

## HUMAN RESOURCES

### *Interview Guide*

This guide is to help you prepare for your interview(s) and to learn what you legally can and cannot ask.

#### **Preparation:**

- Read the position's job description.
- Make sure you have read the application, resume, and/or other documentation completely.
- Make a list of structured, objective questions that you will be asking of each applicant to be interviewed. Do not ask questions related to the applicant's personal life.
- Make notes of the responses made by the applicant during the interview. Do not use words that denote an emotional response such as "I feel", "I believe", "It seems to me that", etc. The questions and the applicant's responses must be returned to Human Resources after a hiring selection has been made or the position has been closed without a selected candidate.
- Schedule a location for the interview that will help you and the applicant be more relaxed during the interview session.

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#### **Asking Questions and Avoiding Discrimination:**

While preparing and asking interview questions, you must be aware of laws and regulations that prohibit discrimination against applicants based on race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, national origin, age, disability, or veteran status. Your questions should not be offensive. The interview should be a step to help establish the applicant's qualifications for the position. A consistent interview format will help prevent discrimination charges against the University. **Have structured, objective job-related questions prepared when interviewing applicants.** This helps to ensure consistency and comparability of the information obtained on each applicant. Use legal open-ended questions to encourage applicants to supply more information. Document the answers to the questions and return them to Human Resources when you have completed the interview process.

The following are topics containing **EXAMPLES** of questions you **may** and **may not** ask.

#### Age

LEGAL: If hired, can you furnish proof of age? (This is a legal question; however, is it related to the job?) Only use this question when hiring teenagers or certain security sensitive type positions.

DISCRIMINATORY: What is your age? What is your birth date?

**Citizenship or Nationality**

LEGAL: If hired, can you show proof of your eligibility to work in the United States?

DISCRIMINATORY: Where were you born?

**Disability**

LEGAL: Are you able to perform the essential functions of this job with or without reasonable accommodation? (Show the applicant the position description.)

DISCRIMINATORY: Are you disabled? What is the nature of your disability?

**Family Status**

LEGAL: Do you have responsibilities that conflict with the job attendance or travel requirements? (Show the applicant the position description.) [If this question is used it MUST be asked of all applicants]

DISCRIMINATORY: Are you married? What is your spouse's name? What is your maiden name? Do you have any children? Are you pregnant? What are your childcare arrangements?

**Race**

LEGAL: None.

DISCRIMINATORY: What is your race?

**Religion**

LEGAL: None.

DISCRIMINATORY: What is your religion? Which church do you attend? What are your religious holidays?

**Residence**

LEGAL: What is your address?

DISCRIMINATORY: Do you own or rent your home. Who resides with you?

**Sex**

LEGAL: None.

DISCRIMINATORY: Are you male or female?

### **Examples of open-ended questions:**

- What skills would you bring to this job if hired?
- Why did you leave your last position?
- When were you last responsible for doing this type of work?
- How much do you know about the university?
- What does customer service mean to you?
- What goals did you set for yourself during your last position?
- How might your skills be improved?

### **Closing the Interview Process:**

At the end of the interview, give the applicant a chance to contribute any information he or she thinks may be important to the decision process. Give the applicant a chance to ask questions about the organization or job. Then make the applicant aware of the next steps in the hiring process:

- Who will contact the applicant and the period of time involved?
- Whom the applicant should contact for the status of the position.
- Thank the applicant for his or her time.

### **Documenting the Interviews:**

Use an “Interview Results Form” to document the applicant recommended for hire or to provide specific reasons that an interviewed applicant was **not** recommended for hire. In determining your specific reasons for non-hire, evaluate the responses to the structured questions asked of the applicant. Be sure you send the questions and answers asked of each candidate during the interview to Human Resources.

In documenting your responses, do not use words that describe your emotions towards the candidate, such as ‘I feel the candidate would be a good employee’. Use factual, objective job related words, such as ‘The candidate has a strong understanding and extensive experience with WordPerfect software’. It is a good idea to complete the interview results forms soon after the interview.

