# INTERVIEWING GUIDE

Interview as if your bottom line depends on it

# Introduction

Unless you have a human resources background, it is likely that those who do most of the interviewing in your company have little or no training on this subject. Interviewing is not typically discussed in business degree programs and is rarely taught before someone has to make their first hire. This implies interviewing is an innate talent, or simply not important. Both messages are wrong.

There are many books on the subject of interviewing, and for good reason. Hiring errors cost seven to nine weeks of pay for an entry-level person, about a year's salary for a professional person, and several years' salary for senior executives and specialized professionals. We do not present the following pages as a complete answer to the subject of interviewing but offer it as a place to begin. You must define and implement an appropriate interview process to generate the right outcome every time. Use this document as a design template or to test your current system.

This booklet is designed to provide specific interview tips based on STM's Behavior, Motivation, and Competency assessments. This should aid you in screening out a greater percentage of poor candidates and reducing the number of candidates you have to assess to find the best possible employee for the unique needs of your company. Even if you are not familiar with or don't use STM's assessments, this guide can help you interview to key behaviors, motivators, attitudes, capacities, energy, and drive.

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# Interview Types

There are three basic types of interviews—**Initial Vetting**, **Screening** and **Exploration**.This material summarizes information we have accumulated over the  years about interviewing and links your interview to STM's assessments that many of our clients use to select their final candidates. What we present here can allow you to interview to the assessments and make better choices in selecting finalists and investing in hiring assessments with STM.

For most candidates you will review a résumé and cover letter to determine if the candidate meets your basic knowledge and experience requirements.

**Initial Vetting** is typically done via telephone or a virtual meeting platform and is your opportunity to decide if the individual is a viable candidate and worth the time and attention of you and your team. This is the nuts and bolts of whether they meet the basic requirements of the position.

The **Screening Interview** is used to determine if the candidate should be seriously considered for employment. You are going beyond the aptitude issues to confirm that the candidate meets your requirements for *attitude and fit*.

The **Exploration Interview** is used with the candidate to explore specific issues raised by earlier interviews and assessments. There may be a series of Exploration Interviews until you are sure you know everything you need to know about the candidate and are convinced he or she will be a *great employee*.

The objective is not simply to fill a position or select the best person from the applicant pool; the objective is to select exactly the right person to fill the right seat in your organization. A perfectly acceptable outcome is that you go through the interview and assessment process only to conclude that none of the applicants are suitable. While that can be frustrating and time consuming, it is far better to find out before you hire the person that they cannot perform to your expectations. Hiring the wrong person is far more costly in the long run.

# Initial Vetting

There are two rules of thumb for any interview to screen out poor and mediocre candidates:

- Do not give the benefit of the doubt.
- Do not leave the interview with unanswered questions.

Before you pick up the phone and call the candidate, do the written documents received from the candidate meet your expectations? There are specific tips for this stage in our booklet, *The Hiring Process*, but the basic rule, do not give the benefit of the doubt, means checking for:

**Good Signs**

- All requested information was submitted
- Relevant education and experience
- Ever increasing responsibilities
- Consistent career focus

**Bad Signs**

- Spelling, grammar, and formatting errors
- Significant turnover or "job hopping"
- Significant gaps in their employment history
- Missing information (cover letter, dates, etc.)

If you do not like what you see here, the chances are that it is not going to get any better. Stop now and save yourself time, money, and frustration!

If the candidate meets your expectations to this point, schedule a 30-minute phone or video appointment to screen for the non-tangibles such as behavior, motivation, attitude, and fit. We have provided an outline of the questions we use ourselves in Appendix 1 at the end of this document.

# The Screening Interview

The following sections address the **Screening Interview** with each of STM's assessments in mind. This generates more useful information and may help you eliminate candidates before you invest in formal assessments.

The entire interview process is predicated on the fact you know what you are looking for. If you do not have a clear benchmark, it's important to put some thought into what you really need in the role. Breaking the list down into must-haves, should-haves, and nice-to-haves is a good way to get organized and set priorities.

STM assessments are valuable in that they can tell us if the candidate meets or exceeds your benchmark or expectations. The traditional hiring dilemma was that even if we knew what we were looking for, we simply did not have reliable tools to determine if the candidate met the standard. Now we do. But even if not using STM assessments, using these concepts can be very helpful in sharpening your interviewing skills and making better decisions.

