



UNLOCKING THE POWER OF INTERVIEWING: WHAT IS YOUR PROCESS MISSING?

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You may have tens of recruiters, managers, and employees involved in assessing and interviewing candidates – often spread across the country. How can you confidently know candidates are evaluated consistently, fairly, and in ways that select only those that meet your core job expectations and requirements?

Although interviewing is among the most basic of hiring practices, it remains among the most challenging to execute effectively. You're balancing many goals and perspectives – earning and keeping the commitment of your entire team to consistently following the interview process, creating a compelling and positive candidate experience, and ensuring you fairly gather the best-job related information. Marry this with constant changes in technology (e.g., video interviewing), labor shortages, and constantly shifting job demands and it's a constant daunting task. We have created a checklist as a guide to building an efficient and effective interview process that is supported by your entire team. **Our goal is to help you unlock the true power of interviewing to select candidates who will perform, fit your culture and brand, and stay.**

We will do this by walking through the process of creating a structured interview step-by-step. In structured interviewing candidates respond to the same set of established questions and are rated against set standards and means of scoring. To create a structured interview that both selects strong candidates and is enthusiastically embraced by your team, you first need a solid and detailed understanding of performance. That's where we'll start.



Before You Begin...

- Start with an understanding of the competencies and traits you need, like a competency model – or a map of what drives performance.

You need to know what's important to measure before you can measure it. The competencies, or performance dimensions, that are needed for performance must be identified, and interview questions must be built around them. This may mean evaluating each position and determining what you want each position to execute in the future for you to be successful.

□ Involve Subject Matter Experts (SMEs).

If you're building a competency model, or even if you already have one, SMEs should be recruited to assist with developing the content of the interviews. SMEs should include strong performers in the roles of interest, their supervisors, and leadership that is accountable and sets direction for these positions. SMEs can also provide you with feedback on current practices around interviewing in your company to see what is and is not working. If recruiters will be completing part of the interview process make sure to include them as well. If you're developing, or adjusting, your competency model, SMEs can help you make sure the content is relevant and resonates with the demands and responsibilities they face. SMEs will be used in building the interview and provide you with critical incidents that you can leverage when developing questions – and that predict performance.

Building the Interview

□ Using your performance dimensions and competencies, determine the most effective type of questions.

Structured interviews can include both behavioral and situational questions.

- **Behavioral questions** ask candidates about their past behavior. In most cases, the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior. These include “Tell me about a time you...,” style questions that you're probably familiar with.
- **Situational questions** are future-focused and ask candidates how they would respond to critical incidents – real situations that occur on the job. Understanding how a candidate approaches critical situations is a strong indicator of their ability to perform, fit your culture, and stay. They also educate the candidate about the position, helping you avoid “[the honeymoon hangover](#).” Situational questions also allow you to measure the candidate's ability to reason and problem solve.

A combination of behavioral and situational questions will often be the most accurate, allowing you to learn about a candidate's past behavior and also how he or she would perform in a situation that is relevant to the position and company.

A reason to consider situational questions is that a candidate may not have had the opportunity to perform in a capacity similar to the position before. For example, if you are in manufacturing and hiring a plant manager, or in healthcare and hiring a clinic manager, you may be interviewing candidates who would be taking on this role for the first time. How they managed critical situations in the past was likely influenced by the policies and beliefs of the leaders and organizations they worked for previously. The “imagine-anything-is-possible” context provided by situational questions allows you to see how they would truly perform.

Situational questions are also useful for entry-level roles where people may not have the experience needed to answer relevant behavioral questions. If your candidates are newly minted college graduates or are applying for frontline service roles, they may have limited work experience. Additionally, situational questions are also helpful for first-time managerial candidates, as they likely have limited experience leading and managing others.

□ Develop job-related questions for each competency or performance dimension.