If you need assistance with the interview process, contact the Human Resources office at extension 8375.

## The 5 Worst Interview Questions & What to Ask Instead

(Updated April 2010)

The interview remains a hiring manager's most effective tool for evaluating job candidates. Unfortunately, managers too often rely on a list of standard interview questions for which most applicants have canned responses.

**The message:** Ask generic questions and you'll get generic answers.

Here are five common questions to avoid, according to an Office Team report, as well as suggestions for more productive queries that will help you make the correct hiring choice.

1. Don't ask: "*Can you tell me about yourself?*"

This question will simply encourage job applicants to summarize their résumés, wasting precious time and preventing you from finding out any new information.

**Instead, ask:**        "***What professional accomplishments are you most proud of and why?***"

Instead of asking for a laundry list, this question forces candidates to elaborate on the most pertinent aspects of their work history.

2. Don't ask: "*What are your strengths?*"

This is such a common question posed by hiring managers that candidates usually trot out a prepared, vanilla response that teaches you nothing.

**Instead, ask:**        "***What is your greatest professional strength, and how have you used it to overcome a challenge in your career?***"

This question compels candidates not only to describe a strength they possess but also to expand on how they've applied it in a real situation. It can be especially revealing when interviewing candidates for technical positions because it allows you to gauge whether they can explain their successes in terms anyone can understand.

3. Don't ask: "*What are your weaknesses?*"

Candidates typically come prepared with weaknesses-turned-positives—"I work too hard" or "I'm sometimes too detail-oriented"—that discloses nothing about their true shortcomings.

**Instead, ask:**        "***Can you describe a time when you didn't accomplish a goal and how you rectified the situation?***"

Your goal is to find out how the candidate has dealt with adversity in the past. Did they solicit help from co-workers? Did they act right away? Did they take responsibility? This question can be especially helpful when interviewing management-level candidates.

4. Don't ask: "*Why do you want to work here?*"

While this could help you find out how much the applicant knows about your organization, chances are you'll also receive praise about the organization that borders on insincerity.

**Instead, ask:**        "***What specifically attracted you to our organization?***"

This question forces applicants to articulate why they view your organization as "unique" and "a good place to work." It allows you to assess not only their depth of knowledge about your organization, but also whether they truly want to work for the company.

5. Don't ask: *"Do you prefer to work alone or with a team?"*

These days, employers need workers who can excel in team and individual roles, rendering this question obsolete.

**Instead, ask:** *"Can you describe an example of when you worked with a colleague or group to solve a problem?"*

Ideal candidates will be able to demonstrate that they can work effectively with people from different departments and at various levels in the organization.

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## **Beyond the bland: 11 more questions to identify "must hires"**

### ***Career Initiative***

1. "Walk me through your progression with your current employer, leading me up to what you now do daily."
2. "Why would this be a good move in progression for you from a career development standpoint?" (i.e., "What are you adding to your résumé?")

### ***Technical skills***

3. "On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being a perfect match for this job), how would you grade yourself from a technical standpoint? What would make you a 10?" (This second question identifies the gap in their current skills.)
4. "Where would you need the most support, structure or direction in your first 90 to 180 days?" (Ask this instead of the standard "What is your greatest weakness?")

### ***Achievement***

5. "What makes you stand out as a rarity among your peers?" (This tells you how much self-confidence they have.)
6. "What have you done in your present/last position to increase your organization's top-line revenues, to reduce expenses or to save time?"
7. "Why is your current organization a better place for you having worked there?"
8. "Tell me about your reputation at work: What are you known for?"

### ***Pressure-cooker questions***

9. "Tell me about your last performance appraisal: In which area were you most disappointed?"
10. "From an interpersonal standpoint, where do you disagree with your boss most often: What kind of constructive feedback would you give him/her if he/she were here right now?"
11. "What do you know about our organization?"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The 5 worst questions & What to ask instead- HR Specialist (<http://www.thehrspecialist.com/article.aspx?articleid=29916>) Revised  
Revised 9-30-15