



INTERVIEWING

A Strategic Guide

The job interview is a powerful factor in the employee selection process as well as a key tool employers utilize in hiring. The job interview questions asked are critical in magnifying the power of the job interview to help us select superior employees. Legal job interview questions and questions that separate desirable candidates from average candidates are fundamental in employee selection. Job interview questions matter to employers. Take the time up front to prepare for your interview. Consider the position you are interviewing for and select the questions you are planning to ask. A well planned interview will insure that you get the most from the interview and assist in making a better selection.

Greet and chat with the candidate for a few minutes to let them become comfortable. Pay attention to how your candidate interacts with people such as the receptionist. This observation, in addition to your own observation of the candidate's level of comfort with communication during the interview, is key. You can observe much about the candidate's communication style during the interview.

Here are sample job interview questions that I have found useful in the past. Feel free to use these or develop your own similar questions.

I like to start the interview process out by looking over their resume and asking questions about their background such as:

- I noticed you have changed jobs several times over the last few years. Could you tell me about that?
- You have been with (__) for a long period of time, why are you looking to leave now?
- Why are there gaps in your employment history?
- What strengths and weaknesses would you bring to this position?
- What is your understanding of this position and what skills do you bring to the position?
- What types of job responsibilities do you find to be most rewarding and why?
- What types of job responsibilities do you find to be most frustrating and why?

- What type of management style do you prefer (hand on, frequent supervision, minimal supervision etc.) and why?
- Tell me about the biggest challenge you have experienced in your life thus far.
- What do you consider to be your strengths?
- What do you consider to be your weakness?

Communication:

Communication skill is another aspect of your candidates' interaction that can be observed during the interview. At the same time, it is important to ask candidates behaviorally-based job interview questions about the communication skills they have exhibited on the job. These sample job interview questions about communication enable you to assess your candidate's skill in communication.

How articulate is the candidate? How clearly does the candidate communicate? How easily does the candidate select words to use to answer questions? Notice the non-verbal communication and the facial expressions as well. Does the candidate radiate sincerity and energy? Is the candidate genuinely interested in your company and the open job? You can learn much about whether to hire the candidate from the candidate's non verbal communication.

The following sample job interview questions about communication enable you to assess your candidate's skills in communication. Feel free to use these job interview questions in your own candidate interviews.

- Information you believe to be untrue or confidential has reached you via the grapevine. What actions have you taken in the past to take care of situations such as this when communication is out of control?
- Give me an example, from your past work experiences, about a time when you were part of a project or team and you never knew what was happening with the other action items or participants. How did you handle this situation?
- Rate your communication skills on a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 representing excellent communication skills. Give me three examples from your past work experiences that demonstrate the selected number is accurate.

- Describe the work environment or culture and its communication style in which you experience the most success.
- Describe five things about the communication within an organization that must be present for you to work most effectively?
- How often do you believe it is necessary to withhold information from staff members who report to you? Would you say you do this regularly, not often, or never? Under what circumstances do you limit communication in your experience?
- When you have had a boss, in the past, who fails to adequately communicate with you, how have you handled this?
- When you have entered a new workplace in the past, describe how you have gone about meeting and developing relationships with your new coworkers, supervisors, and reporting staff.

Interpersonal Skills:

Here, you are questioning to determine the interpersonal skills of your candidate. The effective coworker solves problems and conflicts with his or her peers. The candidate can demonstrate that they have built effective relationships with supervisors and reporting staff.

The candidate is giving you an idea about the interpersonal behaviors he/she will have trouble dealing with in the workplace. The candidate is giving you an idea about how well he works with people. He/she is telling you about how he/she builds relationships with and solves interpersonal problems with coworkers, supervisors, and reporting staff. The following sample job interview questions about teams and team work enable you to assess your candidate's skill in working with teams.

- Give an example of a successful project you were part of. What was your role? Why was the project successful?
- Describe two situations from your past work experience in which you have determined a team was the best potential solution to a problem, a needed process improvement, or a planned change. How did each work out?
- What actions and support, in your experience, make a team function successfully?
- Give me an example of a time when your work group or department worked especially well with another work group or department to accomplish a goal.