# How the Assessments are Related
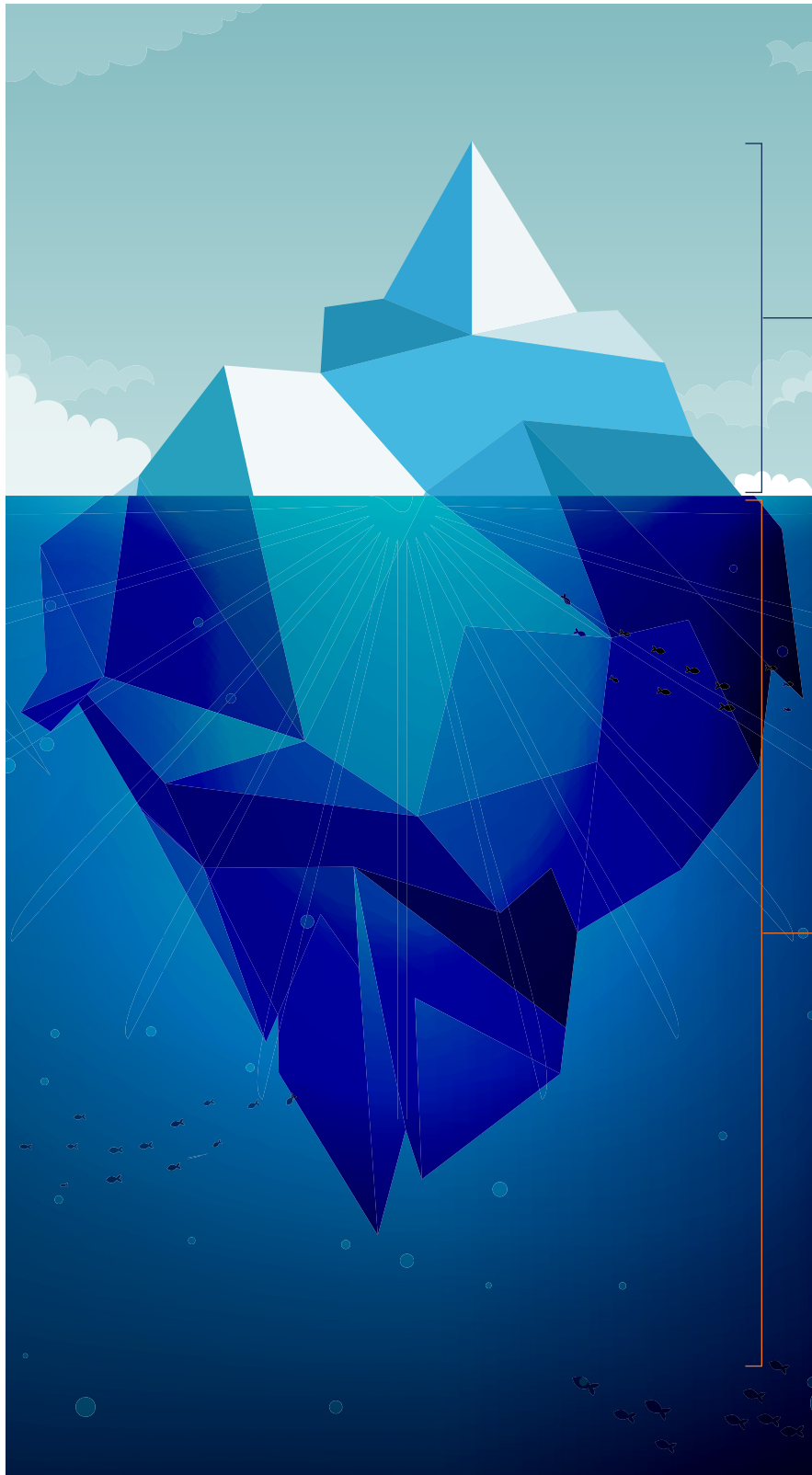
## Behaviors

*How one is perceived to perform (Communication Style)*
Behaviors are visible and observable. They are not about us as much as how we are perceived by others. We are judged by how we communicate and interact with others.

## Motivators

*Why one performs*
Motivators shape Behaviors. They show how we determine the importance of people and things around us and what spurs us to action.

## Competencies

*Will one perform? (Capacity, Attitudes, Energy and Drive)*
Competency shapes both our Behaviors and Motivators. It informs how we think about the world around us and ourselves. Competency includes attitudes, beliefs, energy and drive.

## Attributes

*Predict performance (Common Business Success Factors)*
Attributes are specific factors common in business and organizational life that speak to our predicted performance.

# Behaviors

Interpersonal behavior is the first thing we notice about anyone we meet. We tend to make a judgment in about ten seconds that this person is like me or not which translates into, *I like them or not*. This is how most interviews proceed—the entire judgment about the candidate is based on whether or not we like them! Behavior, however, is about 50-60% accurate in predicting success in a position. Behavioral assessments, whether formal or simply your observations, are far more effective in determining how someone will interact with managers, colleagues, clients, and vendors than in predicting how they will perform. That being said, it is important to evaluate behavior in an objective fashion in order to establish fit within a team, communication style, and how they build relationships with people. At another level, behavior can tell you something about stress which may indicate underlying problems.

**By example:** If you are hiring someone to sell to a hard-nosed, business-oriented client who is frequently blunt and occasionally even rude, you need to hire an assertive, direct, and equally hard-nosed salesperson. The client's impression of a quiet and reserved salesperson will likely be negative, and the new salesperson may well be intimidated by this client. No matter how talented the salesperson, this relationship is doomed to fail. If your client base is broad and includes all sorts of different people, you may want to hire a salesperson who is flexible, customer oriented, and has outstanding interpersonal skills.

Any question at all can yield behavior information. You need not have a specific set of questions in order to screen for behavior. Your feelings and reactions to the person are important as you are attempting to determine if the person can work with you and your team, but we want to be sure to take you beyond your feelings. Key things to listen for during this segment of the interview:

- **Pace:** How fast do they speak? Do they dominate the conversation? Do they interrupt? Is it difficult to get them to open up?

- **Tone:** Are they quiet or loud? Are they deferential and diplomatic? Are they blunt and plain?

- **Focus:** Are they people or task oriented? What do they mention first?

- **Emotion:** Are they controlled or driven? Do they wear their feelings on their sleeve? Are they reserved and careful with their answers?

**TIP 1**

70% of communication is not about what we say, but rather how we say it. Pay careful attention to body language and tone.

Behavior is relatively easy to determine and you have been doing it all your life. Behavior is, by definition, observable and will reveal itself during an interview. Here are some tips about interviewing for behavior. Note the shorthand notation in capital letters:

| D: Dominance | ◢ Loud, fast, dominates the conversation<br>◢ Blunt and to the point<br>◢ Decisive, may exhibit anger or impatience<br>**TASK FOCUSED AND EXTROVERTED** |
|---|---|
| I: Influence | ◢ Friendly, humorous, dominates the conversation<br>◢ Optimistic and people oriented<br>◢ Open and enthusiastic<br>**PEOPLE FOCUSED AND EXTROVERTED** |
| S: Steadiness | ◢ Quiet, relaxed, and friendly<br>◢ Team oriented and not emotional<br>◢ Prefers that things stay the same<br>**PEOPLE FOCUSED AND INTROVERTED** |
| C: Compliance | ◢ Quiet, diplomatic, accurate, and precise<br>◢ Clean, neat, and detail oriented<br>◢ Risk averse, safety conscious<br>**TASK FOCUSED AND INTROVERTED** |

# Motivators

The single most important factor for determining suitability to fill a position is the candidate's motivational profile. Each position and each organization will motivate its employees in a certain way and if the candidate is likewise motivated, she will be comfortable and have the capacity to be successful in the position. Happy employees make good employees. If you are looking for a manager to develop a promising team of entry level people, you will need to hire someone who values mentoring and sharing what they know with others. A candidate with years of experience and demonstrated success in a wide range of areas, but who is not motivated to teach, mentor, or help others will be disengaged and fail to meet your expectations.

Motivation is by definition an internal and intangible quality. How can you interview for this? Think about areas of your life where your motivation is most evident. Is at work or at play? In other words, is what motivates you more evident in your *vocation or avocation*? Your motivation is revealed most clearly by what you do in your free time or as a hobby.

