

Interview Planning Guide



BY VSP GLOBAL®

The purpose of this tool is to provide a high-level overview of best practices for interviewing.

A good interview process invests time in planning a structured interview made up of select behavioral questions designed to identify job-related competencies. Asking the same questions to all candidates will help keep the process focused, fair, consistent, and legally compliant. There are three major steps:

- Ensure Legal Compliance
- Interview Planning and Preparation
- Conduct Interviews and Take Notes
- Make the Decision and Consider Roadblocks

Most important, an interview must be legally defensible (your state and Federal law). It's essential that you're able to demonstrate the job relatedness of your questions. If the candidate raises a claim of discrimination, you may be held liable for damages up to \$300,000 or more.

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LEGAL COMPLIANCE CHEAT SHEET

To ensure you are staying within legal requirements throughout the hiring process, here is some helpful information:

Did you know that almost everyone is in a protected class?

Exception: non-disabled, heterosexual, white males under 40 who are not Vietnam-era veterans, were born in the U.S.A., and do not have a genetic disorder.

Before you engage with the candidate, ask yourself the following about each of your interview questions:

1. Is it job related? *(It should be)*
2. Is it asking a special person a special question? *(It shouldn't)*

Examples that do not meet legal requirements or the two questions above:

- What was it like to be in high school in the 1960's?
- I noticed your family photo on your phone screen. How many kids do you have?
- What kind of name is Oulungu?
- I notice you're from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, what do you think about the Amish Country?

INTERVIEW PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Hiring the right person takes more than a gut feeling. It takes planning and preparation. Behavioral interviews are structured to assess technical, job competencies and leadership competencies. A one-hour interview will likely give you time to probe for three to six competencies and allow the candidate an opportunity to ask questions of their own.

To identify the most qualified candidate, it's essential you do the following:

Develop required three to five key job competencies—the top criteria to be successful on the job.

- Technical competencies represent what's done on the job.
- Leadership competencies represent how an employee performs a job.

Competency Examples:

- Accountability
- Analytical Skills
- Coping
- Decision Making
- Discretionary Effort
- Engagement
- Goal Setting/Planning
- Industry Awareness
- Influencing
- Innovation/Creativity
- Interpersonal Skills
- Leadership
- Managing Obstacles
- Managing Others
- Technical
- Verbal Communications
- Written Communications

Develop Behavioral Interview Questions Based on Top Competencies

Behavioral interviewing is based on the premise that past behavior is a good predictor of future behavior. It allows a candidate to describe events that will help you determine the candidate's ability to do a specific job based on how they behaved in a similar situation in the past. Use the Behavior Interview Questions for more examples.

Notice the differences between traditional and behavioral interview questions below. Candidates cannot answer yes or no—they must provide evidence of a situation in the past.

TRADITIONAL QUESTIONS	BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS
Do you like to work hard?	Tell me about a time when you were persistent to reach your goals.
To what extent are you a people person?	Tell me about a time when you had to provide service to a dogmatic, arrogant customer.
How would you categorize your leadership style?	Give me an example of a time when you used facts and reason to persuade another person to take action.
This is a pretty high-pressure environment. Are you comfortable with that?	Tell me about a high-stress situation when it was desirable for you to keep a positive attitude. What happened?
Do you consider yourself to be detail oriented?	When have you found it useful to use detailed checklists and procedures to reduce potential for error on the job? Be specific.
Have you done a lot of troubleshooting?	Give me an example of a time when you were effective in doing away with the constant surprises and emergencies at work.
How decisive are you?	Describe a situation in which you had to draw a conclusion quickly and take immediate action.

Interview Questions—Dos and Don'ts: There are several types of questions you could ask. The two lists below show the types of questions you should use and the types you should never use.

DO USE...

Open-Ended/Probing: Start your question with who, what, when, how, or where. This invites candidates to elaborate and tell you about their qualifications.

"What type of corporate-wide projects did you manage at Intel?"

Topic-Opener: Opens a major topic or time and is followed by a question that probes performance standards.

"I noticed you worked with Excel. How did you use it? How often? When was the last time? In what advanced functions are you proficient?"

Accomplishment: Ask candidates to identify and validate their accomplishments and how they fit in to your department's environment.

"What was your role in introducing the training to the executive team?"

P.A.R.L.A.: Allows you to probe by requiring the candidate to show the Problem, Action, Result, Learning, and Application.

Silence: Not all candidates find it easy to respond to interview questions with a specific and detailed example of a situation or task when a competency was used. Ask and wait—be okay with the quiet: After asking a question, be silent for several seconds. Count up to 10 seconds of silence. You can take a sip of water, look out the window, or down at your notes to help ease the silence. Give the candidate time to think through their response. Don't shift to another question before the candidate has a chance to respond. This could break the candidate's train of thought.

Ask the question differently/confirm return to the question: If your candidate is still unable to come up with an example within a fair amount of time, ask the question in a different way. This can jog a memory to use as an example. If still there's no response, let them know that if something comes to mind, you can revisit the question. Be sure to revisit the question, especially if it's a core competency.

DON'T USE...

Closed-Ended: Questions that do not allow candidates to expand on their qualifications.

"Are you detail oriented?"

Non-Behavioral: Questions that don't help you learn more about the candidate's demonstrated ability to perform the job.

"Tell me about your strengths/weaknesses."

"Tell me about yourself."

Leading: Questions that are phrased so you telegraph the response you want to hear from the candidate.

"You like to work on the phones all day, don't you?"

Non-Job Related: Questions that do not relate to the position for which you are interviewing the candidate. These types of questions can get you into legal trouble.

"How often do you travel to Mexico to see your family?"

