?

Oral Presentation Skills

- Have you ever done any public or group speaking? Recently? Why? How did it go?
- Have you made any individual presentations recently? How did you prepare and who was the audience? (Looking to see if they take the role of speaking serious or they just wing it)

Written Communication Skills

- Would you rather write a report or give a verbal report? Why?
- What kind of writing have you done? For a group? For an individual? / Technical report?

How to Interview?

Questioning Beyond the Image



Flexibility

- What was the most important idea or suggestion you received recently from your team? What happened as a result?
- What do you think about the continuous changes in company operating policies & procedures?
- Technology has changed the way we all do our jobs. How has technology changed your job in the last 6 months? What investment have you made in learning new technology?
- How effective has your company been in adapting its policies to fit a changing world of business?
- What was the most significant change made in your company in the last six months which directly affected you, & how successfully do you think you implemented this change?

Stress Tolerance

- Everyone has days with pressure - Do you have days in your past or current position that you feel pressure in your job? Tell me about it.
- What has been the highest pressure situation you have been under in recent years? How did you cope with it?

Stability and Maturity

- Describe your most significant success & failure in the last two years.
- What do you like to do best?
- What do you like to do least?
- What is job commitment to you?

Interest in Self Development

- What has been the most important person or event in your own self development?
- How do you maintain your marketability within a company? (I always think if an employee is not marketable outside of a company they are not marketable inside a company – this is where the top performers always stay competitive and in charge of their destiny).
- How do you participate in your organization in regard to training and development for yourself and others?
- What kind of books, publications, web pages/articles do you read?
- Have you recently taken a management development course or attended a seminar/webinar? If so, what was the highlight for you?
- How are you helping your team develop themselves?



How to Interview?

Questioning Beyond the Image



Personal Integrity

The area of personal integrity can be a hard one to access when interviewing a job candidate.

What you want to determine is whether this person will hold to high moral principles in difficult times, and resist unethical practices, which could come to haunt your organization in a dangerous way. Where do these ethical boundaries lie in this individual? Here are some examples of questions designed to reveal:

1. Tell me about a time when co-workers were being dishonest, in your view. What, if anything, did you do?
2. Tell me about a situation in which you felt pressured to compromise your personal integrity. What finally happened there?
3. Have you ever felt like you had to jeopardize your job for something that you really believed in?

Keep in mind that you will often need to drill down to get answers that are specific and relevant as opposed to responses that tend to be vague and general. Keep asking the questions that you feel are important to the job you are hiring for.

Motivation

Assessing a potential employee's level of energy and motivation is tricky business.

One way to assess authentic motivation is to ask questions that give examples of initiative. These might include:

1. What have you done in the last year that was beyond the call of duty in your role?
2. What did you learn from that experience as an employee and an individual?

3. How will this job enable you to meet your long-term objectives?
4. In your past experience, what task have you done that showed a lot of initiative on your part?
5. Besides your job skills and qualifications for this position, what else can you bring to the role?

I once had a candidate say, "I make the best Tiramisu Cake", "Everyone just gets stoked at work when I make that". The candidate really got the question, and he knew that he had to bring something else to the table for this job and this team to get the job".

Often you will have candidates that are so close but there is one thing special about the other candidate that you just know will make a difference to the team. They bring added value.

6. What have you accomplished in the last year that would make your employment here an asset to our company?

Some more specific, pointed questions designed to assess motivation and initiative includes:

1. How do you feel about the progress you have made toward your career goals so far?
2. What career objective have you realized?
3. What goals had you hoped/planned to reach by this time that you have not met?

These questions and their answers may well tell you a lot about an applicant's self-perception, and personal effectiveness. Watch non-verbal communication closely! Remember to look for candidates who have self-awareness. This may also trigger their self-esteem issues.

How to Interview?

Questioning Beyond the Image



Some further probing questions into this area will perhaps include:

1. What is most important to you in a job?
2. What project has been the most satisfying to you, personally?
3. What are you looking forward to in the world of work?
4. What types of rewards for a “job well done” mean the most to you?

Keep asking similar phrased questions to check for sincerity, consistency, and depth of conviction. Listen closely, and compare what you are hearing to what you want to hear - as objectively as possible.

When you conduct your reference checks on the potential candidate cross reference your work. Is the out-come of the work references match what the candidate is saying? If not, this may be a flag for you.

Dedication

The fourth area of evaluation is the level of dedication to your company and their team. Employee turnover is a troublesome problem for many businesses, selecting a loyal employee can save your company a lot of grief and money. Put some direct questions to the applicant:

1. If we were to hire you, how long do you imagine you will remain in our employ?
2. What would you absolutely avoid in your work life?
3. Tell me about a time when you felt your work was not productive. How did you resolve this situation, if you did?
4. What work environments/projects have motivated/ jazzed you the most?

Once you feel like you have gotten solid information about these three crucial areas, you have set the groundwork for peripheral areas of character/ skill revelation. You will want to better understand an applicant's relationship to former bosses with such questions as:

1. Describe for me the best boss you ever had.
2. How much do you work by yourself at your current position?
3. Tell me about the worst boss you had. What went wrong?
4. What do you think your boss will say when you quit?
5. What suggestions would you offer about your current company?
6. How might it be run better?
7. What kind of reference do you suppose you will get from your present supervisor? What will be said about your skill level? Your interpersonal skills?

Now you will want some information about how this person gets along with other people. Your team and you do not need someone at work with a bad attitude! In this area you need to be as non-threatening as possible. A good course of action is to ask questions about how the applicant observes other people interacting:

1. Tell me about your closest co-workers: What are their strengths? Weaknesses?
2. What kinds of problems have you experienced with co-workers?
3. How do you think good morale and teamwork happens in a group? Can you give me an example?

How to Interview?

Questioning Beyond the Image



Be particularly aware of responses, which put blame on others in a consistent way. This may signal a lack of maturity, and resistance to taking on responsibility.

You will also want to know how this person accepts direction and feedback. A good way to broach this subject is to ask the simple questions: In a group? Can you give me an example?

1. For what have you been criticized by more than one person?
2. Do you accept the truth of their observations? Why?
3. Have you changed the behavior as a result of the criticism? Why?

Observe how in touch this person is with mature, objective, constructive criticism.

One of the final areas of work life you will want to explore is coping with the stresses of an organization. The ability to handle stress is a determining factor in many jobs, as well as a predictor of staying power. You will want to get a good idea about how the interviewee copes with stress under pressure. Some strategic questions to pose:

1. What have you done while under a lot of pressure that, later, you wish you had not?
2. What was the tightest deadline you have ever faced?
3. What kinds of difficulties test your patience the most?
4. All of us have had days that are not so great and we become frustrated and frankly fed up - How do you deal with your anger/frustration?

These questions - and the candidate's responses to them (both verbal and non-verbal) - can offer you quite a lot of insight into how an individual copes with the inevitable stress and strains of the work place.

Work References

Lastly the most important part of the hire is checking out the candidates references. Plan the questions accordingly. Look for discrepancies in what the candidate says about himself and what the "Candidates' References" say about them. A good reference takes a minimum of 30 minutes. For many roles you may also have to do criminal checks, make sure the candidate is bonded, can travel internationally (has current passport). As you can see hiring the right candidate takes effort, enthusiasm to market the position and tenacity to get the right candidate.

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Doing a great job of hiring is a "Labour of Love". Do it right the first time and your company, yourself, your team and the candidate will reap the rewards of your effort for a long time.



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Hiring Right The First Time

The "Driving Force" of "Talent Management"