A caveat before we continue. Motivation is NOT associated with Behavior. Consider this exchange:

> ### What do you like to do when you have free time?
> I am a voracious reader. I read all the time.
>
> ### What have you been reading recently?
> I read historical romance novels and mysteries.
>
> ### What else do you like to do when you have the time?
> I love taking clasees and learning new things. I am enrolled in night school

The benchmark for the position is someone who is motivated by learning and studying new things. Is this person motivated to learn? The correct answer is *I have no idea!* Reading a book or taking a class are *behaviors* and can be driven by any number of *motivators*. You need to know *why* they are taking a class or reading the book. To get beyond the mere behavioral elements in the above exchange you must dig a bit deeper. In this exchange we see the candidate has no particular interest in learning:

> ### What do you like to do when you have the free time?
> I am a voracious reader. I read all the time.
>
> ### What are you reading right now?
> I have not had the time recently to read anything but school texts, I am enrolled in night school.
>
> ### What was the last book you read before you enrolled in school?

## TIP 2

Understanding your candidate's values and what motivates them is the key to determining if they're a good fit for your team.

I love reading science fiction. I read Asimov's Foundation Trilogy two summers ago.

### *What are you taking in school?*
Business courses.

### *Sounds like it keeps you busy, why are you taking business courses?*
I have been in the same position for four years and my employer tells me that with a degree I can become a manager and will get a substantial raise.

There is nothing wrong with wanting a raise, but what this exchange reveals is that the candidate is not motivated to learn and most likely motivated to make money and or get ahead. If you really need a learner in this position, this candidate may not be the right choice.

The following paragraphs provide tips for recognizing and interviewing for particular motivation, but you always have to push a bit harder to uncover whether the hobby or activity is truly indicative of the motivation. Some behaviors, such as reading, are suggestive of multiple motivators but there are subtle differences you can look for.

## Knowledge & Discovery

**How to spot it:**

- Reads trade journals, current events, biographies, history, non-fiction
- Takes classes, seminars, education opportunities
- Teaches, coaches, mentors others

**LEARNING AND EDUCATION FOCUSED**

Reading, taking classes, and teaching are all behaviors that may or may not have anything to do with an underlying value or motivation. You want to know what they read, how often they take classes, and what they do with the information they gain.

**How to interview for it:**

- Which is more important, action or knowledge?
- Would you consider yourself to be an expert in something? What is it? How did you go about gaining that knowledge?
- Tell me about what you especially enjoy about learning things. What topics or subjects do you enjoy?
- How comfortable are you in taking the time, energy, and effort required to master a subject or topic you currently know very little about? How about one in which you have very little interest?

**Watch for:** *Analysis Paralysis*

People who overemphasize Knowledge & Discovery will likely struggle with making decisions because they always need more data or information before they can take action.

# Return on Investment (ROI)

**How to spot it:**

- Few (if any) true hobbies
- Most activities directly related to making more money
- Spends long hours at work; a "workaholic"

**VALUE AND MONEY FOCUSED**

Most organizations want to hire or promote people into business positions who appreciate the practical realities of making a profit and/or making the most of available resources.

**How to interview for it:**

- How important is earning a lot of money to you? What do you consider to be a "lot of money"?
- Where would you like to be, financially, in 5 years? 10 years? Why?
- What role does earning a significant income play in your job choices? In staying in a job?
- Would you consider yourself to be a bottom line, practical thinker or are you more theoretical or philosophical? Why do you say that?
- Use situational questions to understand how they balance, for example, doing a little extra for a client versus staying strictly on budget.

**Watch for:** *Short-term thinking*

An over focus on ROI can lead to short term thinking. In most cases, you want someone who can appreciate and embrace long-term strategic plans rather than someone who will make rash decisions in order to make a buck *today.*

# Leadership

**How to spot it:**

- Competitive sports, showy possessions and activities
- Politics, leadership positions on volunteer boards
- Hobbies that involve leading others or self to win or stand out in some way

**POLITICAL CONTROL AND RECOGNITION**

This is *not* a measure of capacity or competency as a leader or manager. Rather it is a measure of one's desire for command and control. It could be a significant factor if the position you are hiring for has few opportunities to be in charge of anything.

**How to interview for it:**

- What role does being in control of a situation play in your job satisfaction? How important is it for you to control your own destiny?

- How important is independence to you? Power? Influencing others? What would be your level of satisfaction with a job if you had none of these?

- How good are you in taking directions from others? How much do you like doing so?

- How do you go about influencing others to act? Give me a concrete, real-world example of a time when you were able to move a group of people to action and exactly how you did it.

**Watch for:** *An over focus on self-promotion or being a "control freak"*

People who are absolutely passionate about being in control will be willing to do whatever it takes to maintain it.

# Aesthetics

**How to spot it:**

- Painter, musician, or craft-related hobbies

- Interest in languages including computer languages, culture, or mathematics

- Nature, travel, non-competitive sports, and self-improvement activities

**CREATIVE AND SYSTEMS FOCUSED**

Aesthetics is more than art and beauty; it is a measure of order and systems thinking. This can be valuable in a graphic designer or copywriter, for example, or in any position in which innovation and out-of-the box thinking are expected and appreciated.

**How to interview for it:**

- How would you rank the importance of creativity and self-expression in your work?

- How do you personally express your unique creative side?

- What is the most innovative idea you've ever had? Were you able to implement it? If so, what were the results?

- What would you say you are most sensitive to in your work environment and/or in general?

**Watch for:** *Impracticality*

Aethetics is often the opposite of ROI which is rooted solely in practical results. An over emphasis on Aethetics can result in getting so wrapped up in the big creative ideas that nothing ever gets implemented in a practical sense.

# Helping Others

**How to spot it:**

- Regular or long-term volunteer service
- Teaching, coaching, mentoring, or simply being with others
- Active in social issues that are other-focused

**HELPFUL AND FOCUSED ON OTHERS**

This is clearly a positive motivator in any support role like an executive assistant or in a leadership position such as a non-profit administrator, and a moderate Helping Others motivation can take the edge off a purely business-orient approach. If this is strong and Knowledge & Discovery is also strong, your candidate will likely have the capacity to excel in a teaching or coaching role.

**How to interview for it:**

- Is there ever such a thing as "too much" service? Explain your answer to me, please.
- Is there ever a point when employees should stand up and tell their manager that they are being mistreated? Give me an example of a circumstance where that might be the case.
- Tell me how you would service an account that kept having problems with your product yet showed no promise of future business.
- What would you do if an employee was missing lots of time due to a family crisis? How would you handle it? At what point would you take corrective action? What would that action be?

**Watch for:** *Takes everything personally*

People with an over focus in this area not only want to be kind and helpful to others, they expect everyone to be that way in return. They can be deeply wounded by anything they perceive as a slight or as criticism.

