

Guide to Interviewing Candidates

As an essential part of the recruitment process, the interview needs some preparation in advanced. One of the aims of an interview is to get quality information from the candidate so that you can evaluate them fairly against the position requirements. At the same time, you need to be giving quality information to the candidate about why your firm or organisation is a good place to work. If you are able to impress candidates on your work culture and your business vision, then you are more likely to attract candidates of a higher calibre.

Preparing for the Interview

Decide who will be interviewing the candidates. It may be just one person such as the supervising manager or the HR manager. Or it may be a panel interview to reflect the key internal relationships the position reports and interacts with. Ensure each panel member has had time to review all the documents such as CVs and interview questions and that they have been assigned a set of questions to ask in the interview.

Referring to the position description, decide on the interview questions that help you to identify the skills, experience and behaviours (ie, the competencies) needed for the position. Use a mix of traditional and competency based questions (see below for samples.)

Traditional Interview Questions

The following are questions that have been traditionally used in interviews. They are a good way to get the candidate to open up and start talking about themselves with relevance to the position. As the interviewer, you will be looking for responses that indicate that they have done their research on the position and your organisation, and whether their responses fit with the competencies that you are seeking in the position.

- Tell me about yourself.
- What attracted you to apply for this position?
- What are your strengths?
- What are your weaknesses?
- What do you see yourself doing in 2(or 5) years?
- Reasons for leaving your current or last position?
- What do you like most about your current position?
- What do you like least about your current position?
- What do you know about our company/firm?

Competency Based Interview Questions

In this section of the interview, you are now directing the candidate to talk about their experiences in an actual situation that relates to a specific competency you are seeking. Here, you are asking candidates what they actually *did do* in a certain situation, rather than speculatively on what they *would do*. This is based on the logic that how a person behaved in the past is a predictor of how that person will behave in the future.

Examples of competency based questions:

- What has been one of your greatest achievements in your job?
- How do you manage your time & prioritise your duties?
- How do you deal with conflict at work?
- Give an example of when you have had to work under pressure.
- How do you deal with difficult colleagues or clients/customers?
- Have you met your budget/ performance targets? How have you achieved this?
- Tell me about a big challenge or difficulty you faced and how did you achieve it?
- Have you had an idea which has been implemented by the company? Tell me about it.

To help provide structure to candidate responses to each question, ask the candidate to respond using a three step process called a STAR (or PAR) statement. Ask the candidate to use work examples that are relevant to the question, and which are fairly recent. If a candidate has had little work experience, ask them to refer to an achievement at school or outside activity.

The table below provides a sample script of how to ask a competency based question.

Process	Sample Script
S ituation or T ask or problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What has been one of your greatest achievements in your job? (eg candidate may say they managed to retain a client who was unhappy with the firm.) • Tell me about the situation that led to this? <p><i>Hint:</i> Make sure the candidate describes a specific event or situation, not a generalized description of what they have done in the past.</p>
A ction you took	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What action did you take in this situation? • What part in the team/group effort did you play? • What did you say? • What did you produce/develop/write etc? <p><i>Hint:</i> Make sure the candidate describes what they personally did, even if discussing a group project. Take control of the interview and direct candidates back to the subject if they are rambling or going off track.</p>
R esults you achieved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What happened? • How did the event end? • What did you accomplish? • What did you learn? If the end result was not the desired result, what did you learn from the situation/experience?

Behavioural Event Interview Questions

Behavioural based interview questions are a form of competency based questions which require candidates to answer the question in greater detail and depth. As the interviewer, you are more probing in your questioning so that you gain a very clear understanding about the candidate's actions and behaviour in a certain situation. As an alternative to the competency based questions above, [click here](#) for some sample behaviour event interview questions listed under common competency headings. Decide on three to four competencies you would like to focus on and choose one question from each competency.

Ask candidates use the STAR technique to help candidates describe their example.

Interview Format

Below is a suggested interview format.

- Ensure there are no distractions during the interview such as phone calls or interruptions from colleagues.
- Welcome the candidate and try to put them at ease by offering them a drink.
- Introduce yourself (and the interview panel if required) and briefly explain what the interview will involve.
- Talk through some background on your business and give some information on the role and what it will involve.
- Ask the candidate traditional interview questions.
- Ask the candidate competency based or behavioural event based interview questions.
- At the end of the interview, ask the candidate if they have any questions.
- Inform them of the next stage in the recruitment process, e.g. second interviews and estimated timeframe.
- Thank the candidate for their time.

Contact Your Consultant

If you have interviewed candidates referred to you by a recruitment consultancy, ring them after the interview. Provide feedback on the performance of the candidate in the interview. Raise any questions or doubts with your consultant, who may be able to give you some information immediately or discuss them with the candidate. Advise the consultant if the candidate has been successful moving to the next recruitment phase.