



BENEFITS OF THE (INITIAL) STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

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The most successful hiring managers use a structured interview. These are *general* initial interview questions to be asked of each candidate to get an idea about a candidate's experience and ability to do the job. It's meant to last about thirty to forty-five 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 about a candidate. It can be done over the phone, but it is not as effective as a face to face interview. A personality is not easily judged over the phone.

This is really simple stuff and designed to make the initial interview extremely effective and economical from a time and effort point of view.

The most successful hiring authorities know that the shorter the time span between initial interviews, the better. Initial interviews all in a day or two are a lot more effective than initial interviews that are strung out over a week or two. This may seem rather obvious, but we're always amazed at hiring authorities who string initial interviews out over time to the point where the first candidates interviewed are taking jobs or making other decisions while the interviewing authority is still doing initial interviews. This practice will guarantee that the interviewing and hiring process will take three or four times longer than necessary.

We can't over-emphasize how disastrous it can be to string initial interviews out over what seems like a short period of time like two weeks. Every hiring authority we ever met *tells* us that hiring is a really high priority. Unfortunately, most of the time they don't really act that way. Even when a specific structured interview, like we recommend, is used it's very hard to remember the candidate interviewed 10 days earlier.



THE FOUR BASIC QUESTIONS

There are four basic questions the interviewing process needs to have answered:

20% of the hiring decision is based on “Can the candidate do the job?” Although this is only 20% of the hiring decision, it’s the “first” 20% and the threshold that a candidate has to meet and surpass to get to the next steps.

40% of the hiring decision is based on “Do we like this candidate and does he or she fit in our company?” The answer to this question is both good news and bad news. The good news is that candidates who become employees and are well-liked will usually overachieve. The bad news is that candidates are often hired because they are well-liked and yet turn out to be very poor performers. Often, being liked has little to do with being good at what you do.

30% of the hiring decision is based on “What are the risk factors this candidate poses?” Every candidate, and we mean every candidate . . . has risks associated with them. The candidate who has had three jobs in three years poses the risk of leaving a job in one year if he or she is hired. The candidate that is been in their present job for 10 years might be *too* stable and have “culture shock” if they are hired. There has never been a perfect candidate. The key is to reasonably assess the risk factors with each candidate and assess if the potential upside and benefits the candidate brings are worth the risks.

10% of the hiring decision is based on “Can we work the money out?” This is a very simple part of the equation. If the first three questions about why people are hired are answered positively, working the money out is usually pretty easy. Most candidates and employers make a much bigger issue over

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money before they get into the interviewing and hiring process. That's because, in the beginning, money is out of context with the job and the candidate being considered.

We'll address these more in-depth in a subsequent chapter, but the purpose of an initial interview is to get a basic feel for the answers to these four basic questions.

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. After an initial evaluation, I will invite candidates back for an in-depth interview.”

“Describe to me 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.)

“Describe to me your previous position.”

“Describe to me your position before that.”

(Go back at least three positions or further for more details in future interviews.)

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

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

“What do you like least about your present (or previous) positions?”

“Why are you leaving your present (or previous) positions?”



(Be sure you understand in detail why this candidate left their present or last positions. Whatever the reasons, they will likely be the same reasons they will potentially leave your job.)

LEARN WHAT MOTIVATES THE CANDIDATE

“What are the two or three most important things you 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?”

“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? With whom and for what kind of job?”

“What have you liked about the positions for which you’ve been interviewed?”

“Why should an employer hire you?”

“Every employee has liabilities in the eyes of 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 (or previous) supervisor say about your performance as an employee?”

“How much was your W-2 last year (or previous year)?

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

“How much money are you seeking?”

“Is there anything else you’d like me to know about you?”

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 want to hire him or her?

There is no reason that the hiring or interviewing authority can’t add a few more questions to the interview, but keep in mind that the purpose of the initial interview is to qualify five or six candidates who are strong possible hires.

If the interviewing or hiring authority only comes up with two or three possible candidates, there is no reason that those two or three cannot be moved along in the process while another group of initial interviews is organized. The purpose is to make sure that a company has a solid pool of candidates from which to choose. A pool of only two candidates is risky, whereas a pool of four or five is ideal to ensure a successful hire.