- Have you been a member of a team that struggled or failed to accomplish its goal? If so, what assessment did you make of the reasons for the failure?
- The following sample job interview questions about interpersonal skills enable you to assess your candidate's skills in interpersonal relationships.
- Tell me about a time when you had to work closely with a coworker whom you disliked or with whom you had trouble working. What did you do to make the relationship work so you could succeed for your company?
- Tell me about a time when you disagreed with the actions or decisions of your manager or supervisor. How did you approach the situation? Was the situation resolved to your satisfaction or did nothing change?
- Tell me about a time when you worked with a friend or a coworker who became a friend. What did you do to ensure that the friendship bore positive results for your company?
- Describe a conflict you were involved in at work. How did you resolve the conflict? What happened next with that coworker or team?
- What are three examples of the kinds of behaviors, actions, or attitudes you are most likely to conflict with at work? Can you give me an example of a situation you addressed in the past? How was it resolved?
- What are the three most important factors that make you an effective, valued coworker in your current job? What would your supervisor say are the three most important factors?
- If you have reporting staff, how would these staff members describe your relationship with them?
- During your work experiences while attending college, tell me about a time when you demonstrated that you have the ability and desire to work effectively with your coworkers.
- When you have entered a new workplace in the past, describe how you have gone about meeting and developing relationships with your new coworkers, supervisors, and reporting staff.

Motivation:

The following sample job interview questions enable you to assess what motivates the candidate you are interviewing.

- Describe the work environment or culture in which you are most productive and happy.
- Imagine you have received a coveted national award five years from now. Why did you receive the award, what is the award, and what are the circumstances under which you are receiving the award?
- What goals, including career goals, have you set for your life?
- How would you define “success” for your career? At the end of your work life, what must have been present for you to feel as if you had a successful career?
- Describe a work situation in which you can demonstrate that you motivated another person.
- Give me some examples of where you took extraordinary efforts to achieve a deadline.
- What did you do and what resulted from it?

Response to deadlines:

- Give me some examples of things you have done which demonstrate your ability to handle multiple priorities. What did you do and what resulted from your actions?
- Give me some examples of things you have done in the past which demonstrate your ability to respond to tight deadlines. What did you do and what resulted from your actions?

Attention to Detail:

- Give me an example of things you have done in previous jobs that demonstrate your ability to pay attention to detail. Tell me what you did and what resulted from your actions.
- Give me an example of where you may have found an error in some aspect of work that others may have overlooked. What was the error and what resulted from your actions? (If they were a Loan Officer previously, maybe a processor or underwriter was wrong in their interpretation of a guideline or in calculating income)

Teams and Team Work:

Depending on your work culture or environment, working with teams, working on a team, or working in a team atmosphere may be important. You are attempting to identify how well your candidate works as a member of either a cross-functional or departmental team. You are listening to hear that the candidate values team work. You are assessing your candidate's skill in analysis as well.

You are also discovering, with these team work job interview questions, what your candidate believes about why teams fail and why teams are successful. You are learning what must be present in the work environment for the candidate to experience team work.

The following sample job interview questions about communication enable you to assess your candidate's skills in communication.

- Information you believe to be untrue or confidential has reached you via the grapevine. What actions have you taken in the past to take care of situations such as this when communication is out of control?
- Give me an example, from your past work experiences, about a time when you were part of a project or team and you never knew what was happening with the other action items or participants. How did you handle this situation?
- Rate your communication skills on a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 representing excellent communication skills. Give me three examples from your past work experiences that demonstrate the selected number is accurate.

- Describe the work environment or culture and its communication style in which you experience the most success.
- Describe five things about the communication within an organization that must be present for you to work most effectively?
- How often do you believe it is necessary to withhold information from staff members who report to you? Would you say you do this regularly, not often, or never? Under what circumstances do you limit communication in your experience?
- When you have had a boss, in the past, who fails to adequately communicate with you, how have you handled this?
- When you have entered a new workplace in the past, describe how you have gone about meeting and developing relationships with your new coworkers, supervisors, and reporting staff.

Personal Development:

- Give me a recent example of something you did to improve your job performance. What did you do, why did you do it and what resulted from it?

Effective: Shows a willingness to learn about new approaches and expand on his/her skills. Recognizes that there is always room for improvement.

Ineffective: Has not idea how doing something to improve would really help them. Has limited ability to expand his/her knowledge base. Can not use new approaches and will rely on the boss to always direct/tell him/her rather than developing a new strategy on his/her own.

- Give me some examples of thing you have done which demonstrate that you are committed to this field and want to be truly professional in it.
- Give me an example of where you failed or received some very negative feedback, in some aspect of your job performance. What did you do to try to correct this failure and what resulted from your actions?

Effective: Gave a lot of thought to the feedback and looked to really improve in that area.

