

Improving Interviews

Employment Interviews

- The importance of interviews
- Benefits of interviews
- Problems with interviews
- Why interviews are poor predictors
- How to make interviews better
- Selection and training of interviewers
- Conclusion

The importance of interviews

- **The importance of interviews**
- *Benefits of interviews*
- *Problems with interviews*
- *Why interviews are poor predictors*
- *How to make interviews better*
- *Selection and training of interviewers*
- *Conclusion*

- Interviews are the most common personnel selection tool
- Interviews are the single biggest determinant of personnel selection decisions

Benefits of interviews

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- Create an interactive forum for the assessment of interpersonal skills, job-relevant knowledge, motivation and potential fit
- Allow the interviewer to:
 - Sell the organization to qualified candidates
 - Give a realistic and detailed description of the position to candidates
- Provide the organization with a chance to make a favorable impression even on applicants who are not given offers or who [do not join the organization](#)

Problems with interviews

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- **Poor reliability/consensus between different interviewers**
- **Poor validity/prediction of job performance**

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Poor reliability/consensus between interviewers:

Different interviewers:

- Have their own styles and approaches
- Treat candidates differently and inconsistently
- Vary in how many criteria they assess
- Vary in which criteria they assess
- Vary in the standards they use to assess and weight criteria

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Poor validity/prediction of job performance:

- Interviews are not very good predictors of job performance

Average validity:

20% for unstructured interviews

50% for structured interviews

Why interviews are poor predictors

- **Intrinsic limitations of the interview**
- **Interviewer biases**
- **Interviewer errors**

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Intrinsic limitations of the interview:

- Interviews are situation-specific samples that often do not generalize to job performance
- There is a higher degree of subjectivity in interviews than in other selection tools
- The two main purposes of the interview- assessment and recruitment- often interfere with one another

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Interviewer biases:

- *Leniency* - rating all candidates favorably
- *Stringency* - rating all candidates unfavorably
- *Central tendency* - not differentiating between candidates
- *Contrast effect* - evaluating candidates in comparison to others
- *Halo effect* - one good or bad attribute determines the full evaluation

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Interviewer biases (continued):

- Physical appearance of candidate
- Perceived similarity with candidate
- Stereotypes on the basis of gender, age, national origin, ethnicity, education, work experience, etc.
- Incorrect assumptions about non-verbal behavior

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Interviewer errors:

- Making judgments too quickly
- Gathering insufficient information by not asking tough or probing questions when necessary
- Over-weighting negative information
- Spending interviews confirming first impressions

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Preparation

Structure

Timing and logistics

Conduct of the interview

Questions

Ratings and rating scales

Additional considerations

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Preparation

- Clearly define the role that the candidate is being interviewed for
- Specify the necessary knowledge, skills, abilities, attributes
- Review the candidate's file and select interviewers in advance
- Assign different interviewers different roles in advance
- Consider both assessment and recruiting when choosing interviewers

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Structure

- Ensure that the experience of all candidates is as similar as possible
- Use the same criteria and rating scale for all candidates
- Ask only job-relevant behavioral or situational questions
- Ask more than one question to assess each criterion

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Timing and logistics

- Do not make the interview too long or too short
- Divide the interview into discrete stages
- Interview in a quiet location free from distraction and interruptions
- Use more than one interviewer to enhance objectivity
- Discourage interviewers from discussing the candidate with one another before they have all met with the candidate

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Conduct of the interview

- Set the candidate at ease and establish rapport
- Make a statement at the beginning to set expectations
- Listen carefully and actively
- Take notes throughout the interview or not at all
- End with a clear statement about next steps

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Conduct of the interview (continued):

Try to balance:

- Sticking to the protocol versus adapting for the individual candidate
- Letting the candidate speak freely without letting the conversation drift
- Being friendly versus probing insufficiently
- Comprehensiveness versus redundancy
- Being encouraging but not "shaping" responses

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Questions

- Ask the same questions of all candidates to ensure standardization
- Follow-up and probing questions can vary when appropriate
- Ask one question at a time
- Use open-ended rather than closed ended or leading questions
- Don't ask questions which encourage candidates to present strengths as weaknesses

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[Five Must-Ask Interview Questions](#)

By Willa Plank

As the economy picks up, companies are starting to hire more. But managers often only get funds for a few key hires, so they have to select new employees wisely. That makes conducting a smart interview critical. Reporter Willa Plank checked in with Ben Dattner, founding principal of organizational consulting and research firm Dattner Consulting, to get his interview advice.

