

# **PREDICTIVE INTERVIEWING WORKBOOK: MAKING INTERVIEWS BETTER**

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**DATTNER CONSULTING, LLC**

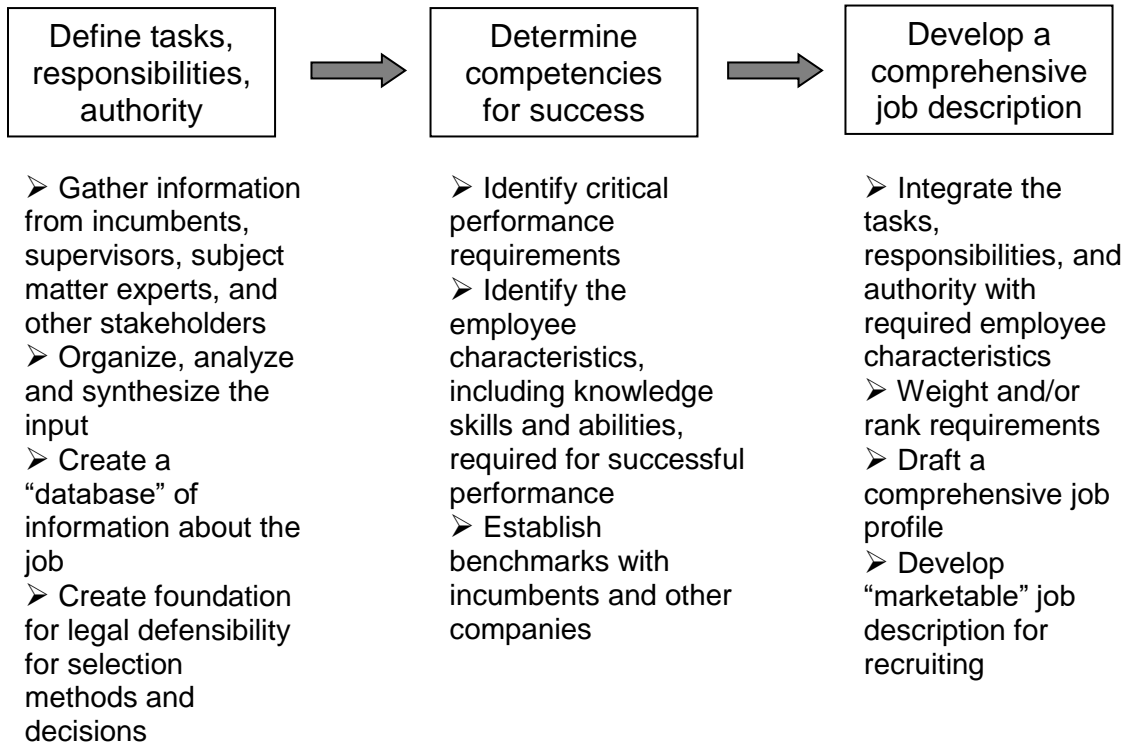
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## Preparation

### Defining the role and essential knowledge, skills, abilities and attributes



## **Planning the stages of the interview**

Structure enables interviewers to work easily and comprehensively through a candidate's credentials, history, ambitions, etc. For example, stages could include:

- Greeting and small talk: to establish rapport and welcome the candidate
- Transition statement: to direct the conversation to the purpose of the meeting
- Overview of the interview process: to provide a framework for the conversation
- Discussion of educational background: to verify degrees, coursework, etc. provided on the resume and/or application
- Work history: to explore work experiences, usually best discussed chronologically
- Job-related outside activities: to discuss volunteer work, professional affiliations, etc., as long as these adhere to EEO guidelines
- Candidate self-assessment: to allow the candidate to assess and reflect on his/her professional assets, developmental areas, interests, ambitions, etc.
- Organization and job information and Q&A: to provide relevant information about the position and the organization, respond to the candidate's questions, and sell the firm
- Statement of next steps: to outline the next steps in your organization's decision-making process and to set expectations about the next interaction
- Closing: to thank the candidate and conclude the interview

