

## **Appendix VIII: Interview Guidelines**

### **The Interview Process**

Before the first question in the first interview is asked, the search committee should do a little homework. Preparation should include understanding the requirements for the position and the qualities one is looking for in an applicant, reviewing the application or resume of the interviewees and making notes that will be referenced later on in the interview and preparing a list of questions. A screening matrix of experience, education and competencies should be developed. Each interviewer should complete a matrix for each candidate. Some believe asking the same questions of all the candidates lends itself to making more effective comparisons. "Patterned" interviews are also an excellent defense against discrimination claims in the selection process.

Each interviewer has his/her own style and format when conducting interviews. There are those who profess that interviewing is an art and not a science. It's true that conducting interviews often involves some subjectivity. Inexperienced interviewers often find themselves making a hiring decision based on a "gut feeling". Seasoned interviewers, however, are successful when they employ sound interviewing skills. One key way to help make the proper hiring decision is to focus on the past behavior of the candidate. Asking open-ended or behavioral questions forces the candidate to talk about how they handled situations in their past work history. The answers they give will provide the supervisor with insight about how the candidate might handle future situations.

Here are some examples of open-ended, behavioral questions:

1. Give me an example of a situation where you had to deal with an irate student or parent. What did you do?
2. Tell me about a situation in the past where you disagreed with a supervisor's decision; how did you handle it?
3. Tell me about your prior jobs and why you left each of them.

The point here is that the candidate cannot just give a yes or no answer, but must reflect on his/her past and provide the interviewer with information that can be used to predict how future situations might be handled. When the candidate provides a vague response, the interviewer must use a follow-up question to obtain specific information. This redirects the discussion to specific behaviors. For example, "Tell me exactly what you did," or "Exactly how were you involved?"

The use of behavioral, open-ended questions will elicit responses that will provide the supervisor a glimpse of how a candidate handled situations in the past and may assist the supervisor in foreseeing how the candidate may perform if hired.

One of the most frequently asked questions is: What can I ask an interviewee? The best

answer may be: Whatever has to do with the job you are trying to fill, but one must be careful. The ever-changing world of labor law prevents employees from asking certain questions that may appear to be job related but may also infringe upon an individual's rights if they are in a protected class. Questions related to a person's race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability or handicap must be avoided.

Following is a list of common mistakes in interviewing. It may be helpful to review each of these and determine if a new approach or an adjustment is necessary to improve your interviewing skills.

### **III. Common Mistakes in Interviewing**

1. Halo effect or a situation where one single characteristic dominates our judgment of the candidate. Note that this effect can be positive or negative.
2. Interviewer bias or your own attitudes and beliefs can enter into the picture and influence your hiring decision.
3. Failure to listen is often a problem. The interviewer should be able to generate questions that urge the candidate to talk more than the interviewer. In this case the interviewer must listen in order to make an intelligent hiring decision.
4. Lack of behavioral questions. Interviewers usually don't ask enough behavioral-type questions. Note that this is where you gain information on past experiences and behaviors. Also, remember that the applicant's past behavior is the best predictor of his or her future behavior. These types of questions make the interviewing process more objective and less subjective.
5. Illegal questions. If a question you want to ask a candidate is not related to the job, there is a good possibility it may be illegal. Stay focused on job-specific questions.
6. Failure to analyze the job vacancy. It is highly unlikely that you will find a truly successful candidate when you, yourself do not fully understand the job. How can you possibly fill a vacancy without a thorough understanding of what is involved?
7. Misleading the candidate. If this happens on a conscious level - you are truly aware that you are misleading - then your chances of retaining the candidate you selected may be slim. By misleading the candidate you may bring him/her "on board" but the real question is for how long?
8. Making a premature commitment. Similar to misleading the candidate, you shouldn't make promises if you can't deliver. Don't commit yourself to anything until you can thoroughly analyze the situation and obtain input from Human Resources.

## IV. Avoiding Lawsuits

An interviewer making a hiring decision must be able to explain the factors that led to that decision. It is important to be aware that anything and everything an interviewer has written or said can be probed or questioned in a discrimination claim.

Following are some suggestions that an interviewer should consider:

1. Remember to focus on job-related questions during the interview. If you cannot ask a question that is "job-related," then it doesn't belong in an interview.
2. Remember to take notes - but be cautious - some notes such as "nice girl" or "mature" can support age or sex discrimination.
3. Don't offer reasons of rejection. Instead, if pressed, you can offer "We selected those we thought would best meet our current need."
4. Remember to be consistent in your application of job requirements/skills.
5. Avoid asking questions about marital status. Married? Engaged? Divorced?
6. Do not ask someone's age, what year they graduated high school or college.
7. Avoid questions dealing with a person's color, sex, religion, or national origin.
8. Do not ask an applicant how many children he/she has, who will care for them, or if the applicant plans on having children.

As a result of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, inquiries pertaining to a disability or handicap are not permitted. They include but are not limited to the following:

1. Do not ask whether an applicant ever filed a workers' compensation claim.
2. Do not ask about an applicant's past drug or alcohol use. (You may ask about current drug or alcohol use.)
3. Do not ask how many days the applicant was absent from work last year because of illness.
4. Do not ask whether the applicant has any serious illnesses, back problems, mental illness, etc.
5. Do not ask whether the individual has a spouse, child or other family members with disabilities.

If an individual has an obvious disability (such as a missing limb, or the person uses a

wheelchair),

- (A) Do not ask how the individual became disabled.
- (B) Do not ask about the severity of the disability.
- (C) Do not comment in any way on the person's physical condition.

Questions you may ask include but are not limited to:

1. You can ask about the individual's ability to perform essential job functions.
2. You may ask about current use of illegal drugs or current alcohol use.
3. You may ask about an applicant's attendance at prior jobs, if the question is limited to days off or number of days late for any reason, and is not limited to days missed due to illness.
4. You may ask whether the individual has ever been involved in an accident on the job that injured co-workers or members of the public.
5. You may state the department's standard for attendance.

## **V. Sampling of Interview Questions**

The following is a list of questions which may prove helpful in conducting interviews:

1. Please describe the most serious challenge you faced in the classroom and how you managed that challenge. How would you change your approach if the situation presented itself today?
2. How do you deal with the heterogeneity of a classroom population? Give specific examples of your most successful, and your least successful approaches.
3. Assume that we are students and you wish to recruit us into your scholarly team for undergraduate research. We are leaving class and you have one minute to attract us to your team.
4. Imagine yourself as a University of Scranton faculty member three years into your tenure. Describe a typical week in your life and what you have accomplished to date.
5. Where will you submit your first University of Scranton grant application and what will be the title?

6. The chairperson has asked you to take an evening introductory course in the spring semester. It conflicts with your plans. What is your reaction and approach to the request?