

Interviewing Best Practices / Hiring and Selection

by Dr. Stephen C. Schoonover
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Overview

The best available method for overcoming potential vulnerabilities in the interview process and for identifying specific behavioral criteria for excellence, is a behaviorally-anchored evaluation. In order to perform this type of interview, you should use a model that describes objective criteria of success for a specific job role (e.g., a success template). In addition, an excellent hiring intervention should focus on:

- Traits and leadership skills that are most difficult to develop on the job through training and development
- Those skills that are critical for top performance in a specific job category

This method of hiring and selection helps interviewers perform the most significant part of the screening by using an objective scoring procedure. The final selection process relies on a scoring protocol (using specific evidence of competent behavior generated during the interview) and subsequent dialogue and testing of interview data. This procedure helps overcome possible



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errors or bias in the scoring process and obligates the interviewer to base the final decision on specific competency-based

data. A summary of principles that support excellent hiring and selection are outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Hiring and Selection Interview: Best Practices and Principles

- Focusing on objectively-defined success behaviors (i.e., job-specific competencies)
- Focusing on 'hard-to-learn' attributes and 'hit-the-ground-running' management and/or technical skills (vs. a complete range of technical skills)
- Using the 80-20 rule (e.g., interview for the ability to perform a **few** behaviors consistently)
- Using a common tool and process (to ensure cross-interviewer consistency)
- Asking mostly open-ended questions, followed by listening and encouraging (vs. talking and telling)
- Gathering evidence about performance from real 'success stories' (not from opinion or hearsay)
- Determining what an applicant **actually did** personally to achieve success (vs. what they think should be done, etc.)

Interview Structure and Format

In order to maximize the ability of an evaluator to discern the characteristics of best performers in a short time, the interview must be both simple to administer and specific in focus. To achieve

these goals, the interview itself should be structured so that dimensions are rated on a rating form and then a total score is generated by adding the separate dimension scores.

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The most common areas interviewees should be assessed against include:

- Target behaviors such as leadership and additional job or role-specific success criteria.
- Requisite technical skills (including experience and contribution to real 'business' related situations).
- Recruiter impressions (including an evaluation of learning capacity, fit with the company's culture and general interviewee presence)

A hiring and selection tool should outline behaviors critical for core competencies and leadership levels. Use selected open-ended questions to elicit evidence about the behavioral targets that accompany each competency area. These tools, however, are only a starting point and should be tailored to the job, your interviewing style, and the overall needs for your group (if multiple interviewers are involved).

Interview Process

In order to complete an effective behaviorally-anchored interview, the interviewer must be able to explain the purpose of the interview succinctly and then efficiently move applicants through a series of focused questions. In general, the breakdown of the interview includes the steps outlined in Figure 2.

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Figure 2: Hiring and Selection Interview Steps

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1. Establish Rapport	
Why?	Candidates are less defensive and disclose more when they trust the interviewer; establishing rapport demonstrates respect.
How?	Introduce yourself; provide a personal touch by sharing opinions/feelings; encourage candidate by creating a calm, quiet setting and by skillful listening
2. Introduce Interview Purpose and Scope	
Why?	Setting expectations results in better interview satisfaction and better focus on interview goals by candidates.
How?	Tell candidates the length, goals, and process of the interview; ask candidates if they have questions or concerns.
3. Conduct General Discussion of Applicant’s Wishes/Strengths	
Why?	Asking about candidate’s job desires and his/her strengths helps increase comfort level and gets him/her talking; this step demonstrates interest.
How?	Ask candidates to spend a few minutes telling you what they want in a job and what unique attributes they bring.
4. Probe for Experiences that Elicit ‘Target Success Factors’	
Why?	Probing for ‘stories’ is the best way to find out what someone actually does (and is capable of doing); eliciting objective evidence about behaviors is the best way to determine if someone can perform the behaviors most critical for success.
How?	Start by asking the candidate to tell you a story about a recent challenge or success; then use a series of probe questions to focus on the most significant part of the story and what he/she actually did.
5. Conduct Discussion of General Work Experience (If Not Previously Covered)	
Why?	Criteria other than competency behaviors can help discriminate which candidates will be most successful (e.g., technical skills/background).
How?	Ask probe questions about targeted criteria.
6. Summarize the Interview and Explain Next Steps	
Why?	Providing closure makes the interview process more satisfying; summarizing clarifies interviewer’s thoughts and candidate’s expectations.
How?	Provide positive feedback about candidate’s participation; tell candidate what to expect next (e.g., other interviews, next contact, etc.).
7. Rate Applicant and Compare Findings	
Why?	Capturing evidence immediately increases accuracy of evaluation; immediate rating increases inter-rater reliability.
How?	Fill in the hiring and selection tool, noting whether candidate exhibited evidence of success factors and other job criteria, and rating your impressions of candidate to arrive at overall rating.

