

# PERSONNEL NOTEBOOK

*For Your Most Important Resource*

## INTERVIEWING CANDIDATES For Employment

How often have you heard someone say, “*Why in the world did I ever hire that guy? What was I thinking?*” It might even have been you asking these questions. That’s usually when your thoughts go back to the job interview.

Interviewing candidates for employment can be the start of a great relationship of mutual success or the beginning of a long struggle to correct a bad decision made by two hopeful and well-intentioned adults. How you conduct the interview, what you learn there, how you analyze the information, and the decision you make could be the start of that great relationship or the beginning of that long struggle. Understanding and properly conducting the interviewing process won’t guarantee your success, but it’s the best management tool you have to get you there.

Let’s take a look at the interview process through these three steps:

- I Preparation
- II Interview
- III Follow-up

### **I. Preparation**

**Know the job.**

The first step is to identify the job for which you are interviewing this candidate. Of course, you already know the job title, but have you looked at the job description? If you don’t have one, start one, at least a basic one.

For hourly paid jobs, identify and list the actual duties the job performs. Which top two or three duties are those functions without which the job cannot be accomplished? Rank the list in order of importance. For salaried jobs, identify the end results each position must accomplish, and rank them as well.

Consider who was, or is, the person who performed this job the best. Why was that person the best? What were the skills, knowledge, actions, attitudes, and characteristics that person displayed that made him or her the best? List and rank these characteristics. Then, consider who was or is the person who performed that job worse of all and do the same. You now know what you are looking for and what you want to avoid. If you have done this well, you have a workable job description for this interview.

**Identify the type of interview you want to use.**

There are many types of interviews, each with its own purpose. The *Screening Interview* is usually done by phone and is meant to narrow the list of candidates who'll be brought in for a more in-depth interview. The *Situational Interview* is usually a tour of the actual work area, and the candidate is actually asked to perform enough of the job to assess his or her capabilities. The *Stress Interview* is for jobs that will operate under heavy stress, such as a sales position or one handling customer complaints. The candidate might be asked how he likes to sell. Then told, "Okay Ms. Jackson, sell me something," or, "We really are not sure you are suitable for the job," to observe how the candidate responds under stress.

But, far and away the most used interview types are the *Traditional Interview* and the *Behavioral Interview*.

**a. The Traditional Interview**

The purpose of the traditional interview is to gather enough information to measure the candidate's job knowledge, skill, interests, and compatibility with the company's culture. The typical exchange includes asking candidates to

- Review their résumé.
- Tell you about their last job and why they left.
- Explain why they want to work for you.
- Tell you about the types of work they have done (projects, equipment used, customer type etc.).

**b. The Behavioral Interview**

The purpose of the behavioral interview is to measure how well the candidate will actually do on the job. (The best indicator of future success is past success.) The candidate describes how he or she handled work and any situations that arose. Examples of questions asked include:

- Tell me about a time when you (describe a specific job-related situation or problem).

How did you handle that? (Demonstrates job knowledge and ability to reason.)

- Tell me about a difficult problem you tried to solve. How did you identify the problem? How did you go about trying to solve it? (Demonstrates ability to solve problems.)
- Describe a time when you tried to persuade another person to do something they didn't want to do. (Demonstrates leadership.)

You don't have to restrict yourself to one type or style of interviewing. Gather the information you need through any style that produces it for you.

There is one very popular interview type called the *Meandering Interview*. Its purpose is to roll-the-dice and hope everything comes out all right. The unprepared interviewer relies on the candidate to lead the discussion. Questions typically begin with, "Tell me about yourself," and segue into an off-the-cuff conversation. There are many problems with the meandering interview. The main one is that the candidate, instead of the interviewer, controls the interview. Unfortunately this is the style most used by the inexperienced interviewer.

**Identify the questions.**

Identifying the "right" questions to ask is difficult for many. The type of interview you will use may help you determine the questions to ask, but you'll want to ask them:

- How did they begin their work in this field?
- What has been their experience in this work? Ask for details about how they did the work.  
What equipment, tools, hardware, and software did they use?
- How would they handle problems or difficult situations you have faced (or are aware of) in doing this work?

For behavioral interviews, focus on the characteristics you want for this job. The previous review about who were the best and worst employees in this job can be your guide. Following is a list of some characteristics from

which you can create questions to fit your opening:

- Adaptable
- Articulate
- Accountable
- Perseverance
- Listener
- High energy
- Confident
- Delegator
- High integrity
- Self-directed
- Focused
- Effective networker
- Ability to work alone
- Team player
- Team leader
- Money hungry
- Enthusiastic

Describe situations that require decisions from the candidate that can exemplify the characteristic you want. Questions might be as simple as, “Can you give me an example of a time when you had to stick to your guns in the face of many objections? How did that come out?” (Displays persistence)

The questions should be designed to give you the answers that tell you the qualifications, value, and suitability of this candidate for this job. List all your questions, and leave room on the sheet to write the answers.

## II. Interview

### The setup

- Bring the application/résumé (two copies just in case)
- Bring the job description
- Assure no interruptions
- Arrange water, coffee, soft drinks, pen, paper, etc.

