

Separate wheat from chaff: 21 smart interview questions

HR professionals often play it ultra-safe in interviewing. For fear of asking unusual, inappropriate or even illegal questions, they stick to bland, scripted queries that don't draw applicants out of their comfort zone.

That's a sure path to hiring failure.

Instead, you and your hiring managers can improve your hiring odds dramatically by probing deeper with more targeted, properly worded questions.

To zero in on "must hires" in your applicant pool, try some of these questions suggested by Paul Falcone, author of the best-selling book *96 Great Interview Questions to Ask Before You Hire*.

Career-initiative questions

- "Walk me through your progression with your current employer, leading me up to what you now do daily."
- "How have you had to reinvent your job over time in light of your employer's changing needs?"
- "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-skill questions

- "On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being a perfect match for this job), how would you grade yourself from a technical standpoint?" (Most people rate themselves an 8, says Falcone.) "What would make you a 10?" (This second question identifies the gap in their current skills.)
- "Where would you need the most support, structure or direction in your first 90 to 180 days?" (Ask this instead of the standard "What's your greatest weakness?" question.)
- "Are you more quality-driven or quantity-driven? I know most people look for balance, but people usually lean one way or the other. Where would you say you fall in the spectrum?"

Personality-match questions

Falcone says most line managers hire on the basis of likability, but they should be focusing on compatibility. Some questions to identify compatibility:

- "How do you prefer to accept constructive criticism. Do you consider yourself thick-skinned, or should we be more delicate when providing feedback."
- "Do you prefer more structure, direction and feedback on a day-to-day basis, or more autonomy?"
- "What work pace do you typically prefer: a) moderate, controllable, predictable; b) fast-paced with deadline pressure; c) hair-on-fire, hyperspace, floor of the New York Stock Exchange?" (The best answer is B.)
- "What would your references say about your listening skills, follow-up abilities and inclination to confront problem situations head-on?"
- "What was your favorite position and what role did your boss play in your career at that point?" (Ask the

same question about “least favorite” position.)

- “Give me three adjectives to describe yourself.”

Achievement questions

- “What makes you stand out as a rarity among your peers?” (This tells you how much self-confidence they have.)
- “What have you done in your present/last position to increase your organization’s top-line revenues, to reduce expenses or to save time?”
- “Why is your current organization a better place for you having worked there?”
- “Tell me about your reputation at work: What are you known for?”
- “Tell me about the greatest achievement you’ve ever had in your career up to now.”

Pressure-cooker questions

- “Tell me about your last performance appraisal: In which area were you most disappointed?”
- “Tell me about me: What can you glean from this interview about my management style?”
- “From an interpersonal standpoint, where do you disagree with your boss most often? What kind of constructive feedback would you give him if he were here right now?”
- What do you know about our organization?”

The Post-Interview Debrief: Smart Questions to Ask

After candidates meet with various managers, you may get the chance to speak with them, either that day or days later. Here are some good follow-up questions to gauge the person’s interest.

- “What interested you most about the opportunity: the people you met, the job or the organization itself?”
- “After learning more, how qualified are you for the position from a technical standpoint on a scale of 1 to 10?”
- “On a scale of 1 to 10, how interested are you in joining our staff?” (If less than a 10, ask: “What would make you a 10?”)
- “What other information do you need to come to an informed career decision?”

Pre-empt any counteroffer with these questions:

- “What would have to change at your present position for you to continue working there?”
- “If you gave notice to your boss right now, what would he/she say to keep you?”