# Guiding Principles

**How to spot it:**

- Religion or other strongly held beliefs

- Activities and interests related to history and the past

- Deep commitment to activities related to family, community, and tradition

**PRINCIPLE AND BELIEF FOCUSED**

People strongly motivated by Guiding Principles want to do the "right" thing in the "right" way and can be narrowly focused on a few specific values or beliefs. This is attractive in fiduciary roles like accounting and auditing as well as in positions that require doing right by others, such as customer service.

**How to interview for it:**

- Is there an absolute right and absolute wrong?

- How do you decide what is right and what is wrong?

- Tell me about "rules". Give me an example of a rule that you follow relative to managing or leading others. Where did you learn that rule? How flexible is it?

- Have there been situations in your work experience when you were absolutely convinced that your rules or standards were superior to your employer's? If so, why were they better? Were you able to convince your employees that yours were better?

**Watch for:** *Inflexibility*

An over focus in this area can translate into someone being so passionate about their beliefs or their version of what is "right", that they can be very rigid and inflexible – even to the point of being impatient with or disdainful of others who do not share or support their beliefs.

# Peace & Harmony

**How to spot it:**

- Meditation, massage, or other physical/spiritual methods to seek balance

- Interest in eastern cultures or methodologies

- Interested in organizations and tools that promote peace and unite others

**BALANCE AND TRANQUILITY FOCUSED**

People who are strong in this area will not rock the boat and are good peacemakers. Posing situations that involve conflict between people and asking how they would resolve them is a good way to get clues in this area. Can they use conflict as a tool, or do they totally avoid it? In a situation with a poorly performing team member, will they put up with it or resolve it?

**How to interview for it:**

- Do you often find yourself taking on the role as the peacekeeper in a group or on a team?

- How do you feel about the importance of having a balanced work/life?

- Do you prefer to avoid conflict situations or face them head on?

- As a reward for good performance, would you prefer to be given paid time off or no time off, but you get a bonus check?

**Watch for:** *Absolute conflict avoidance*

Someone with an over emphasis in this area will be paralyzed by anything that feels like conflict. They will not hold others accountable or confront poor performance or bad behavior.

# Competency Assessments

This is the most challenging profile to determine by interview, but the most important. This assessment is the differentiator. If your candidate appears to have the right behaviors and the desired motivators for the position, you need to determine their attitudes, thinking process, and energy levels to make an accurate final decision. There are 6 Dimensions to consider:

## EXTERNAL FACTORS

Determine attitudes, capacities, and work/leadership style.

- Empathy for Others
- Practical Thinking & Execution
- Strategy, Planning, & Organization

Knowing if someone has the potential to be a fit the position and your culture are critical, but we really need to know if these will be directed in a useful way. It not only about whether they can perform, but will they perform and meet your expectations. There are few natural rock stars out there, but many people are very capable of being highly successful with a bit of development or coaching. Understanding if the person is coachable and in what areas they would benefit from those efforts is important.

**TIP 3**

Look for clues about the candidate's attitudes about people, production, planning, and procedures.

## Empathy for Others

Empathy is a foundational attitude that determines one's capacity to understand and value other people. Empathetic people intuitively understand the importance of their team members, vendors, customers, and others as individuals. This is key to listening, forming relationships, and communication.

- **High:** Anxious to please others; cannot say "no"
- **Medium:** Healthy respect for others but able to keep some distance as appropriate
- **Low:** Does not read people well; likely to hurt or offend others without realizing it

A great test for this is talking to your receptionist and others about how the candidate treated them. Also watch for inappropriate jokes and comments. A low-empathy person simply does not realize their comments are offensive because they cannot read other's body language or subtle messages. This is especially difficult in a leader as people will feel the lack of respect and caring. Use questions about handling delicate personnel matters. The key separation

you must make is the candidate's level of empathy and their ability to distance themselves from other's problems. Most every business position benefits from strong empathy, but stops short of "people pleaser."

**How to interview for it:**

- Describe a time when you had to deal with a particularly difficult situation with a colleague or customer. How did you handle it?

- Describe your favorite supervisor and your least favorite. What distinguished the two?

- Have you ever had to set aside your own priorities for the good of the team?

## Practical Thinking & Execution

Empathy is important, but all levels of employees must also be effective at managing projects, goals, and objectives to achieve results. Execution is about understanding the mechanics of leading a team, doing a project, and anticipating obstacles.

- **High:** Enjoys projects and handling the details; may be a poor delegator

- **Medium:** Very good with projects and details but understands that things happen even with the best laid plans, and is able to adjust accordingly

- **Low:** Careless with details; cannot see how projects flow from A to Z

Have the candidate walk you through the process of planning and executing a project. The ease and thoroughness with which they do this is a good indicator of high Practical Thinking. Quiz them about how they handle problems, unexpected events, and changes. A good planner has considered all the possibilities and is capable of rethinking the plan on the fly. Strong scores here suggest mastery of the details and great social skills. The latter point is critical—they master projects and details and people relationships the same way; they know them inside out and can get to a desirable outcome. Now your challenge is to separate a person with outstanding social skill from a manipulator. This is a fine line sometimes, and the answer may come from the next factor.

**How to interview for it:**

- On a complex project, what tools do you use to keep yourself organized?

- How do you get started with a complex project? [For a leader:] How do you get your team organized for a complex project?

- How do you handle interruptions and unexpected problems?

# Strategy, Planning, & Organization

An effective employee at any level needs to understand the power of planning and organization to move with the organization to accomplish goals. Leaders need this strategic perspective to run the business and set clear expectations. Your workers should appreciate the need for rules, procedures, and guidelines…with exceptions.

- **High:** Control and rule oriented; tends to "tell not sell"; dependent on procedures or direction from others

- **Medium:** Knows what is required and how to communicate it to others; flexible and good delegators

- **Low:** Rebellious of authority and weak communicator; does not like to manage or be managed

Explore if the candidate understands and appreciates plans and strategy. Ask what is important to them – direction, values, outcomes, expectations. This will help you determine how to best manage the candidate and how they respond to rules, plans, and structure. If you pick up an overall negative tone, beware.

**How to interview for it:**

- Set up a hypothetical situation about following procedures versus getting something done. Where is the balance?

- If you were in charge of your last company, what changes would you make?

- How do you communicate expectations to employees?


# INTERNAL FACTORS

Determine ambition and energy and drive for performance.

- Themselves (Self-Esteem)

- Their Work (Role Engagement)

- The Future (Goal Orientation)

We are very interested in the candidate's answers to questions about the future, their work, and themselves as this tells us about their energy levels. You have to be cautious as sometimes these factors are low for reasons of a temporary nature like personal difficulties, a job layoff, or other serious yet short-term problems. But you must still keep in mind that their energy level will be low and they may not hit the ground running. Youth will do this also as a young person may not have great direction or role awareness for lack of knowledge or experience. Take into account the whole person.