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The interviewer should tell applicants that because of the time constraints, they will be asked a series of probe questions, some before being allowed to provide all the evidence related to a particular area

of questioning to make the probing process more effective. Interviewers should use the strategies in Figure 3 to ensure that behavior evidence is elicited.

Figure 3: Probing Strategies - 6 Key Steps

- Pre-select and customize questions for competencies you are assessing.
- Start the probing process with a general, open-ended question (e.g., what have you done to help your team be most effective?)
- Narrow the area of inquiry by using questions focusing on the most significant data (e.g., Can you tell me what made the biggest impact? What was the most important part of the story?)
- Ensure that you are surfacing high quality data by maintaining focus on the following kind of evidence:
 - Demonstrated behavior
 - Attributable to the person
 - Producing excellent performance (i.e., it has a significant impact)
- Ensure that the interviewee has been given a fair chance to describe behavioral evidence by:
- Explaining that you are looking for a full description of what made him/her successful.
- Persisting in your exploration of an event until little or no more data emerges.
- Correct for possible contextual or environmental factors by asking about barriers to performance or what the individual wished they had done differently to make more impact (and exactly how they could have acted differently).

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Summary

A hiring and selection tool (see Figure 4) is an aid that helps interviewers focus on key success criteria, compare findings with others more effectively, and develop more rigor in evaluating and 'scoring' candidates. To be effective, the tool must be supported by excellent skills in behaviorally-anchored interviewing. In addition, interviewers must be sensitive to various legal guidelines about the kind of data sought in interviews. The guiding principle is that specific information related to 'protected classes' of individuals or to 'personal activities or preferences' that are not related to specific job activities should not be directly questioned.

If the principles and practices outlined above are followed, you will have significantly higher levels of success in hiring and selection decisions. In addition, using these tools and processes provides an excellent opportunity to 'sell' the company's approach to performance excellence, including tools that candidates can use throughout their employment to maximize their own performance.

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Figure 4: Example of Hiring and Selection Interview Questions in Tool

<p>Customer Focus Responds to internal and external customer’s needs in a manner that provides added value and generates significant satisfaction.</p>		<p>Overall Rating: (N, 1-5)</p> <input style="width: 100px; height: 40px;" type="text"/>
<p>Planned Behavioral Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me about a time when you assessed the needs of another person or group, such as customers. (What did you do?) • Describe a situation in which you were involved when a product or service did not match someone’s needs. (What was the outcome?) • Working closely with others to adapt project, products and services to their requirements is very important for success in today’s business climate. When have you had to collaborate closely with someone to tailor or customize your approach? (What was the situation?) • Describe a situation when your level of knowledge or expertise about a particular product or service was key to helping someone. (e.g., partner, customer) • Tell me about a situation when you had to prioritize the needs of a particular person or group. • Tell me about a circumstance in which you had to repair a damaged relationship with someone. (What did you do?) • When have you been involved in a situation that made someone feel very satisfied? (What did you do?) • Surfacing perceptions is often critical for success. Tell me about a situation in which you probed to find out about a person or group’s issues and concerns. • Describe a circumstance in which you developed a close, trusting relationship with someone in order to get something done. (What was the situation? What did you do?) 		<p>Behaviors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates a sense of urgency when responding to market/customer needs. • Ensures that customer requirements are incorporated into day-to-day tasks and activities. • Develops strategies/tactics to anticipate and respond to customer’s key needs (internal and external).
<p>Situation/Task (enter description of situation and related tasks below)</p>	<p>Actions Observed (enter specific observable behaviors related to situation below)</p>	<p>Results or Impact (outline key outcomes related to actions below)</p>