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Knowledge Base

Interview Guide

01.
Intro to Behavior-Based Interviewing

Behavioral interviewing is based on the idea that **past behavior is a good predictor of how an individual will behave in the future.** By asking questions about past work-related situations, you can gauge how candidates will respond to similar situations in your workplace.

- **Reduce bias and ambiguity by asking job-relevant questions**
  Behavioral interview questions are based on an analysis of job duties and requirements of the job. A job analysis is conducted to identify the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs) that are required to perform a job. Once KSAOs are identified, questions targeting these KSAOs are developed and set up in a structured interview format.

- **Learn more about a candidate's true personality**
  Asking behavioral interview questions is a quick way to learn more about a candidate's true personality and job-relevant characteristics before you hire them. This interview style can get into deeper detail than other interview questions, and can help you reveal important information about a candidate that may not come out in other interview formats.

- **Consistent and fair interview process**
  Following a structured interview format using behavior-based interview questions ensures that your interview process is consistent and fair, and that it gathers only relevant information about the qualities that will help candidates be successful on the job. This guide will dive into how you can best prepare to conduct a behavioral interview.

02.

How to Prepare for a Behavior-Based Interview

The first step to a successful interview is preparation. This includes defining the job, reviewing the candidate's application materials, and understanding how you will be evaluating the candidate in the interview.

- **Familiarize yourself with the role**
  Even if you are already familiar with the role you are interviewing for, it is important to review job descriptions or profiles, as well as standard information about the company. Be prepared to talk about the role or the company to answer candidates' questions.

- **Review candidate application materials**
  Before each interview, review the candidate's job history and resume. This will help give context to the experiences the candidate may share during the interview. If you are leveraging assessments, you may review the candidate's results ahead of time. However, keep in mind that while assessments are a great tool and are predictive of job fit, it is important to evaluate candidates' interview performance independently of their assessment results.

- **Examine the interview tools**
  Read through all of the questions you will ask in the interview, as well as the areas the questions are targeting (for example, definitions of key job competencies). Next, review any evaluation forms you will use to rate the candidate's responses. This ensures you have a good understanding of the interview process and what is being evaluated by the interview. Remember, interviews are most effective when they are structured. Be sure to leverage the interview module that is built into the tool!

- **Set up your space**
  Conduct the interview in a private room that is clean and free of distractions, and set sufficient time aside for the interview. This will convey to the candidate that you are making the interview a priority. Make sure you have everything you need to take thorough notes during and immediately after the interview.

- **Coordinate with other interviewers.**
  If you are conducting a panel interview, coordinate with other interviewers beforehand to discuss the candidate and divide up questions.

03.
Opening the Interview

Setting the stage appropriately at the beginning of the interview can help the candidate feel more comfortable sharing information, leading to a much better experience. Spend some time setting expectations and building rapport with the candidate before jumping into the formal interview questions.

Tips and Techniques for Building Rapport

Rapport is about understanding other people and showing a genuine interest in them. When we have rapport, communication becomes easier and more effective. Here are ways you can build rapport with candidates:

Remember the basics

Create a good foundation for building rapport by:

- Maintaining good eye contact rather than looking away
- Smiling
- Referring to the candidate by name
- Being sincere and showing a genuine interest in the candidate
- Giving the candidate your full attention

Perfect your 'small talk'

When the candidate first joins the interview, have some good conversation topics ready to break the ice. Remember to keep things light and stick to safe, non-argumentative topics (weather, hometown, etc.)

Set expectations

Once everyone has settled in, give the candidate an introduction and overview. First, introduce yourself and any other interviewers. Next, explain to the candidate that you will be asking a series of behavior-based interview questions. Highlight that you may be taking notes during the interview, but that the candidate has your full attention.

- **Put yourself in their shoes**

  As the candidate shares information and responds to the interview questions, be sure to show empathy – in other words, try to understand the candidate by seeing things from their perspective and recognizing their emotions. You can do this by using your imagination or thinking back to a time when you were in a similar situation and reflecting on your thoughts.