## Timing and logistics

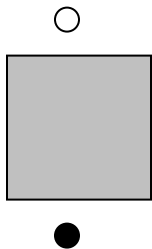
Timing and logistics require preparation and set the tone for the interview. Best practices include:

- Make alternative dates and times available for holding interviews in case candidates are unable to attend on suggested days.
- Schedule interviews with a generous amount of time (20-30 minutes) between them to build in time for interviews that run over and to allow the candidate plenty of time to travel between locations, take breaks, and regroup without running late for the next interview.
- Interviews should be conducted in quiet places, free from interruption. Ensure that others know that you are interviewing someone and expect not to be interrupted.

The following diagrams illustrate some possible seating arrangements for the interview process.

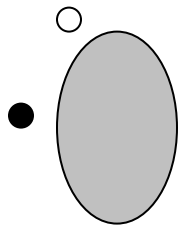
Key: ○ interviewer ● candidate

Face-to-face suggests formality



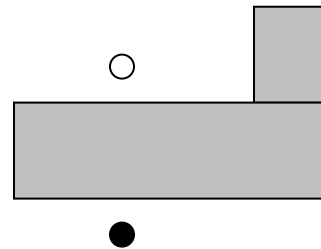
**Formal Interview**

Side-by-side implies cooperation



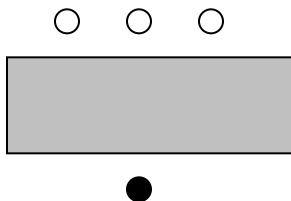
**Informal Interview**

Meeting at a workspace is more relaxed



**Interview in your office**

Panel sits in a line facing the candidate



**Panel Interview**

## Conduct of the interview

### **Opening the interview: expectations, rapport, consistency**

People make very quick judgments about one another when they first meet. Ideally, you should give candidates as similar an experience as possible of being greeted and brought to the room for the interview. This will enable more accurate comparison of candidates than would be possible if different interviews begin differently. A few words of small talk, for example, about directions or travel to the interview location, will set the candidate at ease.

A structuring statement is a clear statement that lets a candidate know who you are and what will happen in the interview, and it helps put him/her at ease. A good structuring statement should include:

- A brief background about your experience with the company
- The position, title, and department for which the candidate is being interviewed
- The amount of time required for the interview and what you want to accomplish in that time
- Mention of your note-taking process
- An explanation of the nature of the questions that will be asked

### **Active listening**

Active listening is one of the most essential abilities of an interviewer. Try to:

- Summarize what a candidate is saying at different junctures to ensure understanding and to signal to the candidate that you are listening.
- Be genuinely curious and ask questions when you hear something that piques your interest. Follow your instincts to go down paths in the candidate's story. If you do not want to interrupt the flow, jot down the questions as they occur to you so you may go back to them later.
- Listen to the emotions behind the words to help you understand the subtext of the candidate's comments and to help you form probing questions to learn more about the texture of the story he/she tells.
- Ensure that you understand a candidate's question before answering it. Ask clarifying questions if you need to.

## Setting the tone of the interview

Conversational listening and dialogue can also help the flow of conversation and open up the candidate so that he/she provides greater and richer data. There are three techniques that can help – commenting, echoing, and rephrasing.

- **Commenting:** an added statement of your own to what the candidate has just said. Keep the comment brief and relevant to the same subject. For example:

*Interviewer: Why did you choose a career in commercial banking?*

*Candidate: I got interested in this subject when I was in college after taking my first econ course.*

***Interviewer comment: I also became interested in banking during college.***

*Candidate: Yes, I feel fortunate to have discovered my interest when I was still in school and could take relevant courses in finance and accounting.*

- **Echoing:** a listening dialogue technique by which you repeat verbatim a key word or phrase the candidate said. By echoing back a selected word/ phrase, you encourage the candidate to contribute additional information. This serves as a very subtle probe and also shows that you are listening actively. For example:

*Interviewer: Why are you leaving your current job?*

*Candidate: I can't see much growth potential. My boss is sort of standing in the way.*

***Interviewer echo: Standing in the way?***

*Candidate: Yes, he seems to take all the credit for himself so I don't get much visibility.*

- **Rephrasing:** a restatement of the candidate's thought using different words. By recapturing the candidate's thoughts in other words, the interviewer demonstrates that he/she not only heard the response but also understood it.