If the questions you are asking candidates have little to no relation to performance and the position in question, you are simply wasting your time and theirs. This could include asking them their opinions on non-job related topics, or asking them to solve riddles or puzzles. You may also leave them with a strong memory

of being evaluated in a way they believed was 'unfair.' Job-relevant questions not only serve to provide candidates with a realistic preview of what to expect if hired, but also allow you to be more confident in the candidate's ability to be a strong performer based on his or her responses.

On another note, research shows that interviewers who ask these questions tend to possess more "dark traits," such as narcissism [1]. A question like, "Why are pothole covers round?" or, "If you could be any animal on a carousel, what would you pick and why?" can be disorienting and unfair to candidates. Furthermore, there's no evidence that candidate responses to questions these questions are related in any way to job performance.

□ **Standardize how interviewers score and evaluate candidates.**

Scoring is a huge opportunity to make interviewing easier and less stressful while also making it consistent and accurate. It takes the guesswork out of interviewing by providing interviewers with clear guidelines for scoring, making a hiring decision, and even supporting a new hire's success. We will share some examples of how to do this later. A well designed scoring template takes the subjectivity out of hiring, not only benefitting your team, but increasing accurate documentation from the interview and legal protection. **Interviewers may become tired from constant notetaking and abandon the guide you so carefully created – a scoring template can give them all the information they need – and create a faster interview process.**

In the example question below, you scored positive and negative responses are provided for the situation. You will also notice the competency assessed by the question is accompanied by a definition. This makes it easier for the interviewer to evaluate candidates' responses in real time during the interview. You should use the listed scored responses as a guide to quickly determine the quality of a candidate's response and how it aligns – or doesn't – with what you are looking for in each question and answer. Additionally, including a summary table at the end of your interview guide allows you to quickly review candidate performance on each question and make comparisons efficiently, as well as calibrate scoring between interviewers.

TEAMWORK

Have you ever been part of a successful team? What did you accomplish together? How did you work together to achieve your goals?

TEAMWORK:		
Encourages an environment of teamwork by one's own actions. Can be counted on to be a productive and reliable member of the team. Shows a high concern for the rights, values, and worth of others. Treats others fairly and consistently.		
<i>Positive Indicators</i>	<i>Negative Indicators</i>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Helped each other <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Helped make work fun for others <input type="checkbox"/> Did whatever it took to be successful <input type="checkbox"/> Shares examples of positively influencing others, coaching and teaching, or organizing tasks <input type="checkbox"/> Did things without being asked <input type="checkbox"/> Gets the support of others on the team <input type="checkbox"/> Coaches and teaches <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Creates a fun environment <input type="checkbox"/> Identifies opportunities for the team to improve <input type="checkbox"/> Other:	<input type="checkbox"/> Shows a lack of understanding of what it means to be part of a team <input type="checkbox"/> Fails to demonstrate passion about teamwork <input type="checkbox"/> Cannot describe what a strong team looks like <input type="checkbox"/> Cannot define why working as a team is important <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Relies on leadership to get things done: e.g., teachers, supervisors, parents/family members <input type="checkbox"/> Does not take personal responsibility for success of the team <input type="checkbox"/> Does not take a "whatever-it-takes" attitude to improve performance <input type="checkbox"/> Focuses on personal success more than team success <input type="checkbox"/> Other:	
<i>Notes:</i> -Understands the importance of a fun environment for team success -Lacks personal initiative to take charge of a team – <u>development opportunity if hired</u>		
Highly Favorable	Favorable	Slightly Favorable

SUMMARY TABLE

Tally all question ratings in the table below:

TITLE	HIGHLY FAVORABLE	FAVORABLE	NOT FAVORABLE
Positivity	✓		
Teamwork		✓	
Working Under Pressure			✓
Dependability		✓	
Customer Service	✓		

- Gain buy-in across your team for the entire interview process.