Ineffective: Felt the feedback was not necessarily true as a partner or co-worker participated and it was their fault. Felt that the boss was a grump or too hard so the feedback had no merit.

Resolving Conflict Effectively:

- Give me an example of where you had a conflict with your (boss, underwriter, investor etc). What was it over and how did you handle it? What resulted from it? Would you handle it differently today and why?

Effective: Assures the boss etc. that he/she will take care of the problem and understands that it should have been handled differently. Assures that once it is taken care of the boss etc. will get an update and that the problem will be solved in a way that benefits the organization.

Ineffective: Tries to give an answer right away before he/she knows all of the details. Failed to keep the boss etc. updated or provide documentation to possibly support his/her actions. Makes unrealistic promises. Shows no ability to resolve conflicts in a way that benefits the organization.

- Give me an example where you had a conflict with a customer. What was it over and how did you handle it? What resulted from it and would you handle it differently today?

Effective: Takes responsibility for own actions and can make a quick decision. Can solve problems he/she has been faced with before. Shows ability to solve problems that benefit the organization.

Ineffective: Can decide what to do. Works on the problem until the last minute without ever solving it. Has no history of solving problems or meeting a deadline and can not specify how his/her stepped in to make the customer happy and the organization look good.

- Give me an example where you had a conflict with a subordinate. What was it over and how did you handle it? What resulted from it? Would you handle it in a different manner now and why?

Sales Ability:

- Give me some examples of how you generated new business from a client. What did you do and what resulted from your actions?
- Tell me about a major sale you lost. Why do you think you lost it and what do you do differently as a result of that experience?
- Give me an example of where you called on a customer and sensed that you were not clicking or developing a rapport with them. What did you do to handle this situation and overcome the challenge?
- What behavioral cues do you look for to indicate that the call is not going well with the client and how do you respond to fix it?
- Lets assume you made a promise to a client and operations was not able to meet that promise. What action would you take and why?
- Describe your most difficult client. What did you do to maintain that client?
- Describe how your previous sales experience qualifies you to perform this job effectively.
- Describe your client where you have had the most repeat business. Give examples of things that you have done that led to the repeat business.
- Give me some examples of specific things you have done which demonstrate your ability to adjust to customer demands.

- Give me examples where you have been able to anticipate customer complaints or problems and correct them before they became an issue. What did you do and what resulted from your actions?

Behavior Questions:

- Describe a time when you had to sacrifice quality for a deadline, or visa versa. How did you react to this?
- Describe for me two improvements you have made in your job in the past six months.
- Tell me about a decision you made that your supervisor disagreed with. How did you handle it?
- What do you feel would be the most common errors made in a position such as this?
- Tell me about a time when you were late or absent to work. How did you communicate that to your supervisor?
- How do you deal with difficult or demanding managers/co-workers/customers? Describe a situation.
- Tell me about a time when a supervisor asked you to complete a task that you thought was not necessary, or could have been done another way. What steps did you take to achieve the task?
- Tell me about a time when you felt you had to break a company rule in order to get something done.

Leadership:

You are questioning to determine whether the candidate has leadership skills or potential. You seek to identify the leadership style of your candidate, from his or her perspective and from the perspective of his or her direct reporting staff and peers. You are determining whether the candidate's style is congruent with the culture of your organization. It is helpful if you have created beforehand a leadership profile that identifies the skills and traits of successful leaders within your organization.

Leadership style is best demonstrated in stories. Self-examination and commentary is self-serving, at best, in an interview setting. Ask your candidates for many specific stories and examples.

The following sample job interview questions about interpersonal skills enable you to assess your candidate's skills in interpersonal relationships.

- Tell me about a time when you had to work closely with a coworker whom you disliked or with whom you had trouble working. What did you do to make the relationship work so you could succeed for your company?
- Tell me about a time when you disagreed with the actions or decisions of your manager or supervisor. How did you approach the situation? Was the situation resolved to your satisfaction or did nothing change?
- Tell me about a time when you worked with a friend or a coworker who became a friend. What did you do to ensure that the friendship bore positive results for your company?
- Describe a conflict you were involved in at work. How did you resolve the conflict? What happened next with that coworker or team?
- What are three examples of the kinds of behaviors, actions, or attitudes you are most likely to conflict with at work? Can you give me an example of a situation you addressed in the past? How was it resolved?
- What are the three most important factors that make you an effective, valued coworker in your current job? What would your supervisor say are the three most important factors?
- If you have reporting staff, how would these staff members describe your relationship with them?
- During your work experiences while attending college, tell me about a time when you demonstrated that you have the ability and desire to work effectively with your coworkers.
- When you have entered a new workplace in the past, describe how you have gone about meeting and developing relationships with your new coworkers, supervisors, and reporting staff.