*Interviewer: Why are you changing careers?*

*Candidate: I love teaching math but the pay isn't enough.*

***Interviewer rephrase: It sounds like you feel intrinsically rewarded but not adequately extrinsically rewarded.***

*Candidate: No matter how hard I work, my paycheck stays the same. I want to be rewarded for my extra efforts.*

### **Attending to nonverbal communication**

Nonverbal communication savvy is also essential – both you and the candidate will take cues from each other based on what is not said, and nonverbal cues shape the tone and direction of the interview. It's important not to send either too many positive or too many negative signals that will shape the candidate's responses or to inadvertently mislead him/her in some way. Keep a check on your body language to ensure that you are signaling that you are interested and engaged:

- Are you turned toward or away from the candidate? Are you leaning, leaning away, rigid, slouched, etc.?
- What is your facial expression? Do you have a scowl or otherwise serious look on your face? Alternatively, are you smiling too much?
- Are your expressions (nodding, facial expressions, etc.) cuing the candidate in some way? Do you seem bored or interested? Are you inadvertently “rewarding” or “punishing” certain responses with your reactions?
- Are you checking your watch, glancing at your computer, or watching others outside of your office?
- Do you feel stiff and uncomfortable or are you relaxed?

*Note:* Different cultures have different norms of body language and personal space. Where some people are open and tactile even with strangers, others feel discomfort if you sit or stand too closely. Be careful not to draw inappropriate conclusions based on what could simply be a cultural difference.

### **Taking notes throughout the interview**

Detailed interview notes provide a record of the questions asked and answered during the interview. Additionally, notes help focus the interviewer on the full content of the interview and not just the points that impressed him/her the most in some way. At the same time, note taking can slow down the interview and distract the interviewer, so it is important to pace the interview well and to develop techniques for capturing the data. Best practices for note taking include:

- Take notes on everything and not just things that you view to be particularly positive negative.
- Take notes that are descriptive and not evaluative, and avoid jumping to conclusions.
- Give stories a label and write down key words to facilitate subsequent recall.
- Note the frequency and recency of behaviors when possible.
- Ask a colleague to join the interview for the sole purpose of taking notes.

## Questions

### **Planning the purpose and type of interview**

There are numerous types of interviews that are designed to capture data about the candidate. The purpose of the interview will shape the content and form of the questions asked and answered. Popular and useful interview types include:

- **Behavior Description Interview:** Candidates are asked about what they *did* in prior job situations that are similar to situations they may encounter on the job for which they are being considered. The interviewer may also ask discretionary probing questions for details about the relevant situations, the candidate's behavior in the situation, and the outcome. The candidate's responses are then scored with "behaviorally anchored" rating scales developed by job experts.
- **Situational Interview:** Candidates are interviewed about what they *would do* in various job-related situations. The job-related situations are usually identified using the "critical incidents" job analysis technique. The interviews are then scored using a scoring guide developed by job experts.
- **Comprehensive Structured Interview:** Candidates are asked questions about what they *did* and/or *would do* in various job-relevant situations in order to demonstrate their job knowledge and ability to fulfill worker requirements. This kind of interview assesses how likely it is that the candidate will perform well in all aspects of the job.
- **Interview Panel:** The job candidate gives oral responses to job-related questions asked by a panel of interviewers. Each member of the panel then rates each candidate on such dimensions as work history, motivation, creative thinking, and presentation. This technique may not be feasible for jobs in which there are a large number of candidates that must be interviewed.
- **Unstructured Interview:** Candidates are informally interviewed, and different questions are asked of each candidate.