"Will you be able to get your wheelchair through the file room door?"

P.A.R.L.A. Model (probing technique)

Even with a great question, you may not always get a fully-developed answer. You will most likely need to probe. How do you determine if the candidate has given you a meaningful example of an accomplishment? The P.A.R.L.A. method can help. Here are the components and some probing questions you can ask:

P – What was the **problem** that required your attention?

A – What **action** did you take?

R – What was the **result**?

L – What did you **learn** from it?

A – How have you **applied** what you learned?

Important: Consider the **frequency** and **recency** of the information in the response. Has the candidate performed the task once or repeatedly over time? (e.g. was it 20 years ago one time or last year for most of their time?)

Additional Probing Techniques:

Even with the P.A.R.L.A. model, you may need to do more probing. To probe any area and to keep your question open-ended, start it with **what, why, when, where, who, or how**. Their behavioral example/response should give sufficient detail to verify that the event did, in fact, occur. Generally, if the person has the experience, they will be able to share detail with you as you probe. It's very difficult for a candidate to falsify an example. The deeper you probe, the better equipped you'll be to assess their competency.

Example:

INTERVIEWER'S QUESTION – "Tell me about your most successful project."

ANSWER – "I would say the telecommunications project I worked on."

Probing Questions:

Q: "Who was involved with that project?"

A: "We had a team that worked on the project."

Q: "Who was on that team?"

A: "It was an engineer, a technician and I."

Q: "What was your role on the team?"

A: "To lead the team and the project."

Q: "Why do you suppose you were selected as Lead?"

A: "Because the last project I led was successful, and because I have the necessary leadership skills to perform the job."

CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

The pre-work and planning is complete, you've laid the groundwork for a successful interview and are ready to proceed. A savvy interviewer listens 80% of the time and only talks 20% of the time.

Before the Candidate Arrives

- Create a comfortable environment that will encourage open communication. A relaxed environment for the candidate begins with the location of the interview. Ensure you are in a room where you will not be disturbed.
- Review the resume shortly before the interview. This will refresh your memory on the candidate's qualifications.
- If conducting a panel interview, assign who will ask each question. Firing a barrage of questions at candidates and putting them on the "hot seat" does not elicit a quality interview.

During the Interview

The interview outline shows the four major components and flow of a successful interview.

1. Opening

- Greet the candidate with some friendly, non-personal questions to establish rapport and help the candidate feel at ease so they're ready to share information in a relaxed way.

Examples:

- Were the directions to the practice ok?
- Is this your first time to this area?
- How are you finding the weather and sights here?
- Would you like some water before we start?
- Introduce yourself, including your position and its relationship to the open position.
- Explain the purpose and process for the interview (e.g. approximately how long it will last; if others will be involved; tour of office, etc).
- Inform the candidate that you will be taking notes.
- Inform the candidate you'll be asking questions first, but you'll allow time at the end of the interview to answer the candidate's questions.

2. Identify and Probe for Competencies

- Ask clarifying questions from the resume or application pertinent to the position, if needed.
- Ask planned behavioral questions.
- Ask probing questions based on responses to planned behavioral questions.
- Explore your concerns.

3. Candidate Questions

- Provide the candidate with an opportunity to ask questions.
- Answer with a focus on selling the position and department.

4. Closing

- Clarify any necessary information regarding the position or department.
- Be transparent - give a realistic job preview (e.g. discuss the challenges, job structure, career opportunities, etc).
- Ask any additional questions on work scheduling, travel, on-call availability, etc.
- Cover the next steps in the process and the intended timing of decisions.
- Sell the job - Highly competitive candidates may have several offers to choose from. The items listed below will help you create a strategy for attracting and retaining candidates.
 - What are the top three selling points of this position and what makes your practice unique?
 - What interesting or unusual projects or tasks will be included in this role?
 - What interesting or unusual technologies will be used?
 - What do others like about working in your practice?

Guidelines for Taking Interview Notes

Taking notes is an important part of the interview. You may need to refer to the notes during the decision-making process. Here are some guidelines:

- Inform the candidate that you will be taking notes.
- Take notes with the paper inclined toward you. This allows you to maintain eye contact with the applicant but doesn't allow the applicant to see what you are writing.
- Write only information that is job related. Do not list what the applicant is wearing, how he or she looks, or any other item that is not directly linked to the job.
- Write both positives and negatives so the applicant doesn't get any clues as to what you are listening for based on your note taking.
- If you write a verbatim response to a question, put it in quotes.
- Write key words or phrases to remember responses.
- Use an interview guide to assist you in keeping notes related to the knowledge, skills, abilities, and experience required for the job.
- Retain your interview notes for two years.

MAKING THE DECISION

You completed your interviews and are ready to decide who will fill the position. Before you do, consider the roadblocks below.

Roadblocks

Don't allow these potential roadblocks to impact your selection:

- **Appearance** – Permitting the candidate's appearance to impact your decision.
- **Similar Background** – Favoring an applicant who shares a similar background.
- **Horns vs. Halo** – Attributing every good trait imaginable to an applicant because of one outstanding trait, or vice-versa.
- **Desired vs. Required Qualifications** – Eliminating good candidates by requiring unrealistic job specifications.
- **Association Bias** – Projecting good or bad attributes onto a candidate because the candidate reminds you of someone.

Candidate Assessment

After you have bypassed the roadblocks, ask yourself the following questions about each candidate:

- Do the candidate's strengths meet the needs of your practice?
- Is this candidate an enhancement for your practice's culture?
- Have you explored all potential concerns with the candidate?
- Are the candidate's skill or knowledge limitations trainable?
- Is the weakness offset by a strength?
- Is the limitation relevant to the job?