



EFFECTIVE INTERVIEWS

the easy complete guide for employers

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CHAPTER 1 – INTERVIEWS

CONDUCTING AN INTERVIEW

The short listed applicants will be invited to an interview. Some organisations use a telephone interview to check details in addition to the CV as a screening tool. It also helps to reduce the shortlist.

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

Most organisations use a face-to-face interview to screen out unsuitable applicants. There are many types of interviews ranging from loosely structured conversational interviews, to highly structured interviews. While the most popular, the unstructured interview is highly unreliable and runs the risk of the interviewer asking questions that are not legally defensible. Unstructured interviews are not consistent and extremely open to personal bias.

PURPOSE OF INTERVIEWING

The purpose of an interview is to collect information that will show how much of the knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal attributes sought, the applicant has. The applicant's responses to the interview questions will provide this information. Effective interviewing therefore depends on the type of questions that are asked.

DO NOT USE THESE QUESTIONS...

Do not use vague, unstructured questions such as -

- Tell me about yourself
- How would your previous employer describe you
- What are your career goals
- What are your strengths and weaknesses

The interview is built around the key 6-8 performance factors* for a position. Two to three structured interview questions are developed for each performance factor.

TYPES OF QUESTIONS

Structured questions

Structured interview questions can be -

- Behavioural questions
- Situational questions
- Knowledge questions

Behavioural questions

Behavioural questions ask how an applicant has responded and behaved in **past situations**. In a structured interview applicants are asked to explain how they used the performance factors referred to above*, in past jobs. For example, an essential performance factor for most positions is the ability to plan and organise. Good behavioural interview questions to assess this ability are:

- Describe how you have handled a difficult customer in your past job?
- Tell me about a time when a colleague asked for help while you were in the middle of a task?

Situational questions

Situational questions ask how applicants would respond to a **specific situation** e.g. dealing with difficult customers.

If it is unlikely that the applicant has had past experience on a particular performance factor, then situational questions can be used. Examples of situation questions are -

- What would you do if a customer complained about the quality of his or her service?
- Your manager has asked you to stay for the next shift, but you have a prior arrangement. What would your response be?

Knowledge questions

Knowledge questions ask applicants about **their understanding and knowledge** on specific aspects of the job.

Examples of knowledge questions -

- Can you use Microsoft Office applications?
- Do you know MYOB?

KEY POINTS

- When possible use a combination of interview questions
- Develop a set of 2-3 questions for each performance factor.

UNLAWFUL QUESTIONS...

In terms of the Human Rights Act and the Employment Relations Act it is unlawful to discriminate, when employing staff, in terms of the applicant's -

Colour	Race
Ethnic or national origin	Gender
Marital and family status	Age
Disability	Religious or ethical belief
Political opinion	Employment status
Sexual orientation	Union involvement

...AND WHEN YOU CAN ASK THEM

...if it is inherent in the position

There is a popular perception that it is illegal to ask ANY personal questions. This is not true.

The principle is that you cannot ask irrelevant questions and then discriminate against a person on those irrelevant points.

Usually, but by no means always, personal questions are irrelevant. For instance, religion is irrelevant in performing most occupations, except if you are a priest – (the law does not intend to force a congregation to appoint a person from another religion as their spiritual leader). In that case the need for a particular religious belief (and therefore discrimination against other religions) is based on the GENUINE OCCUPATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS for the position.

Other examples are age (certain jobs cannot be done by persons under a certain age), or gender (eg male actors for male parts in a play).

If in doubt, a quick phone call to 0800 WANZHELP will resolve the question.

CHAPTER 2 – MORE ON INTERVIEWS

LISTENING SKILLS

SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEWING = GOOD QUESTIONS + LISTENING SKILLS

ACTIVE LISTENING

The key to successful interview is having the right mix of questions **and** listening actively. Active listening involves responding both verbally and non-verbally to the applicant, letting them know that you are giving them your full attention.

Active listening involves -

- **Paraphrasing** to state in your own words what you think the person has said
- **Asking questions** to indicate interest and clarify understanding
- **Using appropriate non-verbal communication** like making eye contact, nodding your head and showing interest.

