



# ***Interviewing Techniques***

## CHAPTER 5

### INTERVIEWING TECHNIQUES

An effective interview does not just happen; it is well planned, prepared, thoughtfully carried out, and actively followed up. We will look at two basic approaches to the interview procedure. Four interview types will be considered.

We consider the details of good interview technique and we examine possible pitfalls to avoid. The outline that follows provides details about interview types, methods, and techniques. Our discussions and practical exercises will be based on this material.

## -- Interviewing Techniques (cont'd)

### Interview

A conversation, usually between two people, that is confined to a specific subject.

The interviewer's role is to seek information.

The interviewee's role is to supply information.

### Interview Types

1. Employment Interview.
  - prospective staff member.
2. Appraisal Interview.
  - gives insight into actual and potential abilities.
  - aids understanding ambitions, motivations, problems.
3. Disciplinary Interview.
  - when there is failure to meet standards; non-adherence regulations; failure to maintain proper attitude.
4. Counseling Interview.
  - when subordinate has difficulty carrying out an assignment due to personal problems.
  - (You are not a psychologist.)**

### Interview Methods

1. Guided Interview.
  - also called directed, patterned.
  - prepared questions, specific information.
  - (Frequently at employment interviews.)**
2. Unguided Interview.
  - also called non-patterned or un-patterned.
  - encourages by sympathy, understanding.
  - interviewee supplies info. himself, identifies problem himself.
  - (Use on a very restricted basis.)**

## -- Interviewing Techniques (cont'd)

### Pitfalls in Interviewing

1. Conversation Capper.  
-- Do not dominate the interview by doing most of the talking.
2. Agile Anticipator.  
-- Do not be impatient, interrupt.
3. Listless Listener.  
-- Pay attention. Do not let your mind wonder.
4. Prosecuting Attorney.  
-- Do not be hostile, cross-examine.
5. Good will ambassador.  
-- Ask necessary, if difficult, questions. Do not skirt the issues.
6. One-man Band.  
-- Do not allow distractions.  
Telephone, interruptions.
7. Faulty Question Framer.  
-- Do not allow distractions.  
Telephone, interruptions.

### Good Interviewing Practices

1. Get Ready.  
Allocate time, gather background data, review records.
2. Define Interview Goals.
3. Determine Interview Environment.
4. Manage the interview.  
Quiet, confidence, objectivity.
5. Consider Nature, Timing of Questions.  
NO "yes/no."
6. Explain Future Action.  
When and how notification about decision.

## - - Interviewing Techniques (cont'd)

7. Listen intelligently.  
Empathize.
8. Coming to Conclusion.  
No surprise ending.
9. Weigh the facts.  
While still fresh in your mind.

### Twenty Practical Suggestions to Improve Interviewing:

#### 1. DO YOUR HOMEWORK

The interview, despite its shortcomings, is the most frequently used method of investigating and identifying most management problems. On the basis of interviews many vital company decisions are made. Without the interview other selection and employment procedures are worthless. Therefore, managers should learn how to interview well. So do your homework. Never try to muddle through or start an interview cold. Be sure you are ready. Advance preparation and careful planning are the ingredients of successful interviewing.

#### 2. NEVER GO BEYOND YOUR DEPTH

Do not attempt to use an interviewing technique that is designed for a professional. It probably will not work and it may be dangerous. For example, if you attempt to subject a shop steward to a "stress interview," you may end up with a wildcat strike.

#### 3. AVOID OVERGENERALIZATION

A good interviewer knows he will find exceptions to every rule. If you generalize you enter you enter an interview with a closed mind and are likely to make unsound judgments. The generalization is the father of prejudice.

## -- Interviewing Techniques (cont'd)

### 4. STAY CLEAR OF PREJUDICE

Nobody is free from prejudice, but if you recognize your biases for what they are you can at least avoid being influenced by them. Empathy, fairness, and good judgment are the working tools of the good interviewer.