### **Developing question content**

The purpose of the selection interview is to gather information that is specifically relevant to the position for which interviewers are hiring. Interviewers need to be careful to elicit the most useful information with carefully crafted questions.

There are five types of information content gathered in an interview: credentials, technical skills, experiences, opinions, and behavior descriptions.



- **Credential Questions:** provide an opportunity to obtain information about a person's education, employment history, and past achievements, etc., which is also verifiable through other sources.

These questions can provide good clues about what the person knows and can do and are useful in the initial screening process. They do not, however, provide information about what a person will choose to do in a given situation. For example:

- What degrees do you hold and from which institutions?
- How long did you work at your last job?
- Are you Series 7 licensed? What are some of your other licensures?

*Note:* Many questions related to biographical information are illegal. (i.e.: Where were you born? What is your marital status?) See "Legal considerations" for more information.

- **Technical Skills Questions:** help determine if a candidate has the technical knowledge necessary to do a job.

These questions can also provide clues to whether a candidate actually has the knowledge that his/her credentials, resume and application indicate. Although this information is valuable, it may be more economical to collect it in a work sample test or through an initial phone screen. For example:

- What is net present value?
- What costs do you consider while calculating a return on investment (ROI)?
- What is a pivot table?

- **Experience Questions:** provide information about what the candidate has done in the past. These are general "work experience" questions and are the most commonly asked questions in interviews.

Work experience is important, and these questions provide an overview of what the candidate has done throughout his/her career. Such questions can also be helpful in probing for more specific information about past performance. Even if the candidate did perform the task or activity well in the last situation, however, it may have involved different behaviors than those required for the new job. It is important to carefully parse out the key competencies and behaviors to match them with the role. For example:

- Who were some of your clients in your last role? What was your relationship with them and how did you build that relationship?

- Tell me about some of your transaction experience and the role you played in those transactions.
- Based on your experience, would you consider yourself more of a product or industry specialist; why?
- Opinion Questions: yield information that describes what the candidate thinks about a given topic, such as self-evaluations, self-reports of strengths/weaknesses, likes/dislikes, and goals.

Opinion questions reveal areas where the interviewer can seek more specific behavioral information. They provide information about what the candidate thinks is important and allow for further probing relevant to the job opening. Interviewers may end up making assumptions about the candidate's behavior as a result of the answers to opinion questions, which may be biases and/or inaccurate. They do not provide any real evidence about what the candidate currently does, or would do in the specific position for which he/she is being interviewed, so it is important to keep biases in check when evaluating responses. For example:

- What do you like best about your job?
- What do you think is the most important part of your job?
- What are some of your strengths vis-à-vis client relationships?
- Compared with your coworkers, how strong are your analytical skills?
- Behavior Description Questions: request detailed accounts of specific events from the candidate's past.

The information obtained from these questions allows the interviewer more objectively to assess candidate accomplishments and competencies, yielding more accurate hiring decisions, and the questions should focus on a candidate's past behavior, the context for the situation, the candidate's role, and the results. At the same time, Behavior Description interviews are time consuming, and many candidates are unfamiliar with this technique. They may be unprepared to succinctly answer these questions and may not be used to talking descriptively about themselves and their personal accomplishments. Interviewers also require more skill and effort to ask and score these types of questions well, and behavior description questions require careful construction of form and content and extensive probing. For example:

- Tell me about the most difficult client that you faced last year. How did you prepare? How did you respond to the client's concerns? What is the status of the relationship now? What presented the challenges?

- Think about a time when you noticed the early warning signs of a problem which would have been costly if not detected. When did you first notice the problem? What was the first thing you did to correct it? Who else had to get involved? How did you alert others? Did anything slip by? What was the ultimate outcome?
- When you built your last valuation model, what discount rate did you use? Why? What were some alternatives that you considered? How did others respond to your choice?
- Please describe a situation where you had to use influence to achieve a goal. Why was influence necessary? What was your strategy for using influence? What obstacles did you encounter? How effective were you in influencing others? What was the final outcome?