Customer Service:

- How would your supervisor describe your relationship with your peers?
- Describe a customer complaint that you had to resolve. What did you do to make the customer happy?

- Describe a day when you were faced with multiple interruptions and had to assist in covering an additional position. Tell me how you manage your day to accomplish your work. Did they tell you they worked later or took home work?

Management and Supervision Skill:

Pay attention to how your candidate answers your questions. Does he or she appear comfortable responding about each of the situations you describe and question? If not, the candidate may not be experienced as a manager and may be misrepresenting his or her credentials. Aside from this, you are looking for answers that reflect the values and approaches that are acceptable and promoted within your workplace culture.

You are looking for truthful, genuine answers that accurately describe a management style and approach that will “fit” within your environment. Beware of a candidate who persistently says the right things but fails to back up statements with solid stories that demonstrate the requested value or approach in action. You seek demonstrable experience, congruence with your culture, and a solid grasp of management responsibilities and requirements.

The following sample job interview questions about leadership enable you to assess your candidate’s skills in leadership. You decided to reorganize the department or work unit that you lead. Tell me how you proceeded with the reorganization?

- Have you ever been a member of a successful team? If so, describe the role you played on the team and in its success.
- Give me an example of a time when you played a leadership role in an event, an activity, a department or work unit, or a project. Describe how you led the efforts. Tell me how people responded to your leadership.
- If I were to ask your reporting staff or your peers to comment about your leadership style, your leadership strengths, and your leadership weaknesses, how would they respond? What would this discussion tell me about you as a leader?
- Tell me about a time when you created agreement and shared purpose from a situation in which all parties originally differed in opinion, approach, and objectives.
- As a leader within an organization, you must often build support for goals and projects from people who do not report to you and over whom you have no authority. Tell me about a situation in which you demonstrated that you can build the needed support.

- What are the three most important values you demonstrate as a leader? Tell me a story that demonstrates each of these leadership values in practice within your workplace.
- During your work experiences while attending college, tell me about a time when you demonstrated that you have leadership ability and skill.

End of the Interview:

- What do you feel is your greatest accomplishment in your professional life?
- Where do you see yourself in five years?
- What do you like to do outside of work?
- Where do you see “Value” in the sales equation and what role does “Value” play in making sales?
- Tell me why I should hire you for this position?
- Do you have any questions for me?

Little Tricks:

Know yourself - Are you a...Bleeding Heart, Talk too much yourself or are susceptible to flattery. Watch out for suck ups!

Be ready for the interview. Read the resume before the interview and know where you want it to go.

Is this candidate INSECURE? Insecurity is the DEATH OF A SALES PERSON!

The candidate should not be considered if.....

He/she does not feel that their success is 100% their responsibility.

He/she must have external discipline to achieve or having them here will slow us down.

Believe What You See:

It is important to watch for nonverbal signals that tell you about that person’s attitude, outlook, interest and approach. They speak louder than the verbal communication during the interview process. The nonverbal communication helps you confidently assess each candidate’s credentials with regard to the:

- Skills necessary to do the job,
- Behavioral characteristics you have identified as necessary for success in the job, and
- Culture and environment of our organization.

First Impressions

The first few minutes in any interview setting are so important that almost nothing else matters. You take a look at the candidate and note all of the nonverbal messages he or she is communicating. You form impressions from the candidate's posture, hand shake, outfit and accessories, space usage, attentiveness, eye contact and facial expressions. And, then you listen to what he or she has to say in response to your questions.

Posture and Space Usage

Is your candidate sitting comfortably yet upright, but not stiffly, in his chair? Does he or she walk with self assured ease? He's likely confident and comfortable with himself. Slouchy posture speaks loudly about sloppy work and low self-esteem. Posture that enables an individual to take up the appropriate amount of space in the room tells you that the applicant is secure in his or her abilities. Sloppy posture gives the impression of low energy and carelessness.

Hand Shake

Notice whether your candidate has a firm, dry, solid hand shake. Again, a confident, comfortable person uses the hand shake as a positive nonverbal interaction. The hand shake should assure you of the candidate's desire for a positive first interaction and impression. A limp hand shake signals low confidence and low self-esteem. An excessively strong hand shake may tell you the person is overly aggressive or trying to steamroll you.

