

# Developing Your Interview Style: *Hiring Smart*

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Hiring smart helps an organization to staff itself with individuals who meet the knowledge, skills, abilities and qualifications of a position. What is the best way to accomplish this task? The personal interview continues to be the preferred way to select an employee. This tried and true method allows for the in-depth questioning needed to assess a candidate's potential for success in the position. Interviewers need to develop a style that prepares them to make the interview productive and a win-win for all.

**Interviewing is an art that involves formulating questions to elicit measurable answers to determine the candidate's background and knowledge for performing the essential functions of the job.**

Errors in hiring the "right" person for a position cost organizations hundreds of thousands of dollars every year. Can you afford to spend the extra \$100,000 on a do-over?

Great interviewers find a way to get the candidate to talk about themselves while effectively listening to key words and phrases that reveal competencies to do the job. It requires preparing and evaluating questions in advance to create a productive, structured interview that will supply the information needed to select the successful candidate.

**A good hiring strategy starts with a focused approach to defining job requirements.**

This fundamental practice is often overlooked; hiring managers tend to focus on tasks that need to be performed instead of the characteristics that a candidate must possess to be successful.

The first step is to perform a job analysis resulting in a detailed description of duties and requirements that add value to your organization. This job description will provide you with information with which to measure potential performance. The description may include a list of the essential duties required in the position; the working environment, including physical and reporting requirements; work experience; and education levels.

Next, you want to determine the competencies required for a candidate's success in the position. Based on the job analysis, you can define the behaviors and core competencies critical to successful job performance. Review individuals who have worked in the position and what made them successful. This is a good way to match the behaviors and competencies required

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for the right candidate. In other words, what characteristics do employees in the same, or similar, positions possess that enables them to be productive contributors?

And finally, how will you assess the candidates you have chosen to interview against the established criteria? Once you have identified the core competencies and behaviors, the next step is to develop questions focusing on the key criteria needed for the job. Using competencies in leadership, business and technical areas provide a well-rounded look at a potential employee. Leadership competencies are skills and behaviors a candidate possesses to lead a team toward its goals and objectives. Business competencies are those skills that are transferrable to any position and needed by candidates to affect the organization on a daily basis. Technical competencies are those skills and behaviors needed to perform the essential functions of the position and are generally learned through education or on the job.

The questions you create become the script for each interview. During your interviews, look for consistent, comparable and measurable responses among the candidates.

**EXAMPLE:** You have a position for an Accountant.

The competencies needed may include the following:

**Leadership Competencies**

- Motivation
- Business Acumen

**Business Competencies**

- Interpersonal Skills
- Problem Solving

**Technical Competencies**

- Financial Statements
- General Ledger

Looking at these competencies, determine behavioral-based, open-ended interview questions to solicit answers that show the candidate's knowledge of the key competency and behavior needed to perform the function. Behavioral-based interview questions identify the attitude of a candidate toward specific work performance. Being able to compare and contrast similar questions with candidate's answers is the science of recruiting.

The following sample questions measure the behavior, knowledge and attitude of candidates toward specific work situations.

**Motivation:**

- Describe a situation when you were able to have a positive influence on the actions of others.
- Give me an example when you went above and beyond the call of duty.

**Problem-Solving:**

- Tell me about a time when you identified a potential problem and resolved the situation before it became serious.
- There is more than one way to solve a problem. Give an example from your recent work experience that would illustrate this.

**Financial Statements:**

- Your resume says that you have created financial statements. Explain to me the process and financial system you used. How did you learn to use this system?
- Walk me through the steps of creating an income statement.

The candidates need to draw from their actual work experiences to answer the questions. The questions require a detailed response instead of just a yes or no answer. The answers should provide a clear sense of how a candidate will handle a real situation in the work environment. You can follow-up with additional probing questions relating to the competency if you need additional information. Since you will already know what answer you expect from a successful candidate, you will be able to rate the candidates against the "ideal."

If you are the type of interviewer who needs some help in formulating good behavioral questions, you can go online and "google" Behavioral Based Questions and find several sites to help you. The Council on Education In Management publishes a book titled *333 Interviewing Questions* that provides questions by competency type.

Skilled interviewers use a "Candidate Evaluation Form," which is a tool to measure each candidate against competency and knowledge levels, providing a quantifiable rating to compare candidates.

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The form should contain the measurable competencies (as above) and other areas around education, prior work experience, etc.. It may look something like this:

**Educational Background** – *Does the candidate have the appropriate educational qualifications or training for this position?*

**Motivation** – *Did the candidate demonstrate, through their answers, good motivation to perform the work required?*


The rating scale can be numerical (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) 1 = Unsatisfactory; 5 = Exceptional or rating statements (Excellent, Meets, Does Not Meet)

Comments on rating:

Ultimately, the key to hiring smart is careful preparation to ensure that you formulate the questions to get the answers you need from a candidate to make a smart, informed choice for your team. It takes time to prepare for an interview, but remember, a candidate will also be judging you during the interview. If you show that you are a prepared and well versed manager, it will help you to sell the organization and for you to put your best foot forward. ■

*Carol L. Kardas, SHHR, CCP, is a Human Resource and Compensation Professional with over 20 years of experience in the HR and Compensation fields. Carol is a Founding Partner in KardasLarson, LLC, Human Resource Solutions. Prior to this, she was the Executive Vice President, Human Resources for Konover & Associates. She is a member of the Society for Human Resource Management and is a member and past president of the Human Resource Association of Central CT.*

*Carol is also presenting a workshop for Connecticut Association of Nonprofits. DEVELOP YOUR INTERVIEWING STYLE will be held on April 27 from 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. at CT Nonprofits in Hartford. This workshop will help you to understand Behavioral Based Interviewing Techniques, formulate questions to elicit accounts of candidate's behavior that illustrate the nature and extent of competencies needed to do the job, learn to listen for cues, recognize ways to effectively manage the interview, and measure the candidates against a valid rating scale For more information and to register, visit [www.ctnonprofits.org/education/offerings](http://www.ctnonprofits.org/education/offerings).*



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