To achieve a predictive and efficient hiring process you must gain the commitment of your team. Everyone must understand the evidence behind the questions and the process. [Generating buy-in to the interview process does not have to be a challenge. The easiest way to do this is to communicate the 'why' behind using the interview as a tool for hiring.](#) Explain how the guides are based on what it takes to be successful in the role and will also educate candidates (and new hires) on these expectations. Explain the logic behind how the interview process is structured: you want them to spend the majority of their time only with qualified candidates. Structured interviews ask the same critical, job-relevant questions of all candidates, and scoring and evaluating is standardized to ensure a streamlined process, saving you time and allowing you to differentiate even the good candidates from the exceptional.

Your structured interview guide will provide managers with a solid understanding of the candidate's strengths and opportunities, personality, and potential to meet the demands of the job – as well as live your culture.

[By using a structured interview – based on research and an understanding of the job – you will receive the same amount of accurate information from the candidate that you would receive in 3 and a half 'traditional,' unstructured interviews \[2\].](#)

Interview Training and Implementation

- Consider multiple interviews, include multiple raters when possible, and have the right interview at the right time.

When you interview matters. The most common approach is to review the candidate's application and resume, conduct a phone screen, and review assessment results before bringing the candidate in for an interview.

However, sometimes it may make the most sense to have a phone screen when the interviewer (or delegated person) calls to schedule the interview. Having a structured set of questions for this screen that are consistently used is essential. This may include questions that confirm information on the application, or are reasons candidates are commonly disqualified when they come in for the in-person interview, including:

1. Availability
2. Certifications
3. Required experience

The phone screen is also a prime time to educate candidates about the position and your organization as a place to work. Candidates are more likely to remember and value the information you provide in this, one of

the first, encounters they've had with your organization. This information will stick with them and they are more likely to know it is important. Communicating key elements of your culture, or how you operate can both attract qualified candidates while also leading those who are likely to not be strong contributors to leave.

If multiple interviews are conducted make sure the questions best fit with the person asking them. What's more, including multiple raters for each interview can help increase the accuracy of any conclusions made from the interviewers and give additional team members ownership of the hiring decision.

□ **Train everyone who interviews – or evaluates information from the interviews.**

Hiring managers and recruiters are frequently given hiring responsibilities with little to no training in how to conduct an interview and make effective hiring decisions. Sufficient time must be taken to train hiring managers on how to conduct the interview, how to take effective notes, how the scoring/rating system works for evaluating responses, and to generate awareness of common errors and biases that must be avoided when evaluating candidates.

Consider including the following in your training process:

1. Review the 'why' of your interview approach, the challenges of hiring for the roles, and how the interviews were developed
2. Rater bias training: cover some of the common errors and risks to the organization with interviewing.
3. Role-play: first, walk through each step of the interview process and any related information s/he should have (like hiring assessment results). Then ask the new hiring manager to play the role of interviewer and you the role of interviewee to fully understand how the guides work.
4. Follow-up! Circle back with the new recruiter or hiring manager to see how the interview process is working. Feedback is critical to securing buy-in and commitment. Even better: observe, or conduct side-by-side interviews for the person's first couple candidates.

□ **Insist on 100% compliance.**

Inevitably, someone on your team will experience a "false positive" or bad hire that made it through the interview process with stellar marks. And some managers will simply drift away from the interview process, while new hiring managers and recruiters need to be bought into the hiring process. Without total compliance to the same hiring process it is impossible to accurately compare candidate responses, allowing personal subjectivity to impact the validity of the interview. You can ensure compliance with the interview process by requiring all hiring managers to submit their completed guide after each interview conducted. You can create compliance reports documenting which new hires fully completed the interview process. This is the first step for documenting the validity and return-on-investment of the interview process.



Fine-Tuning and ROI

Once your interview process is launched and in use long enough to have a sufficient number of new hires it's time to gather user feedback and determine how the tools are identifying quality hires and how they could be improved even more. Showing your team the tools work with actual candidates hired with the tools builds commitment even further and gives you the power to insist the tools are used 100 percent of the time. Additionally, determining the ROI of your interview process speaks to the results-oriented members of your team and really drives home the answer to the question "How will this tool help me?"

