



July, 1999

Job Interview Questions Which Help Select Winning Employees

Another year of NWSA Spring Management Conferences is complete. It was good to meet in person so many of the individuals who, up to now, I had previously communicated with only by telephone regarding some human resource management problem or needs area.

Without a doubt, the whole area of employee hiring remains a key challenge at most distributor and manufacturer organizations. Amongst the many areas of

inquiry is “what questions can I ask during the job interview that are legal and will provide the kind of information needed in order to make an intelligent hiring decision?” In response to the many requests at the Spring Management Conferences, the following guidelines are presented on recommended questions you may ask and not ask candidates during the job interview. Hopefully these examples are useful as you attempt to hire winning employees for your organization!

Suggested Interviewing Questions

In addition to legal considerations, job interview questions must be posed in an open manner that allow the applicant to do most of the talking. Instead of asking questions that can be answered with just a single word (“yes” or “no”), you want to pose questions that invite the candidate to talk about what he or she has done in the past. Remember, past behavior is the best indicator of future performance. This means asking focused questions that prompt the candidate to talk about past job experiences in very specific detail. Some examples:

Questions For All Job Applicants

1. Why are you seeking a new job?
2. Tell me why you have left previous jobs.
3. Describe something you have done in a previous job to make it easier or more productive.
4. Describe your present job strengths.
5. In what areas do you plan to improve?
6. Describe how you like to be supervised.
7. How many days of work have you missed in the past year?
8. Which duties listed on the job description may you have trouble in completing?
9. Which accomplishments are you most proud of in your current job?
10. How would your current supervisor describe your job performance?
11. How much do you know about our company?
12. Describe the kind of company you would like to work for.
13. What kind of computer training/experience have you received?
14. Can you recall a time when you had to resolve a conflict at work either with a colleague or an employee? Tell me how you did it.
15. What are your future job or career goals?
16. What questions do you have of me?

Questions For a Specific Job (Sales, Driver, Supervisor, etc.)

1. How do you keep informed about what's happening in your field?
2. Tell me about your previous on-the-job safety record.
3. Explain any traffic accidents or DOT citations you have received while making prior customer deliveries.
4. Tell me about an unpopular management decision you had to make and how you handled it.
5. Describe a time you successfully resolved a customer problem.
6. Give me an example of the approach you would take to explain the features of a product to a customer who has trouble understanding them?
7. Describe the primary types of people to whom you sell. What approach do you use for each group?
8. Describe a sales presentation when you had the right product/service, and the customer wanted it but wouldn't buy it. What did you do next?
9. This position requires moving pieces of equipment regularly which may weigh up to 100 pounds. Can you do this? (or) Show me how you would do this.
10. Tell me how in the past you helped motivate employees you supervised.
11. What are your feelings about working required overtime?
12. Have you ever moved up to a position where you had to supervise former peers? How did you handle it?
13. A customer refuses to pay on or return a 30-day past due account. Your manager tells you to go pick it up. The customer tells you to "go to hell!" and slams the door in your face. What would you do?

Note: At the conclusion of the interview, it is often useful to ask what the needs of the applicant are and then sell how the job or company might satisfy those needs. Examples include a person's need for job growth potential, minimal job supervision, stable company, flexible work hours, etc.

Avoid These Job Interviewing Questions

Federal legislation states that you cannot base a hiring decision on anything other than bona fide occupational qualifications (BFOQ). This means you cannot discriminate against an applicant because of age, sex, marital status, ethnic origin, religious preference, sexual preference or disabilities.

The following are examples of questions you should not ask because they are, or appear to be, bias-based:

1. How old are you?
2. When did you graduate from high school (college)?
3. Are you married?
4. Are you a single parent?
5. Do you have children?
6. What's your nationality?
7. What other languages do you know?
8. What do you do on Sundays?
9. What church are you a member of?
10. Are you a member of any religious group?
11. Are you "born again"?

12. What is your sexual orientation?
13. Are you a member of any gay or lesbian groups?
14. Do you date members of the opposite or the same sex?
15. What health problems do you have?
16. Are you physically fit and strong?
17. Is your hearing good?
18. Do you have any back problems?
19. When were you in the hospital the last time?
20. What prescription drugs do you take?

The above are by no means all the questions you should avoid asking. But these examples should give you an idea of the kinds of questions that might be considered discriminatory. Remember, you cannot ask questions other than those that directly relate to the qualifications needed for the job.

For example, you cannot ask if a person has any disabilities. However, if the job requires the ability to lift up to 50 packages per day, each of which weighs up to 30 pounds, you can ask each applicant interviewed:

“can you lift up to 50 packages per day, each of which may weight up to 30 pounds?”

Obviously, such questioning of job applicants is not always clear-cut. If you have any doubt about a specific job qualification that some might consider to be discriminatory in nature, and how to determine whether applicants can meet that job qualification, feel free to contact your NWSA Human Resource Consultant.



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