Did you know THIS about body language?

When communicating we depend heavily on non-verbal communication. In fact:

Body language accounts for 55% of communication
Tone account for 38% of communication
Words account for 7% of communication

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

Staff interviews can be intimidating for both parties. It helps a lot if you prepare well for the meeting – you know what you are going to ask, and the applicant immediately senses that you've done your homework. Remember, though, that the interview may be the first time that the person has contact with your company, so be patient.

GETTING STARTED

Greet the applicant by name and shake hands. Introduce yourself and give your title. Break the ice by engaging in some small talk to relax the person (and yourself). Inform the applicant that you will be taking notes during the interview.

CONTROLLING THE INTERVIEW

If you are getting the information you want and all is progressing well, then controlling techniques aren't necessary.

However, if the candidate is avoiding your questions, or trying to take control from you, then some techniques to prevent wasting time are useful.

These techniques include -

- Asking close-ended questions
- Referring to the time you have allowed for the interview
- Politely interrupting the applicant and asking a job-related question

CLOSING THE INTERVIEW

Before closing the interview, give the applicant an opportunity to ask any questions that they may have regarding the position or the company. Once these have been answered, close the interview by -

- Reviewing the key responsibilities of the position
- Reviewing the next steps in the selection process
- If possible walk the person around the work site
- Walk the person out

Even if during the interview you assess that the applicant does not have the required skill set, it is important that you continue with the interview, to ensure that all applicants are treated consistently.

CHAPTER 3 – EVALUATING INTERVIEWS

THE SOAR PRINCIPLE

A good response to a behavioural question follows the **SOAR** principle -

The applicant outlines

- The **S**ituation on which he or she was in
- The **O**bjectives to be achieved
- The **A**ctions taken
- The **R**esults obtained

COMPARING PEOPLE FAIRLY – BEHAVIOURAL RATING GUIDES

To ensure that ALL applicants' responses are evaluated against the same benchmark it is valuable to develop Behavioural Rating Guides for assessing responses to questions.

These rating guides also enable you to assess the response, making it easier to compare applicants.

EXAMPLE RATING GUIDE FOR TEAMWORK

Unacceptable		Acceptable	Superior	
1	2	3	4	5
Does not listen to others Is overly dependent on others Is critical of others		Listens to others Is prepared to help others when asked	Communicates in an open manner Offers help and support Has a positive towards others	

A rating guide that includes specific behaviours will minimise bias. Interviewers often fall prey to the following biases -

- **Central tendency bias** – giving a middle rating to all performance factors
- **Leniency/ strictness bias** – consistently giving either only high or only low ratings
- **Halo effect bias** – allow the rating of one performance factor to influence the ratings given to other performance factors
- **Similarity bias** – assess applicants that are like yourself more favourably
- **Contrast effect** – assess applicant in relation to the applicants previously interviewed
- **First impression** – make a decision in the first few minutes of the interview
- **Biases and stereotypes** – allow personal biases to influence ratings of applicants
- **Overly sensitive to negative information.** Many interviewers look for reasons to reject rather a reason to hire

EFFECTIVE INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

- √ Arrange not to be interrupted for the duration of the interview
- √ Open the interview in a warm and friendly manner
- √ Develop rapport with the applicant, putting them at ease by allowing for a few minutes of small talk
- √ Listen actively and openly to the applicant's responses
- √ Use the 80/20 rule - let the applicant do 80% of the talking and you 20%
- √ Don't finish the applicant's answers
- √ Focus on what the applicant says; not on their appearance (unless of course appearance is a performance factor)
- √ Stay focused
- √ View the applicant's responses neutrally and not emotionally (this may be difficult, but simply being aware of your own reactions is a great help)
- √ Take notes
- √ Don't ask questions that are not legally defensible e.g. questions related to gender, religion, race, culture, marital status, age, disability, organisational affiliations, arrests

DOUBLE CHECKING

Since CVs and interviews can be manipulated to create a particular impression, it is useful to review the insights gathered from the CV and interview. This is done with employment tests and work samples. These tests and work samples should not replace interviews, but supplement them.