## Themselves (Self-Esteem)

It is critical to get this one right and understand the difference between ego and self-confidence. Ego can be a deadly drag on energy and drive – too much and the individual feels they have nothing to learn; too little and a self-fulfilling prophecy guarantees failure. True self-confidence combined with the emotional intelligence of humility can be a powerful source for self-improvement and growth. You need to know that your candidate has an objective understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses.

- **High:** Highly self-satisfied; often refer to themselves rather than others
- **Medium:** Healthy confidence but is objective about their strengths and weaknesses; open and eager to improve
- **Low:** Depressed, negative, or overly focused on external matters

One of the classic energy drains is something we call the bureaucratic mindset. This person has a high opinion of themselves and sees no particular need to improve or even work hard. Signals abound but are most often confused with self-confidence. Self-confidence is a good thing; it means they present well and strongly. Being overly self-assured means the only thing important to them is them. They don't make errors or a mistakes and they show no interest in self-improvement. The best way to judge this factor is by listening to all their answers on other subjects. If it always comes back to them no matter the question, one has to assume that their self-esteem is through the roof. On the other hand, someone who is highly self-critical, depressed, or negative may be lacking the self-esteem to see their way forward, which will be a huge drain on their energy and ambition and translate into an overall attitude of "I can't".

**How to interview for it:**

- Tell me something about yourself that others may be surprised to know about you.
- If there was something in your past you were able to go back and do differently, what would that be?
- When we contact your last supervisor and ask which area of your work needs the most improvement, what will we learn?

> **TIP 4**
>
> Energy comes from within. No specific goals, direction, desires, or dreams? No energy.

## Their Work (Role Engagement)

Simply put, someone who both understands their role and loves what they do has a high level of energy and drive for performance. It can be in short supply today as many external factors can dampen engagement, so this can be tricky to get right.

- **High:** Loves what they are doing; hardworking and highly engaged
- **Medium:** They are satisfied with what they are doing, but see room for improvement

**Low:** Negative and unhappy about what they do and do not see things getting better

Listen closely to the candidate's attitude about projects and work. How much do they like their work today? Do they talk about projects and opportunities with a rising tone and excitement in their voice or do they, as one client reported, yawn every time you ask about their work, favorite projects, or the people they work with? Strong, clear, and rapid-fire responses suggest that the individual has high role awareness and engagement.

**How to interview for it:**

- What is the favorite thing you do in the course of your day?
- What would you like to be doing in an ideal world?
- How do you like to be managed?

# The Future (Goal Orientation)

Clear and precise goals keep one focused on the ultimate objective. They are in one's head, heart, and soul, are largely insulated from external events, and are a reliable indicator of performance. This is the most important factor in determining if the candidate will perform to a high standard.

- **High:** Super clear about where they are going, but may be to the extreme of "marching to their own drummer"; has high energy and enthusiasm about their direction
- **Medium:** Reasonably clear about how to move forward and optimistic about the future; solid energy
- **Low:** Negative and completely disconnected from the future; ineffective communicator of their goals and aspirations

Specific, clear, and rapid answers to these questions suggest the person has a clear vision of the future and they have had it for some time. When we say that someone is not clear about the future, they may literally tell you "I don't know" in answer to your question, BUT if they are socially adept and good verbally, such as someone with a high Influencer behavior style, they can think on their feet and talk for hours at the drop of a hat. To repeat: You want specific, clear answers, not general sentiments.

**How to interview for it:**

- What would you want to accomplish in your first year with us? How about the first two or three years?
- What are your ultimate career goals and how does this position fit in with your plan to reach those goals?
- What is the most ambitious plan or goal that you have for yourself? What stands in your way of reaching it?

# The Exploration Interview

The purpose of the exploration interview is to establish the significance of issues raised by any résumé reviews, Initial Vetting, Screening Interviews, assessments, reference checks, and so on. Perhaps the candidate understands their deficiency in one area and has taken steps to modify their behavior over the years, thereby blunting its significance. Conversely, perhaps the candidate is unaware of their behaviors and the impact on those around them, which would exacerbate the urgency of the problem. Most candidates have some unattractive qualities, and the question comes down to this: *Are you aware of the significance of the issues? Can you live with them or are you willing to take the management time and effort to resolve them?*

Formulate hypothetical scenarios about typical events in your organization and develop a series of questions around each scenario. The questions should be designed to reveal the candidate's thinking about the situation without coming right out and asking a yes/no question about that situation. Each question should be asked without elaboration and with an open-ended invitation for the candidate to respond. Each successive question around the same hypothetical scenario should build the stress level and provide additional insight as to the candidate's true feelings on the matter. Listen carefully.

Do not be surprised when you get the right answer to a hypothetical question. As you follow up with an escalator question and add a level of stress, watch the candidate's body language and non-verbal response. Be prepared for more revealing answers as you stay with this escalation technique for at least three iterations. Pay as much attention to the words spoken as to body language, tone of voice, humorous comments, and unguarded moments. To this last point, we remind you about the TV detective "Columbo." Peter Falk would solve his cases by asking the key question as he was getting up to leave, or while chit-chatting with the suspect, rather than in his formal interrogation.

Humor is an issue worth a few additional comments. People often use humor to convey ideas they feel cannot be said directly. An off-hand response that "I would fire the guy!" (said with a big grin of course) could translate into, "I'm serious, I would fire the guy." But perhaps the candidate is not comfortable just saying so. Humor can also be used as a defense, "What would you do, leave me hanging out to dry on that one?" (said with a big grin, again) means that they are detecting a difference of opinion here and want to know where you stand.

**Let's go through an example:**

Your observations from earlier interviews or results from a formal assessment suggests that the individual sticks to their ideas dogmatically and will not change their approach with people or their job under any circumstances. This is a customer service manager candidate. The good thing in this style is that the candidate will not "give away the store", but on the other hand it could be

**TIP 5**

Hiring issues become management issues as soon as your candidate comes on board. Tread carefully.

**TIP 6**

Successful interviewers take only 10% of the airtime. Allow the candidate the other 90%.

a problem if the candidate never bends the rules in order to resolve issues for unhappy customers. The object of the Exploration Interview is you need to establish just how flexible or inflexible the individual will be.

**Develop a scenario:**

A very unhappy customer is on the phone demanding redress for the problems experienced with your product. Ask the candidate, how would you handle that individual? Expect a conventional and correct answer and encourage the candidate to keep talking.