- **Use mirroring**

  Mirroring is a useful technique you can use to get 'into sync' with the candidate. It uses a combination of body language, words and phrases, and tone of voice:

  Body language. Though more limited in virtual interviews, you may witness some of a candidate's body language, including posture, gestures (such as hand movements), or facial expressions. You can subtly mirror some of this body language to connect with the candidate.

  Words and phrases. Look out for certain keywords and phrases that the candidate uses and drop them into the conversation if you can.

  Tone of voice. Notice the candidate's speech patterns, such as their tone of voice and how loudly or softly they speak. If they speak softly and slowly, then lower the volume and tempo of your voice as well.

  Tip: Be careful not to go overboard, as too much mirroring can run the risk of offending the other person

04.
During the Interview

Types of Interview Questions

When conducting the interview, closely follow the questions laid out in the interview tool. This ensures that all candidates have a consistent interview experience and are evaluated on job-relevant criteria. You may encounter three standard question types:

1. **Opening Questions:**
   These questions set the stage for the interview and capture general information about the candidate, such as work history or interest in the role.
2. **Competency Questions:**
   These questions, which are based on the hiring profile for a particular role, will be asked of all candidates who complete an interview. Their purpose is to gather information to evaluate each candidate's standing on competencies that are required to perform the job successfully.
3. **Follow-Up Questions:**
   These questions are tailored to each candidate based on their assessment results, and target personality traits for which candidates scored outside of the ideal range for the role. This gives candidates the opportunity to demonstrate how they may navigate or overcome potential behavioral weaknesses in a work environment.

Active Listening

Use active listening to engage with the candidate and truly understand their responses to the interview questions . This includes a few key components:

Be attentive – when the candidate is talking, focus on their words instead of what you are going to say next; be sure to silence cell phones and remove other sources of distraction

Acknowledge the candidate with small cues such as maintaining eye contact and occasionally nodding your head; this signals to the candidate that you are listening and encourages them to continue speaking

Request clarification if anything the candidate said was unclear – avoid making assumptions

Rephrase or summarize the candidate's statements to ensure you understand what they meant

Well-Documented Notes

While conducting the interview, it is important to remain attentive to the candidate's responses and document key insights. Notes can help you distinguish among multiple candidates and ensure you are evaluating candidates consistently and lawfully.

- Be open with the candidate about taking notes
- Document enough to recall your thoughts, but do not spend your time writing rather than listening – consider using shorthand during the interview, then filling out your notes afterwards
- Focus on recording your thoughts about the quality of the candidate's responses, keeping in mind the competencies or other areas that the interview questions are targeting
- Do not document assumptions, personal judgements, or non-relevant comments
- Synthesize your thoughts and make a recommendation immediately after the interview

Closing the Interview

Make sure to let the candidate know about the next steps and a timeline for when they can expect to hear back. Be courteous and thank them for their time. If there are delays or changes to the status of the open positions, ensure candidates receive a follow-up and are notified if they are not selected for a role. It is better to provide less detail about the reason for a rejection - but if a candidate asks, you may provide feedback that is job-relevant and related to the competencies being assessed in the interview.

05.

Common Rater Biases

Before beginning your evaluations, you should familiarize yourself with some common rater biases. A bias is a preconceived notion or prejudice you have based on your perspective or experience. It's important to acknowledge your biases so they have less impact on the interview process - the first step to overcoming biases is to recognize and become aware of them.

- **Prejudging**
  Many people have preconceived notions about a candidate before they ever meet them – perhaps from something on their resume, their name, the school they attended, or an assortment of other reasons. These first impressions can have a lasting impact on our decisions. However, it's important not to rely on irrelevant information about the candidate when evaluating their interview performance. Instead, carefully attend to all of the candidate's responses to better understand their past experiences and behaviors. By keeping an open mind, you'll be able to uncover more information about the candidate - and it may or may not align with your initial impressions.

- **Halo and Horn Effect**
  This refers to the tendency to see people as all good or all bad, rather than seeing them as a blend of strengths and weaknesses. The best way to counter the Halo and Horn Effect is to evaluate candidates against each key competency for the job. Think about each competency individually and objectively, then evaluate the candidate on that competency independent of other areas.

