

From the editors at
Clement Communications

Smart Supervision™

"Job candidates are very sophisticated these days, spending a lot of time preparing for interviews and polishing their responses to anticipated questions."

STRATEGIES, IDEAS AND TIPS FOR MANAGING YOURSELF AND OTHERS

Interview Questions That Get Real Answers

It's not easy to find the next great talent and hire him or her. No matter how thorough your hiring process, it is difficult to tell exactly what you're getting in a new hire. Job candidates are very sophisticated these days, spending a lot of time preparing for interviews and polishing their responses to anticipated questions. By the time they are in front of you, you may be getting nothing more than well-rehearsed responses that have nothing to do with how the candidate really thinks or feels.

At the same time, the interview counts for a lot. There is a great deal at stake, so getting beyond canned responses is important. One way to do this is to ask probing questions that can't be answered with practiced responses. For example:

✓ **Tell me about yourself.** Although this is a tried and true question that candidates are likely prepared for, it is still worth asking as it can elicit a great deal of information that you might not otherwise get. A candidate's response to this question will reveal a lot about what is important to him or her. It can also reveal other things. For example, someone who goes on and on, meandering through every detail of his or her life probably has difficulty organizing his or her thoughts. Someone who responds in a sentence or two is probably private and reserved.

✓ **What complicated problems have you had to address on your job and how have you done it?** Asking for specifics may help you determine whether the candidate is a good problem solver, something that can be very important in many jobs.

✓ **I've spoken to 10 candidates. You all have similar skills and qualifications. What sets you apart?** With any luck, this will draw your candidate out, forcing him or her to go beyond the, "I'm hardworking and dependable" type of response, as this is what he or she will assume you've gotten from the other candidates.

✓ **We're really about teamwork here. Give me an example of a time when you worked as part of a team and really succeeded. What do you think made the team so effective?** Again, this will elicit more of a response than, "I'm a team player" or "I'm a people per-

son." It forces the candidate to recall a real life example and it may give you some insight into the kind of role the candidate plays when part of a team.

✓ **How do you demonstrate your work ethic on a day-to-day basis?** This question may help you separate the truly dedicated performers from others. It forces the candidate to say more than, "I have a strong work ethic," as it makes him or her tell you how that work ethic is put into practice.

✓ **Tell me about a time when you failed miserably on the job and how you handled that failure.** This is a much better question than, "What is your greatest weakness?" Instead of getting the old "I'm too much of a perfectionist" sort of response, you will get a real life example. A candidate should not be disqualified because of a failure. What's really important with this question is to hear what he or she did after the failure.

✓ **What is your greatest professional accomplishment?** Keep in mind that younger candidates may not have had much time to achieve greatness but they should still have some kind of answer to this question.

✓ **What will I have to do to keep you motivated on the job?** Someone who responds, "Provide me with regular pay raises," may or may not be the right person for your company. Some candidates may tell you that they are self-motivated. Others may need you to continually

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Interview Questions ...

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provide feedback or challenging work. In any case, it's good to know.

✓ **Sooner or later, everyone comes under some pressure to sacrifice quality in order to complete work on time. What have you done when this has happened to you?** The answer to this question may provide some insight into whether the candidate is able to multi-task and whether he or she can produce under pressure.

✓ **Where do you see yourself in five years? How about in 10?** A good candidate won't have to think about this very long, not because he or she has a canned response prepared, but because he or she should be goal-oriented and should know where he or she is headed. The response to this question may help you get an idea about whether the candidate sees your job as a career or just a job. It may reveal whether the candidate is looking to hang around for a while or use the job as a brief stepping stone on the way to what he or she really wants.

✓ **Tell me about a time when you had a conflict with your boss. How was it resolved?** No one wants to talk about conflict with a boss during a job interview, but nearly everyone has experienced such a problem. Look for honesty and sincerity in your candidate's response to this question.

✓ **What new procedures, ideas or other innovations have you developed in your current position?** There's no hiding behind this question. A candidate who has trouble answering may not be the right candidate for you.

✓ **What has been your best professional development experience?** The response to this question can provide insight into how the candidate prefers to learn and grow on the job. He or she may cite a professional seminar or perhaps a mentoring relationship.

✓ **Why are you leaving your current job?** Listen to the answer to this question. If the candidate is leaving because he or she has no advancement opportunities, is he or she going to find the same thing with your company? If salary is the issue, is it going to be an issue at your company as well? The candidate's response to this question can reveal whether he or she will be a good fit for your organization.

✓ **Outside of work, what interests do you pursue?** This question may help you get a feel for the candidate as a well-rounded individual, not just a potential employee.

✓ **What questions do you have about the company or job?** You may have done a good job of describing the company and the job. However, interested candidates should have at least something to ask. The type of questions they ask may help you gauge their interest in the job. ■

Six 'Do-Not-Ask' Interview Questions

There are some questions that you must never ask during an interview. Here are six of them:

- 1. That's an interesting name. Where does it come from?** Questions about an applicant's name that would indicate national origin, ancestry or marital status should never be asked.
- 2. That's an interesting accent. Where do you come from?** Again, do not ask questions that could indicate national origin. This could set you up for a discrimination lawsuit.
- 3. I graduated from the same college as you. What class were you?** Questions that would indicate age are forbidden. This could set you up for an age discrimination lawsuit.
- 4. Are you married?** Marital status is irrelevant and asking this question could set you up for legal troubles. It might also be perceived as flirtatious, which could get you into a different kind of legal trouble.
- 5. Do you have any physical disabilities?** This is not a good question to ask. Nor should you inquire about workers' compensation claims. However, you may ask, "Are you able to perform the essential functions of the job, with or without reasonable accommodation?"
- 6. What type of discharge did you receive from the military?** This may reveal a disability or other information that can get you in trouble. However, you may ask about an applicant's military experience. ■