□ Conduct a user survey of your team to see what can be improved.

A user survey solicits feedback from all hiring managers, recruiters, or team members involved in interviewing in your organization to determine what is and is not working well for them with the interview guides. There is nobody better to seek feedback from than the individuals who are conducting the interviews. Ensure that an appropriate amount of time has passed since the interview process was implemented and that enough candidates have been through the process – otherwise, the feedback received is unlikely to be meaningful or valid. It may be wise to ask in your survey how frequently the person has used the tools. Then you can review feedback based on those with little experience and compare their impressions to your experienced 'superusers.'

□ Use interview data to find opportunities to improve the interview process.

Analyze data from the interview guides to determine where improvements can be made in the interview process. Are too many candidates passing? Too few? Are there positive or negative indicators that are always, or never, selected? Are you frequently seeing the same note for a response that is not included in the scored responses? These are all things to look for to enhance the rigor and effectiveness of the interviews.

□ Measure the return-on-investment of your interview guides.

You can measure the ROI of your interview guide(s) in several ways. One way is to determine the relationship between interview performance and then job performance at a later point in time. If your interview guide leads to additional rounds of the hiring process you may want to evaluate whether candidates who pass your interview are more likely to move on through sequential steps of the hiring process. Interviews will be most effective when they are part of an intentional and evidence based hiring process that is consistently used.



Legal Implications

With interviewing, the best way to protect your company from discrimination claims is to ask the same job-related questions of all candidates for a position. Avoid asking questions in the interview relating to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, marital status (including family responsibilities), sexual orientation, age, disability, and veteran status. While this may seem simple, when a hiring manager slips into a traditional interview irrelevant and legally questionable questions can seem legitimate. For example, if a manager notices the candidate's high school and is familiar with the area – that could lead to questions about the person's childhood – and a multitude of possible answers that would place your organization at risk. A strong structured interview guide that has the confidence of your team is the best defense against sliding into questions that put your organization at risk.

Ensuring and Protecting the Validity of the Interview

As a final point of emphasis, below are some things to remember when developing and implementing your interview to ensure its ability to predict job performance:

- ✓ Ask the same standardized, job-relevant questions of all candidates
- ✓ Leverage both situational (future-focused) and behavioral (past behavior) questions
- ✓ Ask the right questions at the right time – consider a series of interviews and a phone screen
- ✓ Educate candidates on your organization and the position
- ✓ Train all interviewers on how to conduct the interview
- ✓ Train all interviewers on how to use the interview guide(s) – and how to use the scoring system
- ✓ Have a standardized process for scoring candidates' responses
- ✓ Ensure all candidates are evaluated on the same performance dimensions

As with most things in life and especially in business, structure and consistency are key. A recent article in the Forbes Leadership Forum states in reference to structured interviews, "... organizations large and small owe it to themselves and their stakeholders to base this important decision on a consistent process." [3]

If your organization has an employee handbook, policies, and procedures for success, why wouldn't you have a set procedure in place to find the people who will be the **faces and future of your brand**?

We hope that this checklist serves as a useful tool for successful interviewing if you're just now beginning to put a selection process in place or perhaps reevaluating your current one. If you're interested in learning more about how a partnership with us can help you make better hiring decisions and save you time, simply contact us and one of our Talent Management Specialists will be in touch.

[1] Highhouse, S., Nye, C. D., & Zhang, D. C. (2018). Dark motives and elective use of brainteaser interview questions. *Applied Psychology, 0*(0), 1-30.

[2] Schmidt, F. L., & Zimmerman, R. D. (2005). A counterintuitive hypothesis about employment interview validity and some supporting evidence. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 89*, 553-561.

[3] "Stop Being Deceived by Interviews When You're Hiring" Forbes Leadership Forum

Ready to learn how we can strengthen your culture through hiring, developing, and retaining remarkable people?

Contact us – we'd love to chat!

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