- **"Similar to Me" Error**
  We all tend to like people who remind us of ourselves, or who have characteristics that we admire in ourselves. The bias to favor those who are similar to us is quite powerful and extremely common; however, it is important to keep in mind that candidates who are very different from you may still be a good fit for the role.

Overgeneralizing

We have a natural tendency to lump people into categories. Sometimes we generalize characteristics to groups, or assume that because a person has Characteristic A, they must also have Characteristic B. This can result in positive or negative stereotyping. Rather than making assumptions about a candidate's strengths or weaknesses based on other information about them, you should independently evaluate each of the candidate's interview responses against their target job competencies.

First/Last Effect

This is the tendency to be overly influenced by information that a candidate presented very early or very late in the interview. To combat this effect, listen carefully and take notes throughout the interview – that way you can refer to all relevant information when making your evaluations, rather than just the candidate's opening or closing statements.

Contrast Effect

When conducting multiple interviews, we may allow our perceptions of previous candidates to influence our ratings of the present candidate. This is particularly pronounced when previous candidates performed very well or very poorly. Instead of thinking about previous candidates when making evaluations, be sure to rate the present candidate according to the objective standards provided for each interview question.

Leniency/Severity/Central Tendency

This refers to raters who are too lenient, too harsh, or hesitant to rate outside of the average when evaluating others. An interviewer rating one candidate low or high is not indicative of a bias - but if the trend persists across candidates, the rater may have their own expectations for interviewees that are not tied to the objective standards used in the interview.

06.
Making your evaluations

The final step in the interviewing process is to evaluate the candidate's interview performance. This can be the most difficult for some interviewers because it requires making a decision about the candidate and taking accountability for that decision. There are, however, some techniques that can help make the decision easier:

- **Use your rating resources**
  Always make use of the rating information that accompanies an interview question. This may include a definition of the competency or other key area that the interview question is targeting. You may also see rating scale anchors, or behavioral descriptions that define what constitutes a very low or very high level of the competency being assessed. Carefully read this information to make sure you understand what the interview question is intended to measure, as well as what a good or bad response looks like.

- **Review your documentation**
  Read through your notes on the candidate's response to the target interview question. Recall the behaviors that were relevant to the job competency being assessed.

- **Evaluate the candidate's response**
  Compare the candidate's response to the competency definition and associated rating anchors. Based on this comparison, identify each candidate's strengths and opportunities on the competency being assessed. Stay objective - focus on the candidate's qualifications for the demands of the job and try not to re-define the competency to each candidate.

- **Check your decision**
  Consider whether you are falling into any of the common rater biases. Don't fall into bad decision traps – avoid making the hiring decision just because you need someone and/or you liked the person. If necessary, adjust your evaluation to better align with the objective rating standards.

- **Record your final rating and move on to the next interview question**
  Remember to rate each of the candidate's responses independently, without considering your evaluations of previous responses

07.
Summary Check List

Before the Interview

- [ ] Review the job description
- [ ] Review the candidate’s resume and assessment results
- [ ] Read through the interview questions and evaluation resources
- [ ] Make sure the interview space is quiet, clean, and free from distractions
- [ ] Bring materials to take notes
- [ ] Coordinate with other interviewers if you are conducting a panel interview

When the Candidate Arrives

- [ ] Greet and welcome the candidate
- [ ] Spend some time building rapport
- [ ] Introduce yourself and explain the interview process

During the Interview

- [ ] Follow the questions in the interview tool
- [ ] Try to make the experience consistent for each candidate
- [ ] Practice active listening and silence cell phones
- [ ] Take notes
- [ ] Inform the candidate of next steps

Making Your Evaluations

- [ ] Utilize your rating resources, including competency definitions and scale anchors
- [ ] Review your notes prior to making a rating
- [ ] Evaluate the candidate’s response against the objective rating criteria
- [ ] Consider whether you are falling into any rater biases
- [ ] Rate each response independently of the others