- Plan on talking 20 percent of the time — have the candidate talk 80 percent. Allow silence; take notes.

### The introduction

- Go to where the candidate is, and greet him or her. Don’t have him or her led into your room.
- As an introduction ice-breaker, ask, “*Have any trouble finding us?*” or “*Can I offer you a soft drink or a cup of coffee or water?*” You can tell candidates you were impressed with their application/résumé and that you have a lot of things you want to discuss with them. And remember, you’re selling your company and yourself just as much as candidates are selling themselves to you.

### The interview conversation and questions

It helps the candidate to be at ease if you can get her to start talking. “*I’d like to get an idea of how you got where you are today [name]. So, why don’t you take a few minutes to walk me through your résumé?*” Ask easy questions along the way, such as the type of tasks and projects, and what she liked or didn’t like about certain jobs (primarily those that relate to this job).

Show the candidate the job description. Ask how it compares to his former work. Avoid asking questions that require a yes or no answer. Ask open-ended questions, such as how, why, what if, can you tell me about, describe for me, etc. Bring in the list of questions you prepared.

Ensure that you are asking all the right questions and, equally important, that you are not asking questions that expose you to charges of ageism, sexism, discrimination or some other serious charges. (See page 5 for a guide to legal and illegal interview questions.)

Review your notes for any omissions. Ask if the candidate has any questions. If you are in the final stages of selection, check on their

availability and compensation range, and let them know when the job starts.

Treat the candidate with respect and present a good image of your company. How you treat candidates gets around. After all, how many people do you want bad-mouthing your company to other employers or candidates. Let them know the next step and when it will occur. Escort him or her out yourself.

### III. Follow-up

Review your notes. Compare them with the ranked list you prepared earlier. Include those characteristics you identified in your best performers that you want to see in this job. Write comments, but not on the résumé!

Sort all the candidate résumés into YES, MAYBE, and NO piles. Notify the NOs immediately! Send them a thank you letter. (Use the following Job Candidate Evaluation Form as a guide to rank candidates.)

#### JOB CANDIDATE EVALUATION FORM

**Position:**

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**Candidate**

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**Interviewer**

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**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

Based on the interview, please evaluate the candidate's qualifications for the position named above. In each section, space is provided to write additional job-specific comments. If

one of the questions does not apply, please write "N/A" in the comment section.

#### Education/Training

The candidate has the necessary education and/or training required for this 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.

#### Skills (Technical)

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

#### Supervising Others

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

#### Leadership Skills

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

#### Personal Skills

Communication: The candidate articulated ideas clearly both written and orally.

#### Teamwork

The candidate demonstrated the ability to work well in a team and with superiors, peers, and reporting staff.

#### Time Management

The candidate demonstrated the ability to manage time and to work independently and efficiently.

**Customer Service**

The candidate demonstrated the ability to be customer focused.

**Motivation for the Job**

The candidate expressed interest and excitement about the job.

**Problem Solving**

The candidate demonstrated the ability to design innovative solutions and solve problems.

**Additional Skills**

List any additional skills you feel the candidate has that apply to this job.

**Overall Recommendation**

\_\_\_\_\_ Highly recommended

\_\_\_\_\_ Recommend

\_\_\_\_\_ Needs further clarification

\_\_\_\_\_ Do not recommend

Comments:

(Note: Add the ratings and comments list to each of the above qualifications)

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It is illegal to discriminate in employment decisions based on anything related to:

- Age
- Sex or gender
- Race, ethnicity or color
- Country of national origin or birthplace
- Religion
- Disability
- Marital or family status or pregnancy

Therefore, you may not ask questions that relate to these factors until after an offer of employment is made.

All questions in the interview must be related to the job. You may identify the factors you need or want in the job and focus all the questions on those factors.

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**Examples of Legal/Illegal Interview Questions**

**Illegal questions:**

**Okay to ask:**

How old are you?

This job requires you to drive and be insured by our company. To do this you must be 18. Are you 18 or over?

Do you have any physical handicaps?

Describe the requirements and functions of the job first, and then ask, "Are you able to perform the functions of this job?"

(Further example: If you can plainly see that the individual has only one arm, you might ask, “Can you describe for me how you would perform the functions of this job?”)

Do you have any children?

Are you able to be at work on time every day? This job requires overtime. Is there any reason you would not be able to work overtime?

Have you ever been arrested?

Have you ever had any driving or criminal convictions?

Are you a U.S. citizen?

Are you legally allowed to work in this country? Do you have the required documents?

What is your native language?

Can you speak, read, and understand English?

Have you ever been through alcohol or drug rehabilitation?

Do you use illegal drugs?

Have you ever been convicted of an alcohol or drug-related crime?

**Additional examples of illegal questions:**

Are you married?

Are you a man or a woman?

Do you have any children?

Do you have day-care arrangements you can count on?

How tall are you? How much do you weigh?

Do you own your own home?

What country were you born in?

When did you graduate from high school?

Will you need time off for any religious holidays?

What does your wife/husband do for a living?

How long do you plan to work before you retire?

Have you experienced any serious illness in the last year?

Are you currently pregnant or do you plan to be?

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