### 5. BE RECEPTIVE

Encourage the interviewee to talk. Always listen objectively and attentively. If you are not willing to give the interviewee a fair hearing there is no need to hold the interview. If you dominate the conversation you are reversing your proper role. Playing the straight man takes great ability and pleasant unobtrusiveness. A straight man knows how and when to throw his partner a line so he can get the best audience reaction from his jokes. The straight man understands that if he makes a play for the limelight he spoils the act.

### 6. AVOID TRICKS OR RUSES

Cleverness does not bring good results interviewing. Except on rare occasions -- in discipline matters or investigations -- you are never in the capacity of a lawyer trying to force an admission. If your questions reveal discrepancies, conflicts in statements, apparent untruths, or the answers are unrevealingly vague; you are justified in asking direct questions to straighten things out. But do so frankly, and not in a "Ha! Ha! I caught you!" manner. If you are dissatisfied with what an interviewee has told you, and it is apparent that you can get no further information from him, do not push. Keep your annoyance to yourself. At least you know what to investigate and the chances are you can get the facts from other sources.

## -- Interviewing Techniques (cont'd)

### 7. NEVER OVERQUESTION

Your questions should be asked in such a way that they bring forth complete and detailed answers. So keep count of "yeses" and "noes," and if you are getting too many, try to improve the questions. The ones you are asking are not doing the job. Your object is to frame inquiries that allow the interviewee to do most of the talking.

### 8. DO NOT WORRY ABOUT CONVERSATIONAL GAPS

You do not have to fill every lag in the conversation with a question. If the interviewee stops talking, and you want to hear more on the same subject, just keep quiet. Your silence will indicate you expect him to continue.

### 9. KEEP IT PRIVATE

An interview should be held in private. There should be no interruptions. If you lack time to conduct the interview properly, postpone it until you do. You may think you can do two or three things at once, but the interviewee is not encouraged to talk by your versatility. He feels like an intruder and will have difficulty saying anything. An interview requires your entire attention and it must be held in an environment of unhurried privacy.

### 10. NEVER ASK MULTIPLE QUESTIONS

For example, "Tell me about your last job? Why did you leave? What do you mean you left it because of lack of opportunity?" If you ask two or three questions in rapid succession you will not get satisfactory answers to any of them; in fact, the interviewee will probably not remember all parts of your multistage query. Ask questions one at a time, and word each one so that it will bring you a full and sensible answer.

## -- Interviewing Techniques (cont'd)

### 11. KEEP THE INITIATIVE

You are running the interview, so never let it get away from you. Interviewing is not a natural means of communications. The interviewee is generally trying to please you and endeavors to read signs in your facial expressions, the tone of your voice, or the wording of your questions that give him some clues as to your wishes or opinions. Not only must you be noncommittal; you must keep things moving. Direct the flow of conversation along specific lines to a desired goal. The trick is to establish a pleasant atmosphere in which the interviewee is encouraged to talk while you maintain an objective and impartial attitude.

### 12. SELECT THE PROPER APPROACH

Adjust the method of interviewing to the needs of the interviewee. Size him up quickly, and talk to him at his level of understanding. If you talk down, he freezes up. If your questions are over his head or put in language he does not comprehend, the barrier of misunderstanding will block off favorable results. Whatever you do, NEVER PATRONIZE.

### 13. KEEP YOUR OPINIONS TO YOURSELF

The sound of one's own voice is pleasant. The interviewee is a captive audience, and he probably has no option but to sit and listen if you choose to talk. But your purpose is not to impress the interviewee with experiences in your career or to tell him how you handled a difficult problem. Your job is to persuade him to give you information that will be helpful in making an evaluation. Every time you talk you are intruding on the interviewee's time and denying yourself the opportunity to get facts you need. You want to know his views. You already know your own.