Clothing and Accessories

No matter how informal your work environment, a professional job candidate needs to wear a suit to his/her first meeting. The selected outfit tells you how well the candidate will interact with and be perceived by customers. The chosen accessories either telegraph professionalism – or they don't. A brief case, a leather portfolio, a nice pen, leather purse and shined shoes present a solid, professional appearance. They tell you the candidate cared enough to want to make a good first impression.

Makeup, perfume, and jewelry, worn tastefully, can add to your perception of their professionalism. Dirty fingernails or scuffed shoes tell you the person is careless, too hurried, or unaware of the impression they have on others. Not good.

Alternatively, if the candidate attempted to look polished and professional for the interview – and doesn't – this is likely as good as it gets. Decide what works for your organization, and make your best selection. The candidate's chosen clothing and accessories are a form of powerful nonverbal communication.

Attentiveness, eye contact, body language and facial expressions are nonverbal communications that can tell you much about the candidates you consider hiring.

Attentiveness and Eye Contact

Watch the listening and interactive behavior of your candidate. He/ she should act as if he/she is engaged by leaning slightly forward in his chair to close some of the distance between himself and the interviewer. You want an employee who can maintain comfortable eye contact without staring or forced attentiveness.

If the candidate spends most of the interview with eyes moving all over the room, rarely looking at you, this can signal a lack of confidence – or worse – he/she doesn't care. Long forced eye contact can indicate an overly aggressive person who does not care about your comfort. If he/she don't care during the interview, this behavior won't get better when you hire that person.

Listen also to the candidate's responses to your questions. Did he hear your question? Did he/she answer succinctly and share stories, or ramble incessantly off topic? The former tells you he prepared for the interview and has success stories to share. The latter signals unprepared, ill-at-ease, or that he/she didn't care enough to pay attention.

Facial Expressions and Body Language

“What you do speaks so loud that I cannot hear what you say” said Ralph Waldo Emerson in one of his quotations. And, nothing is as communicative as the facial expressions and body language of your candidates. Whole books have been written interpreting facial expressions and body language. The key to listening to their nonverbal communication is whether their facial expressions and body language match words spoken.

Facial expressions that fail to match the words spoken can indicate serious discomfort or lying – neither desirable behaviors in a candidate. A candidate that never makes eye contact and talks to a spot over your shoulder is uncomfortable and demonstrating a lack of

confidence. You want to hire an employee whose facial expressions are consistent with and punctuate his or her words.

Body language speaks loudly, too. Is the candidate leaning back in his or her seat with legs crossed at the knee? He/she may be too relaxed for an interview setting. Has he/she taken over your whole desk with arms or accessories? He/she is overly aggressive. Does he/she lean back with hands crossed behind the head? This is aggressive interview behavior in the extreme. Don't expect less aggressive when you hire this person.

If the candidate makes a statement and looks away from you or appears nervous, he/she is probably not telling the truth. If he/she stares into your eyes as they tell their story, the story maybe fabricated. If she constantly twists her jewelry at the end of every sentence, strokes her hair every few minutes, she is sending all sorts of messages about her discomfort with the interview setting or her skills and abilities.

Always listen to what they are not saying. Interviewing and hiring people who will be great employees who fit well in our organization is a challenge. Listening to the nonverbal communication of your candidates can tell you as much

Candidate Evaluation Form:

Based on the interview, evaluate the candidate's qualifications for the position. In each section, space is provided to write comments. If one of the questions does not apply to the position, please write N/A or skip that section.

Education/Training

The candidate has the necessary education/training required by the position.

- Exceeds requirements
- Meets requirements
- Needs a little more training
- Doesn't meet requirements

Comments:

Work Experience

The candidate has prior work experience that is related to the position.

- Extensive experience
- Meet requirements
- Not related but transferable skills
- No prior experience

Comments:

Skills (Technical)

The candidate demonstrated to your satisfaction that he/she had the necessary technical skills to perform the job successfully.

- Exceeds requirements
- Meets requirements
- Needs more training
- Doesn't meet requirements

Comments:

Supervising Others:

The candidate demonstrated to your satisfaction that he/she had the necessary experience in supervising others to perform the job successfully.

_____ Exceeds requirements

_____ Meets requirements

_____ Needs more training

_____ Doesn't meet requirements

Comments:

Interpersonal Skills

Communication: articulated ideas clearly both written and orally.

_____ Exceeds requirements

_____ Meets requirements

_____ Needs more training

_____ Doesn't meet requirements

Comments: