

Interviewing

Setting a Strategy and Questioning Techniques

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Introduction

For most interviews, you are assessing a candidate's skills and work history. The evidence you find will tell you if they are a good fit for the role, a good fit for the organization, or if they meet some pre-defined criteria. To do this, you should have a strategy and be prepared before the interview starts. The strategy should include what evidence you need to gather and how you will approach the time you have with the candidate. To prepare, read the resume, CV, or other documentation the candidate provided. You should also do an Internet search and look on professional social websites to gather information about the candidate prior to the interview.

How-To

To budget your time, remove five minutes for the person being interviewed to ask questions. Then, separate the time remaining in two. For instance, if your interview time is 45 minutes, give five minutes for candidate questions and have two 20-minute blocks.

For the first half, ask questions across the areas you need to cover to get a general idea of the candidate's fit and function. Note any areas where questions arise, or you feel something doesn't align with the answer you expected. If you have time during the first half of the interview, probe the candidate further on any areas where you made note.

Next, ask the candidate if they have any questions for you and limit the time to five minutes. The questions they ask will give you additional insight into how they think, how they prepare, and their level of experience. The questions will also give you time to plan for the second half of your interview time.

For the second half of the interview, focus questions on the specific areas you were assigned, or on the areas you uncovered during the first and second portions of the interview. These questions are meant to be more detail-oriented rather than broad. You want to collect evidence that supports the feelings you formed during the first portion of the interview. If you were assigned specific areas to cover, make sure you ask questions that provide evidence for those topic areas.



The types of questions and how you ask them are important. Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives describes categories of questions that can be used to form questions. The categories are knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. As you start looking at the level of experience you need for the position, you can start matching question types to those levels. There is not a direct correlation, but for the purposes of interviewing, it serves well. Once you have determined the level of experience for an area to your satisfaction, quit asking questions in that area and move to a different area.

- **Knowledge/Comprehension** – This category of questions can be used to generate rapport and set a rhythm for the conversation and are focused on who, what, when, where, and how.
- **Application/Analysis** – You can use these questions to validate skills at the practitioner level.
- **Synthesis/Evaluation** – You should spend most of your interview time asking questions in these categories, i.e.: “If you were midstream on the project that you told me about and your executive sponsor was replaced by someone who wants to cancel the project, how would you gather and present evidence to justify continuing with your project? Or would you?”

Finally, you must stay in control of the interview. As a candidate provides you with the information you need, tactfully interrupt them and shift topics. You can warn them in advance that you have limited time and once you gather the evidence you need, you are going to stop them and move to a different topic area.

Conclusion

Interviewing someone is a practiced art, just as being interviewed is. To keep relaxed and enjoy the process, prepare for the interview, and go in with a strategy. During the interview, focus first on the person you are interviewing rather than capturing notes. As you get responses that raise flags in your mind, make a note or ask a question to satisfy that concern. Try to stick to your plan, but make sure you validate or remedy the areas of concern.

Capture notes after the interview about the candidate on your technique, including what worked well and what questions were most effective. Most of all, stay focused on the candidate, remove the distraction of having a laptop open, and enjoy yourself.

