

Achievements and Evidence: Today's Best Hiring Metrics

by Mel Kleiman, CSP

The Problem with Behavioral Interviewing

Just as typewriters and record players have given way to desktop computers and handheld media players, outmoded employee selection systems need to be reinvented to take advantage of our new understanding of how to select employees in the 21st century.

Although behavioral interviewing was initially developed by industrial psychologists back in the 1970s, it is still in widespread use today. Predictably, during these past 30 years, everyone looking for a job has learned to expect interviewers to ask them about their past *behaviors*.

Just as we all learned what our teachers wanted to hear from us in school, prospective employees learned to deliver the answers interviewers want to hear. Ask, “*Tell me about a time you had to deal with a difficult customer,*” and all but the dullest applicant immediately understands that customer service is paramount and will respond to the question accordingly.

Every job applicant with a basic understanding of the interview process now knows that the most critical interview questions will concern past behaviors. The reason so many unsatisfactory new hire decisions are made is due to the fatal flaw in this system – specific past behaviors during specific past events are all but impossible to document or verify.

The continued reliance on the validity of behavioral questions has led to too many hiring decisions based more on the applicant's presentation skills rather than on the person's ability to perform on the job.

Great Employees vs. Great Applicants

Start hiring great employees (instead of great applicants) by shifting the focus from past behaviors to verifiable experiences and achievements. Begin by using an interview built upon the following five, essential questions. (To gain a sense of their effectiveness, as you read each one, ask yourself how you would respond if you were the applicant.)

Essential Question #1: “Tell me what you learned from your very first paying job.”

This is the first question interviewers should ask because our earliest learning experiences set the patterns and expectations for later experiences. (*Hiring Hint: The story makes a lot more sense when you hear it from the beginning. Follow this up by asking them to talk briefly about each successive job and what was learned at each.*)

Essential Question #2: “Which work achievements or accomplishments to-date are you most proud of?”

The achievements we value most reveal both our strongest character traits and our strongest desires. Identifying these speaks volumes about the kind of employee the applicant can become. (*Hiring Hint: The number of achievements or accomplishments is not as important as the motivations that drove it.*)

Essential Question #3: “On a scale from zero to ten, how would you rate yourself as a (job title) and why?”

Because we seldom see ourselves as others see do, the specific

number is not as important as the fact that you will be able to verify if the applicant's number is higher, lower, or the same as perceived by the applicant's former managers or supervisors when you check references. (*Hiring Hint: Would you rather have an employee who undervalues or overvalues their contributions reporting to you?*)

Essential Question #4: “When we contact your former manager to verify your employment, what will he or she tell me about your last performance review?” The answer will tell you a great deal about the applicant's actual on-the-job performance, ability to take direction, and efforts to improve. (*Hiring Hint: Phrased this way, this question will elicit the truth from 99% of applicants. For further verification, if you decide to extend a job offer, then ask for a copy of that review.*)

Essential Question #5: “What would you like to ask me about the job or our company?” The answers to this one reveal the applicant's concerns and motivators or simply point out basic job information (benefits, hours, policies) that have not yet been communicated. (*Hiring Hint: Follow this up by allowing the applicant one or two more questions for even more insight.*)

Between Questions #3 and #4, ask all the other questions you've developed that help determine if the candidate is a good fit for the job, the department, and the company.

After the interview, verify what you learned with this achievement-based interviewing technique through evidence-based selection criteria: thorough reference and background checks.

The further you can move your interviews away from outdated behavioral techniques and toward achievement- and evidence-based selection, the quicker your hiring effectiveness will improve. Like that great philosopher of our time Dilbert said: “Eighty-percent of a manager's job is hiring the right people. The other 20 percent is leaving them alone so they can do what you hired them for.”

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