

Interviewing Basics 101

Some of the most important business decisions you'll ever make revolve around the hiring of new employees. The employment interview continues to be a crucial part of the hiring process. In a short amount of time, not only do you try to learn the prospective employee's background, skills and experience, but also build a rapport to help them relax and open up. At the same time, the interview also must remain *legal*. Here are some suggestions designed to help create an atmosphere that encourages an open discussion, while staying within specified legal constraints.

General Suggestions

- Put the applicant at ease at the beginning of the interview. If they are comfortable, they are more likely to share information.
- Describe the job and what a "typical day" is like.
- Describe the work environment. Remember, while you are "shopping" for an employee, the applicant is trying to decide if your business would be a good place to work.
- Ask questions designed to create a discussion. Avoid questions requiring a yes or no answer.
- Keep questions open-ended so the applicant has the opportunity to speak freely.
- Only ask job-related questions.
- Let the applicant speak without interruptions. Remember, the purpose of an interview is to gather as much information as possible.
- Thank the applicant for their time and interest. Provide a time frame for a decision and explain how they will be notified.

Legal Constraints

Federal law regulates the type of questions that can be asked during an interview. Avoid questions relating either directly or indirectly to age, sex, race, color, national origin, religion, or disabilities. If you need information that could potentially infringe on any of these categories, make sure the question relates to a bona fide occupational qualification or is required to be asked by law.

You may not ask an applicant about their workers compensation history or if they have a disability. However, you may ask if anything precludes them from performing the *essential functions* of the job he/she is applying for. Always review these essential job functions with the applicant so they have the information necessary to make that determination.

If you remain uncertain whether a question violates federal or state legislation, do not ask the question and check with legal counsel.

Limit questions to the applicant's skills, experience, education, and professional goals and interests. Examples of acceptable and unacceptable interview questions include:

No How old are you?

Yes Are you over the age of 18?

No Have you ever filed a workers compensation claim?

You can't ask this question or any related question during the pre-offer stage.

No What disabilities do you have?

Yes Are you able to perform the essential functions of the job to which you are applying?

No When did you graduate from high school?

Yes What schools have you attended?

No Do you smoke?

Yes Our smoking policy is would you be able to adhere to it?

No What is your maiden name?

Yes Have you ever been known by another name?

The only reason you should ask this question is if you need to contact a former employer. An applicant may claim that you were trying to determine ethnic background and consequently didn't hire them because of it.

No Are you married? Do you have any children? What are your child care arrangements?

Questions about family status are not job-related and should not be asked.

No Do you have AIDS or are you HIV-positive?

There is no acceptable way to inquire about this or any other medical condition.

No What political party do you belong to?

Don't ask.

SO...what CAN you ask? Here are some suggestions, broken-down by category:

Work Experience

- Describe the work you do in your present/last job.
- Tell me about work experiences you feel have provided you with the appropriate background for this job.
- What did you like least/most about your last job?
- Describe a situation in your last job where you were able to reduce operating costs/increase profits.
- Tell me about a risky decision you've had to make. How did you weigh the risk? Who did you involve in the decision-making process? How did you gain acceptance?
- Describe a recent situation when you had to make a quick decision.

- What types of _____ equipment have you operated? Do you have any special proficiencies in operating this type of equipment?

Education

- Describe your educational background.
- What specific educational background or training has prepared you for this position?

Work Attitude and Ethic

- How do you measure job success?
- Describe a time when you've had conflicting priorities. How did you resolve the conflict?
- How do you feel about routine/detail work?
- Describe a time when your work was criticized. How did you feel and what did you do?
- What skills and abilities do you respect in a supervisor?
- If you believed a co-worker was violating a company policy, what would you do?
- Describe an especially hectic day on the job and tell me what you did to alleviate some of the confusion.
- What is the last task (project) you completed because it needed to be done, even if it wasn't your responsibility? What motivated you to do it?

Ability to Work Well With Others

- Describe a time when you became angry with a co-worker. What did you do to help resolve the problem?
- Tell me about a time when an upper level decision delayed your work. What did you do?
- If a co-worker or supervisor presented one of your ideas to the company owner as his/her own, what would you do?
- Tell me about the last time you successfully handled a dissatisfied, unhappy customer.
- Give me an example of your willingness to help a co-worker on the job.

Self-Evaluation

- What are your short/long range employment objectives?
- Why did you leave your previous job(s)?
- What would be your greatest contribution to this company?
- What are your strengths/weaknesses as they relate to this job?

Other

- Are you able to work overtime?
- How many days of work did you miss last year?
- What salary do you expect?
- When are you available for work?