

7 Questions to Ask During a Job Interview

By June Campbell

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A good employee is one of your company's greatest assets.
A poor employee is a liability.

Poor employees are unsuited for the position they fill. They might lack the skills needed to do the work. Or, their work habits and personalities are incompatible with your business environment. They could be excellent employees at a different workplace -- but not at yours.

The best time to weed out unsuitable employees is before you've hired them. After they're on the job, dealing with the problem will be time-consuming, stressful, unpleasant and expensive. HR experts say that supervisors typically spend 80% of their time with 20% of their employees.

When you're recruiting, you want to know two things:

1. Can this person do the job?
2. Will he or she be a problem to manage in this workplace?

The first question is simple to answer. Skills are easy to assess and to test. Look to samples of work, educational criteria, licenses, accreditations, skill tests, etc.

The second question is the hard one. You want to discover whether the applicant will fit into your workplace.

Before conducting the job interview, be sure you know what questions are illegal to ask in your country. Make an error here, and you could be faced with legal proceedings.

Once you know what's legal and what isn't, create interview questions designed to discover the applicant's "soft skills."

Examples:

1. Tell me about your favorite supervisor in the past, and why you liked working for this person. Then, your least favorite supervisor, and why? Identifying information is not necessary.

This will elicit information about how the applicant responds to supervision and how he prefers to be supervised.

2. Describe a difficult workplace situation that you faced, and that you think you handled well.

Then, tell me about a workplace situation that you don't think you handled very well and what you could do differently next time.

You are looking for clues about how the applicant deals with conflict and difficult situations. In the situation that was handled poorly, try to determine if the person has learned from the mistake.

3. Describe a situation that is likely to occur, or has occurred, in your workplace. Ask the applicant how he or she would handle it.

You are looking for problem solving and judgement skills. Remember that the applicant is not familiar with your workplace and cannot be expected to provide the exact response that you would expect from your employees.

4. How many sick days have you taken from work in the past year?

Asking direct questions about the applicant's health is illegal in many countries. Asking about sick days is not. If the applicant has missed considerable time, ask if there is any current condition that would interfere with his or her ability to have a good attendance record.

An existing medical condition doesn't mean the applicant is unsuitable, but you do want to know how reliable and dependable he will be.

5. Are you able to work shifts? Graveyard shifts? Weekends? Are you available for business travel?

In many countries, it's illegal to ask questions about marital status and whether the person has family obligations. But you are entitled to know whether they are free to work the shifts you have available and if they are free to travel, if travel is a requirement of the job.

6. This is our policy regarding smoking/dress code/alcohol and drug use while on the job. Are you willing and able to abide by this policy?

It could be illegal to ask about an applicant's use of tobacco, alcohol or illicit drugs. But it is legal to explain your workplace policy and ask if they will abide by it.

7. Where do you see yourself in five years?

You are trying to find out if the person's long term goals are compatible with your workplace. If they are planning to move to another city, retire, quit work to raise children or to attend school, you will want to know it.

Or, if they want to climb the ladder, does your workplace offer an opportunity? On the other hand, if they are looking for a job to settle into for years, is that possible in your workplace?

Get the answers you were looking for? Do your reference checks, then Ready, Set, HIRE!

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