

Probing Interview Questions

Hiring is one of the most important aspects of our success and happiness in life. Every practice needs to have a structured hiring protocol, which should include: 1) clear written objectives and protocols; 2) Advertising for finding the right people; 2) Key telephone screenings; 3) Key personal interviews; 4) Personality testing; and 5) Working interviews.

This article discusses key principles during interview with prospective employee:

- 1) Before interview, write exactly what you are looking for: Think of an ideal person for the position and write down their ideal characteristics, personality, working habits, style, etc. Also write down what are the responsibilities that individual will have and describe in detail how those responsibilities are fulfilled perfectly by an ideal candidate. Be descriptive with lots of details.
- 2) Avoid ‘yes’ or ‘no’ questions. Instead, ask questions that relate to real situations the applicant has experienced. For example, instead of asking “Are you an organized person” ask: “tell me about a work or personal situation or circumstance where you had to use your organizational skills to improve the condition. Tell me what the situation was, what the problem was, how did you use your skill to improve it, how did it work out, and what did you learn from it”. A person with real skill will have real stories.
- 3) Focus on personality type that fits your position: Hire for personality not skill or experience.

Here are some probing questions that can be helpful to separate fantasies from realities:

Work History

1. Review the nature of the job; expectations, responsibilities, etc
2. What were your mistakes or failures experienced in this job? If you could wind the clock back, what would you do differently?
3. What were the most enjoyable or rewarding aspects of the job?
4. What circumstances contributed to your leaving?

5. May I contact your supervisor? What was his name and title?
6. What was it like working for him and what were his strengths and shortcomings as a supervisor from your point of view?
7. What is your best guess as to what he honestly felt were your strengths, weaker points, and overall performance?

Intellectual Competencies

1. Describe a complex situation in which you had to learn a lot, quickly. How did you go about learning and how successful were the outcomes?
2. Do people see you as one who diligently pursues every detail or do you tend to be more broad brush?
3. Please describe your decision making approach when you are faced with difficult situations, in comparison with others, at about your level in the organization. Are you decisive and quick or more thorough?
4. Tell me about your most difficult and best / worse decisions you have made recently?
5. How creative are you? What are the best examples of your creativity in processes, systems, methods, products, structures, or services?
6. In the past year, what specifically have you done in order to remain knowledgeable about the competitive environment, market, and trade dynamics, products / services and technology trends, innovations, and patterns of customer behavior?
7. What are the biggest risks you have taken in recent years?
8. How have you copied, created, or applied best practices?
9. Describe your reading habits.
10. Looking back in your career, what were you most and least successful jobs?

Personal Competencies

1. Describe a situation or two in which the pressures to compromise your integrity were the strongest you have ever felt.
2. What actions would you take in the first weeks, should you join our organization?
3. What sorts of obstacles have you faced in your present / most recent job, and what did you do?
4. What are examples of circumstances in which you were expected to do a certain thing and on your own, went beyond the call of duty?
5. How well organized are you? What do you do to be organized and what if anything do you feel you ought to do to be better organized?
6. Are you better at juggling a number of priorities or projects simultaneously or attacking few projects one at a time? Examples?
7. What are the kinds of things that you procrastinate on?
8. Have you significantly raised the bar for yourself or others? Explain how you did it, your approach, the problems encountered, the outcomes.
9. What sort of mood swings do you experience?
10. What do you do to alleviate stress??
11. How do you handle yourself under stress and pressure?
12. What are your principal developmental needs and what are your plans to deal with them?
13. How have you changed during recent years?

Interpersonal competencies

1. What sort of first impression do you think you make at different levels in an organization?
2. From 1-10, where are you as an active listener?
3. What would your customers/clients say about you strengths and areas of improvement?
4. Give examples of your going beyond what was normally expected to enhance your company's reputation or image.
5. Describe your methods of diagnosing client / customer needs.
6. Tell me about the most frustrated customer you have had in recent years and how did you deal with him/her?
7. Perception of peers regarding how much of a team player you are.
8. How do you express your differences of opinion?
9. Examples of assertiveness, one in which the outcome was favorable, and one where it was not.
10. How would you rate yourself in public speaking?
11. Describe a situation in which you were most effective selling an idea or yourself.

Management competencies

1. What have your most recent two teams looked like (how many A's, C's)?
2. Tell me about the performance management system you have used.
3. How do you follow up on delegated assignments?
4. How many non performers have you removed in recent years? What approaches were used?
5. How have you tried to build teamwork?
6. When have you actively confronted indications of discrimination or prejudicial behavior?
7. How productive are meetings you run? How could they become more productive?

Leadership

1. What is your vision for your present job? How was it developed?
2. Examples of when people might have readily followed your lead and when they did not.
3. Describe situations in which you prevented or resolved conflicts.
4. How many hours per week have you worked, on the average, during the past year?
5. What motivates you?
6. What de-motivates you?
7. What is your pace of work and the circumstances under which it varies.
8. How satisfied are you with your balance in life?
9. How happy are you as a person: 0-10