

THE COMPETENCY-BASED INTERVIEWING QUESTIONNAIRE

The use of a customized “Competency Based Interviewing Questionnaire” by both you and your client will help ensure that you properly measure the selection criteria, as well as bring consistency and objectivity to the assessment phase of the hiring process.

Now that’s a pretty strong statement, considering the three major problems that impact the objectivity of most selection processes:

1. When hiring new employees, many times emotions and intuition will dominate a manager’s decision-making process.
2. Members of the employer’s selection team may have different understandings of the job needs and, therefore, will measure candidates against variable selection criteria.
3. Candidates’ interviewing skills may not necessarily reflect his or her on-the-job performance.

To achieve consistent results, it’s necessary to mitigate these problems by ensuring that you and the client are using the same tool to measure each candidate’s qualifications for the job. The “Competency Based Interviewing Questionnaire” can be such a tool. The reason for this is that you and the client’s selection team jointly develop the “Questionnaire.” Each member of the team is required to consider the selection criteria in terms that are job related and then develop questions, the answers to which will validate whether or not the candidate possesses the necessary skills, talents, and experience to perform successfully on the job.

The first step in this process is the validation of the job description. When completed, this step will provide a priority list of outcomes that must be achieved through the position as well as the specific critical functions that have to be successfully performed in order to achieve those outcomes. This serves as the basis for determining the job-related selection criteria. Only after everyone involved has agreed on valid selection criteria can you proceed with the development of the “Competency Based Interviewing Questionnaire.”

Depending on the complexity of the position and its impact on the achievement of organizational objectives (division or department), the hiring team could consist of one person (immediate supervisor) and the “Questionnaire” may include only three or four competency-based questions. However, on the other end of the continuum, the hiring team may comprise several senior managers and the “Questionnaire” could consist of several pages of questions.

Remember

The key to success for the “Competency Based Interviewing Questionnaire” is the active involvement of the hiring team in validating the job description and in developing job-related, competency-based questions. Their buy-in and active participation in the process is absolutely essential.

When properly developed and utilized, a “Competency Based Interviewing Questionnaire” will help ensure that the selection team receives honest, accurate, and timely information on which to evaluate the candidate’s “can do,” “will do,” and organizational “fit.”

To secure this information, the questions should be designed to seek out specific facts, figures, dates, amounts, etc., by asking why, when, with whom, and how. Although it is a request rather than a question, the following is a good example of an item that might be found on a "Questionnaire."

Draw an organizational chart showing your position and describe how you interfaced on a daily basis with those above and below you on the chart.

Other examples may include:

- Tell me about your experience in developing and implementing a lead generation system. Specifically, how did you do it?

And

- How did you go about completing a SWOT analysis on the competition?

These questions are behaviorally based, and with all such questions, the real value lies in the careful layering and sequencing of the follow-up questions. For example:

- Explain the details of how you approach the development and implementation of a client-development program.
- What were the factors you considered in choosing this approach?
- Were there any other considerations during the development phase?
- What were the greatest challenges you faced in implementing the program?
- How did you handle them?
- Why did you choose this approach to handling the challenges over other options?
- In specific terms, what were the actual results achieved through this program? How was that measured? Did you meet your expectations?

Using role-projection questions should also be considered. The objective of this type of questioning is to determine whether or not the candidates can generalize what they have learned from their previous experience and apply it to the critical functions of the new position. For example:

- In this position, you will be responsible for revamping our organization's entire approach to existing clients and new market development.
- Describe your most comparable experience.
- If we hired you, how would you handle this responsibility?
- What information or resources would you require?
- How would you organize and implement your approach?
- Who else would have to be involved?

With certain search assignments, you may be required to identify, interest, and assess senior managers or executives who, if hired, would be responsible for spear-heading change initiatives in their new organization. An example of the type of question that may be included on the “Questionnaire” under these circumstances might be:

- As a senior executive, what would you tell people about change, particularly as it relates to how it would affect them and what they can do to prepare for it?
- Can you give me an example of this from your previous experience?
- How was it received?
- If you had it to do over again, would you change or alter your approach, and if so, in what manner?

The questioning format should be varied and somewhat overlapping as, with most positions, there generally are only three to seven core job-related competencies that have to be evaluated. Once the questions have been developed and agreed on, each member of the hiring team should be assigned an area of questioning to cover with the candidates he or she interviews.

In this manner, you can ensure that all the relevant questions are asked and answered, without the need for each member of the team to review the entire “questionnaire” with each candidate. Since the areas of inquiry overlap, each required competency will be covered by more than one member of the hiring team without the need to repeat specific questions.

In those situations where the hiring team consists of just you and the hiring manager, the two of you need to determine who will ask which questions.

Although the proper use of the “Competency Based Interviewing Questionnaire” will help ensure a successful hire, interview questions do not have to be limited to those on the “Questionnaire.” Each member of the hiring team, including you, may have other questions they wish to ask. This is fine as long as the questions are JOB RELATED. This still allows for a wide variety of questions and large areas for inquiry, all of which should be documented in the interview notes.

When all the interviews have been completed for each candidate utilizing the “Questionnaire,” the hiring team needs to pool and share the job-related information they have gathered. Only in this manner can an informed judgment be made on each candidate.

Remember

Initially, with most clients, you will need to be the driving force in selling them on the benefits of developing the “Questionnaire.” And since you will be providing the candidates, you will also be the first member of the hiring team to benefit from its use.

In addition to dealing with the three major problems that impact the objectivity of the hiring process, using a well-developed “Competency Based Interviewing Questionnaire” will help ensure that you and your client are on the “same page” and that the job description does not change in mid-process. Most importantly, it will bring greater validity and credibility to the hiring process. The result is that the client has greater confidence in their hiring decision, while you elevate the efficiency and effectiveness of the services you provide as a true professional in this industry.



As usual, if you have questions or comments, just drop me an email or give me a call. It's always good to hear from you.



Recipient of the "2006 Harold B. Nelson Award", Terry Petra is one of our industry's leading trainers and consultants. He has successfully conducted in-house programs for hundreds of search, placement, temporary staffing firms and industry groups across the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Australia, New Zealand, Russia, England, and South Africa. To learn more about his training products and services, visit his web site at: www.tpetra.com. Terry can be reached at (651) 738-8561 or e-mail him at Terry@tpetra.com.