

# ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

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**E**very recruiter knows that in order to get the right answers, you must ask the right questions. Some recruiters are pretty good at this, but there are many others who have fallen into the trap of asking the same few questions of every candidate, expecting the better candidates to distinguish themselves by their responses.

In reality, everybody is the unique sum of his or her own life experiences, environmental circumstances, and values. Anyone who assumes some answers are more right than others is, for all intents and purposes, exhibiting his or her personal bias. To fairly judge others, we must take great care to learn what specific actions or behaviors the candidate demonstrated, as well as the circumstances under which the actions were taken, and the specific outcomes of each. Otherwise, we are likely to fill in the blanks with our own values and experiences, which, more often than not, do not accurately represent those of the candidate.

Aristotle once said, "We are what we repeatedly do. Behavior, then, is not an act, but a habit." Built on this premise, we can assume with relative assuredness that people will behave or perform similarly in like situations. Asking the right questions about a person's past performance should yield meaningful and relevant data with which future performance can be predicted.

Asking a candidate if she has ever worked on a project team before will usually generate a brief, nonspecific response. However, if you ask the candidate, "Describe for me a recent project team or group you worked with, the problems you encountered, and how you resolved them," then you will usually generate a more fully detailed story from which you can gain a comfortable sense of style and behavior. Based upon what is shared in response to these questions, it then becomes obvious what questions need to be asked to fully understand the "whys," the "whats," and the outcomes.

Certainly, specific examples of past behavior are more believable than most "stock" or general responses. Rather than offering unsubstantiated claims of competence, detailed examples of actual past behavior serve as credible proof statements of performance. Rather than looking for talent indicated by credentials, we should be focused upon obtaining relevant and repeatable examples of performance to give us confidence that the individual can perform to the level of our expectations.

A good interviewer asking the right questions can quickly learn not only what a person knows, but how they apply it, and how effective they have been doing it. For example:

**Instead of asking:** "Why do you want to work for our company?"

**Try:** "Why are you considering a job change at this time?" "What aspects of your last job would you like to avoid in your next job?"

**Instead of asking:** “How did you get along with your last supervisor?”

**Try:** “Tell me about a time when you didn’t agree with your supervisor. What were the circumstances and how did you deal with them?” or, “We all have times when we have had to work with a difficult person. Tell me about a time when this has happened to you.”

**Instead of asking:** “How do you solve problems?”

**Try:** “Tell me about a particularly difficult job-related problem you faced recently. How did you handle it? What did you learn from that experience? How have you handled similar problems since then?”

Good interviews are conversations where information is exchanged openly and freely by both parties. Asking the right questions and being a good listener are the keys to being a successful conversationalist and a good interviewer.