**Escalator Question #1:**

*In the course of the complaint you understand the customer has had two replacement products installed over the past three months and your technician is still not able to make it work properly. How would you handle this?* Because you have added a bit of stress, you may get a more interesting answer, but still, a savvy candidate knows that he cannot just give away the store or shut down a complaining customer, so expect another "right" answer.

**Escalator Question #2 assumes the candidate has given in to the customer:**

*You would refund the money without investigation or talking to the field technician? Wouldn't that get expensive? These are $25,000 units!* Conversely, assume the candidate has refused to give in to the customer. *The customer is really angry now and wants to talk to the CEO. Is that the result you want?* As you escalate the stress factors you will get a more accurate picture where the line between flexibility and inflexibility lies in order to make an accurate hiring decision.

**TIP 7**

When you think you have your answer, ask two more questions to be sure.

**Escalator Question #3:**

We recommend three questions only to fully explore the subject. You are watching the candidate to see that they remain calm, have confidence in their approach and are well aware of the various boundaries in the situation. If you need another question or two to be certain, a good way to keep them talking is to introduce a twist based on their response, as in the previous example.

Again, the words are less important than body language. Crossed arms suggest defensiveness or discomfort. Shifting in one's seat is the same. Slouched back in the chair with hands behind the head suggests ease and comfort or perhaps over familiarity or a devil may care attitude. Behaviors are predicted by your observations and/or the assessments, and so if someone is flagged as introverted and quiet, do not hold it against them that they were quiet and soft spoken in the interview. If that style will not work with your clients, then you should not be interviewing them in the first place. Conversely, the glad-handing, broad smiling, talkative candidate is will likely exhibiting their natural behavior. Whatever the behavior, look at the body language in context of your culture and the specific position you have in mind. If you do not get your questions answered, have someone else conduct an Exploration Interview on those points or plan a new line of questioning yourself.

# Review: The Interview Process

Interviewing is the most critical job in your company. Hire the wrong manager or president or carpenter and find out just how much damage can be caused by one uncaring, disloyal, or accident-prone employee. Following is a basic interviewing model.

### STAGE 1: The First Date

Each stage leading to the final interview is designed to screen out applicants who clearly do not measure up and avoid investing your valuable resources in the wrong people. The first thing you need to do is scan the resume for the minimum requirements for the position. If the candidate passes this lowest level of screening, phone him or her for a 30-minute Vetting Interview. The purpose of the interview is to *scan the person for the minimum behavior, motivation, attitude and fit requirements for the position.*

For this phone or virtual interview have one or two scenarios prepared that are most indicative of what is required in the position. Prepare questions concerning issues with the résumé—gaps, frequent job changes, lack of training and so on. Have another couple of questions ready about basic requirements such as relocation, travel, pay, etc. If the applicant fails the "first date" scan, thank them and hang up the phone fast. If not, invite them to participate in the next stage of the interview process.

### STAGE 2: The First Kiss

*The next steps depend on you knowing exactly what you are looking for because you have well defined expectations and a clear benchmark for this position.* In addition to the hard answers you are looking for, judge their BEHAVIOR, MOTIVATIONS, and COMPETENCIES as outlined in the Screening Interview section of this booklet.

- They confirm that the candidate is right for this position, and
- Provide a wealth of material from which to plan and prepare Exploration Interviews.

It is important to plan the interviews as conducting structured and thoughtful interviews is a time intensive and critical stage in the hiring process. You have gone to great lengths to avoid interviewing the obviously wrong candidate, and so it is quite likely the person before you is attractive in many ways. It is imperative that the interview, or more likely, the multiple interviews are well planned and carefully designed. The critical step is to develop a series of scenarios that will decisively validate or eliminate red flags raised in earlier conversations or by the assessments.

**TIP 8**

Our mother was right. Don't kiss on the first date.

**TIP 9**

Assess for all positions. A hiring mistake is costly no matter if it is the Receptionist or the CEO.

**STAGE 3: Meeting The Parents**

We encourage group interviews whenever possible. When you do that, each interviewer takes on a distinctly different set of issues and prepares to ask questions in that area. Others may ask clarifying questions on that topic, but the lead person will take notes, ask his/her prepared questions and be in charge of that segment. A typical format:

- **Interviewer 1:** Focus on technical capability, knowledge, and suitability for the role. Interviewer chosen for technical competence.

- **Interviewer 2:** Focus on management knowledge, skill, and suitability. Will this candidate get things done through our people, will she develop our people, and can she confront inappropriate employee behavior and poor results? Develop hypothetical situations you know will arise because they have come up before, or you anticipate certain conflicts among people or between this candidate and particular staff members. Interviewer chosen for competence as people manager.

- **Interviewer 3:** Focus on leadership knowledge, skill, and suitability. Will this candidate be the one to take us to the future, are they excellent communicators, and is their vision consistent with ours? Establish hypothetical scenarios based on where you see the company headed. Interviewer chosen for competence as leader.

- **Interviewer 4:** Focus on behavior, motivation, and attitudes suitable for the position. This person may largely be an observer to the interview. Validate the assessments and explore issues raised by the assessments. Interviewer chosen for their knowledge of behavior, motivation and attitudes as a success factor in hiring selection.

Immediately following the departure of the candidate (ideally), each interviewer reports back to the rest of the interviewers their notes, findings, and conclusions. The key is to make sure each interviewer heard the same thing. Score the candidate against pre-determined criteria.(see Appendix 2) to make apples-to-apples comparisons among candidates.

There may be multiple interviews. The more critical the position, the more people you will want to involve in the interview process. Supervisors and managers, teammates, colleagues from around the company, perhaps even key customers, vendors, or strategic partners. Given the possibility of many interviewers taking many different points of view, it is important to use a standard set of criteria to judge the applicants.

**TIP 10**

Don't be fooled by first impressions. Ask the tough questions and keep your eyes, ears, and mind open.

# Re-cap of the Ten Interview Tips:

**1:** 70% of communication is not about what we say, but rather how we say it. Pay careful attention to body language and tone.

**2:** Understanding your candidate's values and what motivates them is the key to determining if they're a good fit for your team.

