



Job Interview Guide

Getting to Know Your Candidates

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The setup: Breaking the Ice

When you meet applicants, try your best to make them comfortable, using a friendly but professional attitude. Make sure to thank the applicant for his or her interest in the advertised position.

“By the way, was there anything in particular that interested you in this position (job ad)?”

That can be a good first question to start a *dialogue*.

Starting your question with “*By the way ...*”, “*How about ...*” and “*I was curious about ...*” makes it sound less intimidating and almost unimportant. Use this technique, and the applicant may provide you with a lot more information than you’ve anticipated.

Try to think about interview as a “getting to know you” meeting. Many candidates feel stressed and intimidated before and during an interview. If you can put them at ease during the first 5-10 minutes, your time with them will be a lot more productive.

If you’re starting your interview by chatting about hobbies, interests, etc., make sure to stay away from personal questions that could be considered discriminatory.

After the initial “icebreaker” it’s always good to set the pace by letting the candidate know how you are going to conduct the interview, which also puts you in charge of the *dialogue*.

“OK, so here is what we are going to do: Let’s try to get to know each other better. Ultimately, that’s why we are here, right? Why don’t we start by you sharing some things about yourself, and then I’ll tell you more about the position we are hiring for and provide you with more information about the company. How does that sound?”

(By asking this question, you make the candidate feel like a participant. Remember that you are looking for a comfort level from him or her).

“... And by the way, I don’t know about you but I really don’t like the word interview. Finding the right job is as important as finding the right employee. It’s a two-way street and it has to be a win-win for both of us to work. So let’s just sit back and talk”.

This approach has proven itself over and over again as one of the most successful out there, maximizing the efficiency of the interview and minimizing the time.

It’s important for you to have a very particular plan of action and to stay the course during an entire interview, as most job seekers may offer you stories about

“everything and nothing” to distract you from what you really seek.

If you feel you lost your course – and it’s going to happen from time to time – it’s important to regain control right from where you left it and get the candidate back to where you want him.

One good way to do that is to (1) politely interrupt the candidate by saying “... OK, well, that’s great. Now let’s get back to where we were, when I was asking you about...” (2) Make short notes on the candidate’s resume, and that way you can see where your last note was so that you can pick it up right from there.

Previous Experience

A discussion about work experience will vary widely based on how long the applicant has been employed. Questions appropriate to a recent high school or college graduate would make little sense when interviewing a professional with 20 years’ experience.

For an applicant with substantial experience, a reasonable starting point would be a discussion about his or her most recent position. In addition to focusing on the jobs themselves, it will also be helpful to discuss why a candidate has changed jobs, the length of each prior employment, gaps in employment, etc.

Ask about each job in chronological order. Make sure to have specific follow-up questions for each job, and keep moving forward in chronological order. Moving forward chronologically creates a more natural conversational flow, and you can see distinct patterns of behavior emerge.

Your follow-up question(s) should ask for specific examples of behavior, not general or hypothetical responses. For example, don’t ask “*Are you good at research?*” because the answer will always be “*Yes*”.

Here is what you should be asking: “*Tell me about time you were working on the project and had insufficient resources.*” Possible responses: (1) Talked in detail about how he or she wracked his or her brain to come up with a creative solution, what was tried, what didn’t

work, and what eventually turned out. (2) Talked about how poorly the company was managed and that’s why the applicant is job hunting because after all, it’s impossible to do a job that is not set up for success.

You should be asking very specific, easy-to-understand, direct questions. And take notes, because you’re going to need them.

You should also avoid giving the applicant any clues as to how you view answers. Try to stay as neutral as possible. Think “poker face.”

Remember that there have been many more books and manuals written for job seekers than for interviewers. You have to be well prepared with the right tools in order to achieve desired results. Using pre-employment assessments and skills testing will provide you with candidate-specific information that will save you a lot of time during the selection process and will later assist you during interview questioning.

Education

Similar to the situation with the Work Experience part of the interview, any questions on this subject must be appropriate to the applicant’s level of education. When interviewing for a professional position, the focus should be on the applicant’s professional education.

“I really enjoyed talking about your work experience. Now let’s talk about your education.”

Make sure to have specific follow-up questions for each educational experience and keep moving forward in chronological order. Don’t automatically accept answers at face value. Look for patterns. Take the gathered information and patterns of behavior you’re hearing and compare them in terms of the job-specific skills you have determined you need.