## -- Interviewing Techniques (cont'd)

### 14. SHUN THE ROLE OF THE AMATEUR PSYCHOLOGIST

Today nearly everybody is a cocktail party psychologist equipped with at least a smattering of professional jargon and ready to give a clinical analysis of anyone from the President of the United States to an overaffectionate movie star. You will do little harm and perhaps have some fun if you confine your attentions to persons beyond the range of your advice. But simply because you had a course in psychology or read a book or a magazine article on the subject, do not attempt to make psychological interpretations of an interviewee's remarks. You can be completely off base. Even Sigmund Freud said that a cigar is not always a phallic symbol, that sometimes it is a good smoke. Use practical judgment and rely on common sense evaluation. If it is necessary to have someone's subconscious explored, call in a professional.

### 15. KEEP AN EYE ON OBJECTIVES

Know specifically what facts and information you wish to obtain. Frame your questions to get these data. Do not allow an interview to be sidetracked by irrelevancies.

### 16. MAINTAIN A STEADY PACE

The pace of an interview should be consistent and apparently unhurried. If you show by constantly looking at your watch that time is pressing, you upset the interviewee and bring him instinctively to the edge of his chair, ready for a quick departure. The experienced interviewer knows how to take full advantage of time without seeming to do so and moves the conversation quickly and efficiently along desired lines. This requires planning and the judgment of experience.

-- Interviewing Techniques (cont'd)

*Physical*

17. DO NOT BE MISLEAD BY PHYSICAL APPEARANCES

Never accept old wives' tales about characteristics being reflected in physical traits. The nervous person who dodges your glance may be telling the truth while the unmitigated rogue looks you straight in the eye and relates an outrageous falsehood. Fat men are not necessarily jolly, men with close-set eyes shifty. If you make judgments on this basis – in part or in whole – you are failing as an interviewer, and worse, will likely be victimized by your own fallacious thinking.

18. DO NOT SHY AWAY FROM HARD QUESTIONS

It is never pleasant to ask unpleasant questions, but there are times when you have to do it. However, if you ask them in an impersonal or clinical manner, detaching the interviewee as an individual from the matter you are inquiring about, the problem is less difficult. Make it evident you are in no way trying to pry into his private affairs out of idle curiosity, but are seeking information needed to evaluate his work or abilities in the context of his relationship with the company, his job, or his associates. You should also make it quite clear to the interviewee that you are giving him a chance to tell his full story and to give any explanation for a deficiency or an offense which otherwise might militate against him. True, he may give you the information in such a way that he is put in the best light possible. You may not be able to accept it literally. But you can evaluate what he has said in conjunction with other information at your disposal and thus make a judgment. The average person is willing to discuss mistakes or serious shortcomings if he is assured of a sympathetic and objective listener. If you can get him to start talking, it may even be hard to shut him off. But the same person may deny or attempt to justify his mistake or offense if he believes he has been judged and condemned in advance of giving his side of the case.

## -- Interviewing Techniques (cont'd)

### 19. SEEK ADVICE

Do not downgrade interviewing techniques or think you do not need interviewing training because anybody can interview. If your company has personnel experts available who can help you improve your interviewing skills, make use of their talents. Their coaching will make you a better interviewer and a better manager.

### 20. EVALUATE CAREFULLY

Evaluation of information after an interview is a four (4) step process:

- (1) interpret the meaning of the facts you have gathered;
- (2) investigate when necessary to make sure your facts are accurate;
- (3) weigh the facts carefully – good and bad – before reaching an evaluation or decision;
- (4) determine a course of action. The time to do this is as soon after the interview as possible. The longer you delay, the less effective your evaluation will be and the greater the margin for error in your decision.

## REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Name the four different types of interviews and briefly describe the purpose of each.
2. Name three practices you would use to prepare for an interview.
3. Define an interview as to its components and purpose.
4. List the steps in the evaluative process.

### Assignments for Interviewing

Write a series of questions for a guided interview.  
You will use your questions in a class activity next week.