### **Crafting question form**

The variety and precision of your questions are vital in determining the quality and quantity of the information exchange between you and each candidate. There are six different ways to structure questions based on what you are trying to elicit – the level and type of detail:

- **Open-Ended Questions:** solicit broad, opinion-based, direct responses and allow respondent to take initiative in answering as they see appropriate. Open-ended questions provide valuable insights regarding the candidate's priorities, style, thought processes, etc. For example: "How have your previous jobs prepared you for greater responsibilities with client relationships?"
- **Closed-Ended Questions:** seek verification of information by narrowing the choice of answers to either yes/no or a very succinct answer like a number or a name. You can recognize closed-ended questions by the first words of the sentence: "are you/were you," "do you/did you," or "can you/could you." Use a closed-ended question when you've targeted a point of information or want to clarify a point. For example: "How many employees did you manage?"
- **Probing Questions:** seek further information about a candidate's comment or response. Consider whether candidates have answered a question to your satisfaction, and probe further to find out more. For example: "Could you please say more about your team leadership role?"
- **Paraphrasing Questions/Statements:** mirror the content and feelings of what the candidate is saying in your own words and allow you to ensure that you understand what the person is saying. For example: "Let me see if I understood what you were saying about your working relationship with your manager..."

- **Direct Questions:** ask for specific information on a defined topic and direct the candidate's answers to a narrow focus for evaluating knowledge, skills, and abilities. For example: "What do you find challenging about pitching to structure finance companies?"
- **Problem-Solving Questions:** allow the interviewer to describe a hypothetical or real scenario to check for common understanding and knowledge from respondents. Basically, the interviewer wants to know how a candidate would handle a situation. For example: "How would you handle an irate customer?"

### **A few favorite questions**

- What is some developmental or constructive feedback that you have received in the past? What did you think of it? What did you do about it?
- What skills, competencies or knowledge bases are you working to develop now? Why? What are you doing to grow in this area?
- Tell me about a time when you didn't know how to do something critical to your performance. What happened?
- Based on what you've heard from everyone, what do you understand the job responsibilities to be? Why are you a good fit? What do you understand the key challenges of the role?
- What do you think it would require for you to be most successful?
- Which aspects of role will be the biggest challenges and will require you to grow the most?

### **A few favorite follow-up probing questions**

- What did you learn from that experience?
- How has that informed your work since then?
- What would you do differently now that you know what you know?
- How did others react to that?
- Why do you think that happened?
- And then what happened?

## Legal considerations

The law describes appropriate and inappropriate interview protocol. In general, one should only ask job-relevant questions and questions which do not probe about irrelevant information about a candidate's personal life, personal history or membership in any demographic group or protected class. It is illegal to treat candidates differently on the basis of, to ask questions about, or to make employment decisions related to protected classes. Examples of Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) legal and illegal questions include:

### Age

- Illegal: How old are you? When did you graduate from high school?
- Legal: None

### Race or national origin

- Illegal: What is your race? Where were you born?
- Legal: None

### Citizenship

- Illegal: Are you an American citizen?
- Legal: Can you document your right to work in the United States?

### Religion

- Illegal: What is your religion? Do you attend church/synagogue/mosque?
- Legal: None

### Marital status

- Illegal: Are you married? Have you ever been married? What was your maiden name? What kind of work does your husband/wife do?
- Legal: None

### Family status

- Illegal: Where do you live? Who do you live with? Do you have children? How many? How old are they? Who takes care of them? Are you pregnant? Do you plan to have children?
- Legal: Are there any factors which would prevent you from meeting your work obligations or from getting to work on time?

### Disabilities and health

- Illegal: Do you have any disabilities or health problems?
- Legal: Can you fulfill the essential functions of the job?

### Arrest record

- Illegal: Have you ever been arrested?
- Legal: Have you ever been convicted of a (relevant) crime?

### Compensation (New York City)

- Illegal: What is your current compensation?
- Legal: What is the range of compensation you would expect in your next position?