Interests

Don't ask "What do you do for fun?"

Instead, ask: "So how do you relax? After all, we make money to spend it. What do you enjoy? Do you collect anything? I'm always curious about different hobbies people have, it's so fascinating."

And as in earlier parts of the interview, ask specific follow-up questions.

Show genuine interest, attention and respect for the applicant. Remember to stay away from personal questions that could be considered discriminatory, as it's really easy to get sidetracked in this section.

Use the Interests section as a "break." Most candidates perceive it as such after being "cross-examined" in the Previous Experience and Education sections. But don't underestimate the importance of this section. You may find out your candidate likes to take 30-day holiday each year to travel the world, whereas you cannot afford to fund more than two weeks' vacation at a time.

Self Evaluation

"Without knowing too many details about this position, but having some general idea of what this position entails, what would you say your personal and professional strengths are that will allow you to be successful?"

Follow up with relevant questions. Take notes.

"Since we're all human, nobody is perfect. I know I'm not perfect. We all can improve somewhere. What some of the things that you'd improve or change about yourself?"

Follow up with relevant questions as needed.

Job Description Information (share and ask)

If you are still interested in the applicant, proceed to this stage of the interview.

However, if you have decided that the applicant isn't what you're looking for, there isn't much point in describing a position that the applicant won't be filling.

"You're probably wondering about the actual position we're hiring for. Let me share some information with you. Do you have any specific questions before I begin?"

Review the job, company, benefits, etc.

Deliver your presentation according to your interest in the candidate. Make sure to cover the "good" and the "bad" about position that you are hiring for. For example: "It's a pretty straightforward task, but it's repetitive and requires attention to detail. How do you feel about that?"

Now is a good time to watch body language. The candidate will react and it's going to be up to you to interpret it.

As you can see, we're multitasking by sharing some information but also keeping our hand on the candidate's pulse to see how he or she will react to different aspects of the job. This is a simple but excellent technique to determine whether you or the candidate is having second thoughts.

It's quite common not to see any "red flags" up until this point. But if you do come across a red flag, don't ignore it. Talk about it, elaborate on it, stay on it, and press on until you know what you're dealing with. There is a possibility that you could end the interview right there. If that happens, you should feel good about asking the right questions and not wasting anyone's time.

You should have at least three "Share and ask" scenarios during this section of the interview process.

Conclusion

Ask if the candidate has any questions.

If the answer is “no,” challenge it by saying: *“Come on. I’m sure you must have some questions for me. Go ahead. Ask anything.”*

This is another opportunity for you to learn more about the candidate’s attitude towards the advertised position.

If you haven’t changed your mind about this candidate, a good question to ask at this time is: *“After learning more about this position, I was just curious – What is your level of interest at this time, on a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being most interested?”*

If the candidate says “7” this is a perfect opportunity to discuss it, as you obviously looking for someone who is “10.”

Let the applicant know what is going to happen next, if it’s possible to follow up with you and how you’re going to be in touch.

It’s always good to leave your E-mail address or phone number with a candidate, telling them to *“Call me if you have any questions, I’ll be glad to answer them.”* You may be surprised to find how many people don’t follow up.

People that do follow up are usually confident that they can do the job, really want the job and go after the job aggressively. Quite often they get hired, promoted and stay with a company for a very long time.

It’s very important to close interviews graciously. If you already know you’re not going to call for the second interview or offer a job, you can state it right there. Few people do, as it’s much easier to do it with E-mail. But there’s no right or wrong here. Use your own judgment.

If a candidate is in a tough financial spot, don’t take two weeks to say you’re going to go with someone else. If you give candidates information or suggestions on how they can improve, you may be surprised to find out how appreciative they are.

Good Karma always comes back, although sometimes not as fast as we’d like it.

Helpful Tools:

1. Determine the cost of employee replacement: How much is it actually costing you to hire and train a new person? A turnover calculator is available at <http://www.canadahrcentre.com/solutions/calculating-cost/turnover-calculator/>
2. Skills Testing. Determine a candidate’s proficiency in a particular area (software, typing, spelling, etc.) <http://www.canadahrcentre.com/services/skills-testing/>
3. Behavioral assessments. Find out things like energy level, attention to detail, assertiveness, independence, trustworthiness and much more <http://www.canadahrcentre.com/services/assessments/>