Here are his five must-ask interview questions:

1. In what ways will this role help you stretch your professional capabilities?

This is a reversal of the common question, "What are some of your greatest weaknesses?" Normally candidates dress up their weaknesses, or talk about "positive weaknesses" such as a tendency to work too hard. Phrased Dr. Dattner's way, this question may better prompt the candidate to describe skills she wants to improve and goals she'd like to achieve. Watch out for candidates who say the prospective job would simply incrementally add to what they already know.

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2. What have been your greatest areas of improvement in your career?

This is another question that gets at weaknesses, but in a new way. It also allows interviewees to tell their career histories and ambitions. A red flag answer: "I've always been a natural. I don't need to make any improvements."

3. What's the toughest feedback you've ever received and how did you learn from it?

This shows a candidate's ability to learn from mistakes. A good answer would involve the candidate recalling specific feedback and detailing how she learned from it and changed. Sometimes candidates say they can't remember tough feedback. That can be a red flag. It may indicate the interviewee hasn't worked in a high-risk or creative environment, that she has never solicited advice, or that her co-workers viewed her as too fragile for feedback.

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4. What are people likely to misunderstand about you?

This question reveals social intelligence, or the ability to understand others. A candidate might say he asks a lot of questions, and that some people have misinterpreted this inquisitiveness as aggression or criticism. If the candidate says he once found himself in this situation and changed his managerial style that would indicate he can sense other people's perceptions and adapt.

5. If you were giving your new staff a "user's manual" to you, to accelerate their "getting to know you" process, what would you include in it?

This lets the candidate reveal her work style. A straight answer should indicate the interviewee is self-aware. For example, a candidate might reveal that she prefers to hold conversations in person rather than over the phone, that she likes to be kept in the loop or that she dislikes surprises. Those answers can help a hiring manager determine whether the candidate's style fits with the office culture. A bad answer, Dr. Dattner says, would be: "Just do your job and there won't be any problem," or " They'll figure it out soon enough."

Legal considerations

It is illegal to treat candidates differently on the basis of, to ask questions about, or to make employment decisions based on:

Age

Gender

Race

Religion

Marital, family or residential status

Place of birth, country of origin or citizenship

Arrest record

Disabilities

Health

Past/current compensation (In New York City)

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Ratings and rating scales

- Rate all candidates on the same criteria using the [same scale](#)
- Use separate rating scales for each criterion
- Be mindful of biases in making ratings
- Make ratings as soon as possible after the interview
- Discuss ratings of candidates with other interviewers as soon as possible after interviews

Interview Scorecard

Candidate name _____

Position interviewed for _____

Date _____

CRITERION	INTERVIEW RATING (1–5)	PERFORMANCE RATING AFTER HIRE (1–5)	GAP	COMMENTS/ LESSONS LEARNED
1 Technical ability				
2 Leadership skills				
3 Interpersonal/ team skills				
4 Presentation skills				
5 Organizational citizenship				

Overall strengths:

Overall concerns:

What would help this candidate be most successful in the role?

Selection and training of interviewers

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Choose interviewers who are and/or train interviewers to be:

- Knowledgeable about the role, the team, and the organization
- Representative of diverse groups in the organization
- Good at eliciting and evaluating information
- Reluctant to jump to conclusions
- Open-minded and able to revise opinions
- Self-aware and able to account for their own biases
- Accurate in their predictions of candidate success over time

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Employment interviews should be part of an evolving, integrated candidate evaluation process and are a key component of an evolving, adaptive and integrated talent management system

Additional Talent Assessment Resources

- HBR: “[A scorecard for making better hiring decisions](#)”
- HBR: “[How to use psychometric testing in hiring](#)”
- [Psychometric tests that organizations use to select employees](#)
- [How to ensure the legality of pre-employment cognitive ability and personality tests](#)
- [Sample report based on psychometrics and structured interview](#)
- (WSJ): “[Five must-ask interview questions](#)”

For all links: <http://www.dattnerconsulting.com/talentassessment.pdf>

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