**3:** Look for clues about the candidate's attitudes about people, production, planning, and procedures.

**4:** Energy comes from within. No specific goals, direction, desires, or dreams? No energy.

**5:** Hiring issues become management issues as soon as your candidate comes on board. Tread carefully.

**6:** Successful interviewers take only 10% of the airtime. Allow the candidate the other 90%.

**7:** When you think you have your answer, ask two more questions to be sure.

**8:** Your mother was right. Don't kiss on the first date.

**9:** Assess for all positions. A hiring mistake is costly no matter if it is the Receptionist or the CEO.

**10:** Don't be fooled by first impressions. Ask the tough questions and keep your eyes, ears, and mind open.

# Key Reminders

**Know yourself.** If you are highly optimistic and willing to help or please others, know that you will have trouble being objective about a candidate's flaws. This is an issue for most interviewers.

**Know exactly what you are looking for (and not looking for) in a candidate.** Assessments and interviews are only useful to the extent you are clear about your expectations, have a well-defined benchmark, and accurate Job Description.

**Do not yield the benefit of the doubt.** Chase down every contradictory statement, inconclusive answer, and outstanding question. Introduce stress into the interview process and be prepared to quantify and compare each candidate's predicted success in the position.

**Finally, plan for and be organized about each interview.**

# APPENDIX 1: Initial Vetting Guide

These are the questions we suggest (and use ourselves) to guide the initial vetting of a candidate.

**Let's start by having you walk me through your background.**

Ask additional position-specific follow-up questions as needed. Use this to screen for the technical background needed for the role.

**Why are you looking for a new position?**

Are the reasons they're leaving their current (or left their last) employer the same things they'll encounter on the job with you?

**What are some of the things you enjoy most about your work? What are some things you'd like to avoid in the next step of your career?**

Are the things they most enjoy missing from this role, or are the things they want to avoid key pieces of this role?

**What are you looking for in your next position? What does the ideal situation look like to you?**

Use this to get clues as to fit to the position and your culture.

**What in particular appealed to you when you read the ad for this position?**

You want a specific and meaningful answer. "I needed a new job." or "It is close to home." won't cut it.

**How do you think the people who have worked with you or for you would describe your leadership (or project management/work) style?**

Know what you're looking for and listen carefully for clues that this candidate has it. Will their style work for you?

**Thinking long term, what are your ultimate professional goals and how do you think this position fits in with your plan?**

Again, you want a specific and meaningful answer. Even if they're unclear about the ultimate goal, they should be able to articulate the next step or two.

**What do you like to do with your free time?**

Hobbies and pastimes can give you insight into values and motivators which can help determine fit for the position and your culture.

**What are your salary expectations?**

They should have some idea of what the market conditions and what they're worth. If they're wishy washy about it or ask for something significantly below market value, that could be a yellow flag about decision making or confidence.

**If you were to be selected for this position, what are your thoughts concerning your susceptibility to a counter-offer from your current employer?**

You want to be certain that they want this position and to work for you, not that they're using you to force a counter from their current employer.

**How does this job compare to others you are considering?**

This provides more clues as to what the candidate is looking for, but also gives you some idea about how focused they are in their job search. How do you stand up against the competition?

**What questions do you have for me?**

This can be an indicator of general curiosity and they should have specific and thoughtful questions about the role and/or the company that go beyond pay and benefits.

# APPENDIX 2: Candidate Interview Evaluation

Candidate's Name: _____ Date: _____

Position Interviewed for: _____

Interviewer: _____

**Scoring System:** 4 – Excellent   3 – Very Good   2 – Average   1 – Unsatisfactory

| CRITERIA | SCORE | COMMENTS |
|---|---|---|
| Education | | |
| Technical Qualifications | | |
| Experience | | |
| Curiosity / Fast Learner | | |
| Detail Management / Organization | | |
| Strategic Thinking | | |
| Communication / Listening Skills | | |
| Relationship / People Skills | | |
| Teamwork | | |
| Engagement | | |
| Enthusiasm / Attitude | | |
| Goal Achievement | | |
| Independent / Remote Work | | |
| Cultural Fit | | |
| Overall Evaluation | | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Education | Does the candidate possess appropriate knowledge, certifications, or training necessary for the position? |
| Technical Qualifications | Does the candidate possess the required technical skills to perform well in the position? |
| Experience | Does the candidate have the depth of experience relevant to this position? Have they demonstrated success in relevant situations over time? |
| Curiosity/Fast Learner | Have they made an effort in the past few months or few years to enhance their knowledge in their field of expertise or expand their knowledge in new areas? |
| Detail Management/Organization | Do they possess the ability organize themselves for large and complex projects? Do they employ effective tools or techniques?<br>For Leaders: Are they able to prepare their teams for large and complex projects? |
| Strategic Thinking | Critical for Leadership roles. Are they good at presenting or explaining complex ideas? Are they able to see "the forest for the trees?" |
| Communication/Listening Skills | Does the candidate demonstrate the ability to present their thoughts clearly and effectively? Are they equally good at listening to and understanding others? |
| Relationship/People Skills | Have they demonstrated an ability to resolve differences and turn around difficult situations? |
| Teamwork | Did the candidate demonstrate, through answers and overall demeanor, good teambuilding and interpersonal skills? |
| Engagement | Does the candidate demonstrate an interest in improving or growing in their role or industry? |
| Enthusiasm/Attitude | Did the candidate express enthusiasm for the position and a positive attitude throughout the interview? |
| Goal Achievement | Does the candidate have a clear and specific definition of their path to success? How do they show that they are a self-starter? |
| Independent/Remote Work | (Only relevant to remote workers and leaders) Have they demonstrated the ability to make difficult decisions without much support? Are they comfortable with ambiguous situations or situations where they do not have "perfect" knowledge? |
| Cultural Fit | Based on the candidate's attitude, demeanor, and answers, will they contribute to the direction of this organization? Do they share the values of your company and your clients? |

**Recommendation (circle):**     Hire     Consider     Do Not Hire     Better Qualified for Another Role

# APPENDIX 3: Hiring Calculator

This tool can help you dollarize the value of hiring the right employee the first time—and is a useful exercise to lend urgency to your selection process. Following is a simplified version:

| | SALARY COSTS | HARD COSTS | SOFT COSTS | VACANT ROLES |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **DIRECT COSTS** | · Salary<br>· Signing bonus and training expenses<br>· Benefits<br>· Taxes and other costs for a Total Salary | · Separation processing including coaching, counseling, "managing" and other direct expenses<br>· Recruiting costs for search firms, ads, resume screening, interviewing, reference checking, background checks, testing, and other onboarding costs | · Bad public relations, impacts on vendor relations, cost of other relationship issues<br>· Lost productivity of executive team—what they could have been producing while dealing with these issues | · Lost income or benefit while this key position is vacant |
| **PRODUCTIVITY COSTS** | · Time it takes to get up to speed in this position extended by their total direct salary cost for the period | · Burden placed on co-workers or direct reports extended by the average salary of all the people affected for the period | · Lost productivity on key projects or initiatives<br>· Good employees who left because of this person's management style—and the cost to replace them | · Lost income or benefit due to the unnecessary departure of good employees |

