

“In This Issue: How To Ask Difficult Questions In The Interview”

Test for Success
Tools, Tips, & Techniques for Avoiding
Hiring Mistakes and Developing People
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How To Ask Difficult Questions In The Interview
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As you interview a promising applicant, you glance through his application blank and find something that concerns you. It might, for example, be one of the following:

- A question about a criminal record was left unanswered
- A two-year gap in his work history
- The applicant was terminated from his last job

Each of these raise questions that you need to have answered. But how? These are sensitive subjects which, if you were the applicant, you would hate to be questioned about. The good news is that there are ways to ask questions about uncomfortable issues that don't leave you feeling like you are participating in the Spanish Inquisition.

#1. Establish rapport right from the very beginning of the interview. It doesn't matter how hurried you feel by the next appointment. Remember, this is a great place for the Golden Rule. How would you like to be treated if your roles were reversed? (Answer: warmly, with respect, and inclusively.) Even if you don't hire this guy, remember that it is a small world and you just might run into him again. And wouldn't it be ironic if, the next time you meet, the roles are reversed, with him in the power position? So, do what you have to do to establish a good relationship. The greater the rapport, the more comfortable most people will feel discussing difficult subjects.

#2. Avoid confrontation by asking open-ended questions. An open-ended question is one that does not reveal the “best” answer, or the answer you would prefer to hear. Good open-ended questions sound non-judgmental to the person who must answer them, which gives them room to give you as complete an answer as possible without first having to defend themselves against a perceived attack. Open-ended questions can be very direct – that is you can ask directly about the issue you are concerned about, without including the desired answer in the question. (Remember, “directness” does not mean “aggressiveness.”) Here are some examples of open-ended questions:

“Tell me more about the circumstances at the end of your last job...”

“Fill in for me what you were doing in these two years...”

#3. Don’t expect admissions of guilt. Most people see themselves in a basically positive light. When a person screws up, the most natural thing for him or her to do is to blame circumstances, the other guy, bad luck, or anything to keep from doing the painful thing, which is accepting responsibility. Don’t expect emotional mea culpa scenes. Instead, listen to the person’s answer and keep probing with open-ended questions until you feel you have gotten the most complete explanation possible. Carefully evaluate how plausible the explanations are.

#4. Be cautious about accepting the other person’s excuses or reasons. We all tend to rationalize our poor decisions or behavior by saying things like, “Everyone else does it” or “It’s not that big a deal” or “It’s not just me.” And we are all pretty good at rationalizing. Over time, our rationalizations can become very well practiced and legitimate sounding. So don’t be surprised if you find yourself nodding and thinking, “Yes of course, knocking over that convenience store to get the money for your mother’s operation was completely justified.” This is the time to become a card-carrying skeptic. Trust, but verify. And, in this case, verify whatever questionable rationalizations you hear with reference checks, background checks, and other objective means.

Remember, People ARE your most important asset!

To Hire the Best, Test!

To Reveal Management Potential, Test!

To Diagnose Problem Behavior, Test!

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