



QUESTIONS AND  
OUTLINE OF THE  
STRUCTURED  
INITIAL INTERVIEW

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Successful interviewing is one of the most difficult challenges for all of us who manage. Each one of us would like to think we really know how to do it and each one of us looks back on some of the hiring mistakes we've made and realize that we may have done a very poor job. Few of us will ever admit that we really don't interview very well and we really don't have a systematic approach to interviewing. As a recruiting firm, we confront this challenge everyday when one of our candidates tells us that the interviewing authority of our client company began the interview was something like, "Well . . . tell me about yourself."

Most poor interviewing centers around *inconsistency*, lack of *clarity*, a *poor memory* and lack of the simple practice of taking notes. We are overwhelmed, almost daily, by the poor interviewing techniques of some hiring authorities. More often than not, they come away from the interviews with either an unclear idea of the candidate's experience and background or a total misconception of the candidate. This is especially challenging when the interviewing process extends over a week or two, or longer. It is not uncommon for hiring authorities to even forget the first two or three candidates they interviewed as the process lengthens.

The purpose of the structured interview is to provide a consistent "formula" for at least the initial interviews. This provides for a reasonable comparison of the candidates. And it transcends the challenge of interviewing candidates over an extended period of time.

Below are "general" initial interview questions to be asked of each candidate to get an idea of the candidate's experience and their ability to do the job they are being interviewed for.



It is meant to last about 30 minutes. If the results are positive, the candidate may be invited back for a much more in-depth interview. The purpose of it is to simply get a first impression of a candidate. It can be done over the phone, but it is not as effective as a face-to-face interview.

### SPEAK TO THE CANDIDATE:

“I’m going to ask you a number of questions. I ask the same questions of every candidate so I can get a good comparison. This will take a few minutes. They will not go into much depth for now. After an initial evaluation, I will invite candidates back for an in-depth interview.

Describe your present position . . . the exact duties and responsibilities . . . who did you report to?”

(Be sure you *understand* exactly what the candidate has done in detail, even if you have to ask about their daily functions. Most of us think we get an idea of what a candidate does or has done, and two weeks later we really can’t remember. Be very clear about your understanding. Most interviewing authorities act as though they understand a candidate’s experience or performance even if they don’t. Bluntly, we do it because we don’t want to appear ignorant or stupid. Since we are an interviewing “authority” we act like we understand when we often don’t. So it is important to ask these questions until you really understand exactly what the candidate has done . . . and be able to clearly recall it two or three weeks later. Take really good notes. Better to appear ignorant than to actually be stupid.)



“ . . . And the position before

. . . And the position before that”

(Go back at least three positions. You can go back further and be more detailed in future interviews.)

“What do you think the two or three most important, specific aspects of your present or past jobs would be of interest to a perspective employer?”

“What do you like most about your present position and in the previous two jobs?

And what do you like least about your present or previous two positions?

Why are you leaving your present position?

Why did you leave the previous position . . . and the one before that . . . and the one before that . . .”

(Be sure that you understand, in detail, why this candidate left their present or last positions. You cannot live with, “Well it was just time to leave,” or “It was mutual.” You have to have a real, detailed understanding. Whatever the reasons, they will likely be the same reasons that they will potentially leave your job).

“What motivates you?

What are the two or three most important things you have accomplished in your career to date? Be very specific about the particular accomplishments and where you performed them.

What are your three strongest assets . . . and give me specific



examples of where they have appeared in your work history?

What are your three weakest qualifications... and give me specific examples of where they appear in your work history and how they affected you and your previous employers?

What kind of job are you looking for?

What do you want in the job that you don't have now or had in your last positions?

How long have you been looking for a job?

What kind of interviews have you been on and with whom?

Have you received any job offers? . . . do you expect to? . . . who with and for what kind of job?

What have you liked about the position you've been interviewing for?

Why should an employer hire you?

Every employee has liabilities to their employer . . . what are your liabilities?

What are your long-term goals?

On a scale of 1 to 10 how would you evaluate your performance in your present job? Explain how you have arrived at that number.

What would your present Supervisor say about your performance as an employee?

. . . And your supervisor before that?



. . . And your supervisor before that?

How much was your W-2 last year? Exactly how much of it was salary, bonus, commissions, etc.? If we proceed, I will need to see the W-2s.

. . . And the year before?

. . . And the year before?

How much money are you seeking?

Is there anything else you'd like me to know about you?"

Some hiring authorities (if they are interested in a candidate) will carry on the conversation beyond these questions. But there's no obligation here. A hiring authority does not have to respond to any of these questions. By making it clear to the candidate that you're going to make this a 30 minute initial interview, you set the stage. Keep in mind that you can bring back any candidate you are interested in for an in-depth interview. Using this method allows an authority to go quickly through a number of candidates and keep from wasting a lot of time with candidates who may be of no interest.

After the interview, use this evaluation scheme to decide if the candidate is worthy of deeper interviews.



## **EVALUATION:**

On a scale of 1 to 10, can this candidate do my job?

On a scale of 1 to 10, do I like this candidate personally and professionally?

On the scale of 1 to 10, is this candidate a risk?

On a scale of 1 to 10, can I work the money out with this candidate if I decide to hire him or her?