Now, add up the numbers in each box—what is the Total Salary (white box)?                 $_____

What are the Total Costs (add up all the gray boxes)?                                       $_____

Calculate the ratio of Total Costs/Total Salary:                          Turnover Cost Ratio _____%

Typically, turnover cost is 100% to 200% of the extended salary, or more.
Multiply your ratio by the salaries of people who have left, on average,
each year.                                                        **Annual Turnover Cost** $_____
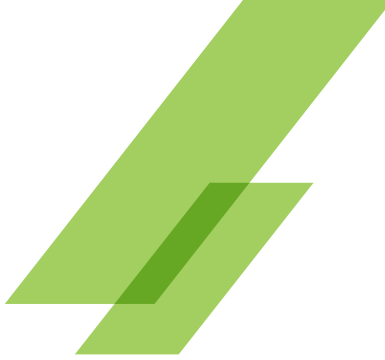
# APPENDIX 4: Interview Questions You Can and Cannot Ask

These guidelines will help you distinguish between lawful, acceptable interview questions and those that are unlawful. These guidelines are not complete and only provide major highlights. Remember: any question that is not specifically job-related may be construed as unlawful. Generally, if you do ask a question, you must consistently ask the question in every interview.

| CATEGORY | OK TO ASK | DO NOT ASK |
|---|---|---|
| **Age** | If hired can you provide proof of age and / or submit a work permit? <br><br> Are you over or under 18? (If not, proof of age and work permit required) | What is your date of birth? <br><br> How old are you? |
| **Arrests & Convictions** | Have you been convicted of any crime? <br><br> Are any felony charges pending? Give details. (You must tell applicant a conviction is not an automatic bar to employment but is only considered as fitness for job performance.) | Have you ever been arrested? <br><br> Have you ever been charged with any crime? |
| **Birthplace** | Only relevant for background check. | Where were you born? <br><br> Where were your parents born? |
| **Citizenship** | Are you a US citizen? <br><br> Do you intend to remain in the US? <br><br> Can you submit proof of citizenship or immigration status? <br><br> If you are not a citizen are you prevented from becoming lawfully employed because of visa or immigration status? | What is your country of citizenship? <br><br> Whether or when you or family members became naturalized citizens. <br><br> To submit a copy of your naturalization papers. |
| **Credit Rating** | Can you be bonded? Only if job related. | Questions about credit rating, charge accounts, ownership of car, etc. |
| **Disabilities & Health** | Are you capable of performing the essential tasks and duties of the position as they have been explained to you? | Are you handicapped? <br><br> Do you have a disability? <br><br> Have you ever been treated for any of the following illnesses…? <br><br> Have you ever had a Worker's Compensation claim? |
| **Education** | Describe your academic, vocational or professional education. <br><br> Please list the schools you've attended. <br><br> What is the highest grade you completed? | List the dates you attended or graduated from high school or college. (Some employment applications may ask for attendance dates to account for employment gaps.) |

| CATEGORY | OK TO ASK | DO NOT ASK |
|---|---|---|
| **Emergency Contact** | Name and address of a person to be notified in case of emergency | Name and address of a relative to be notified in case of emergency. |
| **Handicaps** | Describe or demonstrate the job function and ask whether the applicant can perform the function with or without reasonable accommodation. If asked, must be asked of every applicant. | General questions about whether they are handicapped or the nature or severity of their handicaps |
| **Height & Weight** | | What is your height and / or weight? |
| **Marital & Family Status** | Name and address of parent or guardian only if applicant is a minor.<br><br>Are there any activities, commitments or responsibilities that may hinder the work attendance requirements? | Marital status: spouse's name, employment, etc.<br>Maiden name.<br>Preference among Ms., Miss, or Mrs.<br>Are you pregnant?<br>Do you expect to be pregnant within the year?<br>Do you live with your parents?<br>With whom do you reside?<br>Number & age of children, or intent to have children.<br>About child care arrangements. |
| **Military Record** | Are you a veteran of the US Armed Forces or State Militia?<br><br>If yes, describe any training or education received while in the military. | Type, conditions or dates of military discharge or about experiences in other the US Armed Forces or State Militia. |
| **Name** | Have you worked for this company under a different name?<br><br>Does this company need any additional information about a change of name, use of an assumed name or nickname to check your work record? | Any inquiries that would indicate marital status, maiden name, ancestry, national origin.<br><br>Has your original name been legally changed?<br><br>Inquiries about preferred courtesy title: Miss, Mrs., Ms. |
| **National Origin & Language** | What languages do you read, speak or write fluently? Only if job related. | Ancestry, lineage, national origin, descent, parentage or nationality.<br><br>Nationality of parents or spouse.<br><br>Native language and how acquired proficiency. |
| **Organizations** | List memberships in any professional or trade organizations or other organizations that you consider relevant to your ability to perform the job.<br><br>What office, if any, do or did you hold?<br><br>Inquiry into any organization that the applicant is a member only if providing the name does not reveal race, religion or ancestry. | List any or all social organizations, clubs, societies, and lodges to which you belong. |

| CATEGORY | OK TO ASK | DO NOT ASK |
|---|---|---|
| **Photographs** | May inform that a photograph may be required after hire only if job related. | Submit a photograph with application or before hire. Can only request after hiring. |
| **Race & Color** | | Race, complexion, color of hair, eyes or skin. |
| **Relatives** | Do you have any relatives already employed by this company? If yes, please list their names. | List names and addresses of relative(s) to be contacted in case of emergency. |
| **Religion & Creed** | Are you available to work Saturdays or Sundays if needed? Only if job related. | Religious affiliation, denomination, church, parish, pastor, minister or rabbi, religious holidays observed. |
| **References** | Name of persons willing to provide professional or character references for you.<br><br>Who referred you here? | What is the name of your pastor, minister or rabbi? |
| **Residence** | What is your current address?<br><br>How long have you resided at that address?<br><br>What was your former address and how long did you reside there? Only for background checks. | Do you own or rent?<br><br>Can you give the names and relationships of the persons residing with you? |
| **Salary / Pay** | What are your salary/pay expectations? | Any inquiry related to salary or pay history. |
| **Sex** | Only permissible where a Bona Fide Occupational Qualification exists. | Are you male or female?<br>Any inquiry related to sex or ability to reproduce.<br>Any inquiry related to sexual orientation. |

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