

Practical Interviewing

Interviewing as a Communication Process

Third Edition



By

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Orlando E. Blake, PhD CPT

As a Certified Performance Technologist (CPT), Licensed Unitive™ Coach and Certified Mediator Dr. Blake's more than 30 years of experience is uniquely diverse. His clients come from commercial printing, consumer products, food processing, healthcare, heavy engineering construction, government, utilities, entertainment, defense and tribal businesses.

Orlando is a Founding Fellow of the Institute of Professional Coaching Association at Mclean Hospital a Harvard Medical School Affiliate. He received his masters from the University of Southern California, with a specialization in applied behavioral sciences. He followed this with a doctorate and breakthrough research at Claremont Graduate University that discovered unique techniques to resolve disputes. Harvard has included his research in their study of critical moments in conflict resolution

He served on the Mediation and Mediator Mentor Panels for the Los Angeles County Superior Courts, and Inland Valley Mediation & Arbitration Services (IVAMS) mediation panel. Orlando was awarded Certificates Appreciation and a letter of merit from County of Los Angeles, California, Superior Courts for his contribution to alternative dispute resolution.

Orlando's business experience includes senior executive positions for Warner Bros, and Guess? Inc. After leaving corporate life, he provided key executive career services and personal coaching for Lee, Hecht, Harrison and Right Consultants in Southern California.

In addition to Dr. Blake's nationally recognized consulting and coaching practice he was a consulting editor for Personnel Policy Manual™ and HRMatters™, and a columnist for the maquilladora-focused Twin Plant News™. Dr. Blake's books include:

- *Leading the Total Quality Mission: aligning principles, practices & management*
- *Leading Continuous Improvement: building capability & commitment*
- *Leading Total Quality: management's role in aligning leadership & total quality practices*
- *POWW! Mediation & Facilitation for HR Professionals*
- *POWW! Stop Fighting & Start Talking for Managers*

- *Investigations at Work: the art of fact-finding & investigating employee complaints*
- *Career On! Creating career clarity and confidence, and avoiding a career cul-de-sac.*
- *Life's Path: make a choice that brings you happiness*

Dr. Blake taught for the Department of Law & Public Policy at University of California, Riverside Extension and also sat on the advisory for the Certificate in Dispute Resolution. For Claremont Graduate University he taught in the School of Organizational & Behavioral Sciences and he is an Adjunct Professor for University of Arizona South's Commerce Program.

As a result of his commitment to human potential and performance improvement, he was awarded the experienced professional designation of Certified Performance Technologist (CPT) from the International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI).

The Blake Group provides workshops, seminars and coaching in all aspects of interviewing including in this book. Orlando will help you improve the results of your interviewing for:

- Hiring and Selection
- Performance Coaching & Improvement
- Career Counseling
- Discipline
- Termination
- Problem Solving
- Grievance & Employee Complaint Handling
- Program Evaluation & Information Gathering

Call Orlando now to get the results you want and need to improve your interviewing skills and reduce your legal vulnerability.

Call The Blake Group now at 520.455.9393

You may also visit The Blake Group on the web at: www.blake-group.com.

Introduction to the Third Edition

First, thank you for downloading the third edition of *Practical Interviewing*.

Second, I have completely revised and updated many of the sections. I have added new content that will help you improve your interviewing ability, hone your skills, and immediately improve the outcomes you want and need. For those of you familiar with The Blake Group, and what we offer and for those of you new to The Blake Group, this is an update to our catalog of free offerings.

We are prepared to help you achieve even more by supporting this book with our coaching, seminars and workshops on all of the content in this book. So if you have any questions or needs, give us a call or visit our website: www.blake-group.com.

Basic Points

While each interview situation will be different because of its purpose and the individual concerned, the following general points apply to each.

This series of articles covering interviews will explore:

- Problems and how to overcome them
- Approach, preparation and structure
- Questioning techniques
- Maintaining control
- Note taking
- How to find out what we need to know
- The importance of clear job descriptions and specifications.

Role of Interviewing

An interview is a structured interaction conducted for a specific purpose and focused on defined content. Interviewing can provide a means for gathering general or specific details, data, ideas, concepts, feedback, concerns, or history. The format of an interview depends on the nature, purpose and goal, the time constraints, styles of the participants – interviewer and interviewee. Yet all of the interview types share common characteristics and elements which can yield positive information exchange and which will produce constructive results.

Each of these interviewing categories requires different approaches and techniques for them to be effective. In addition, each category is part of the communication landscape that requires planning, practice, and polished performance. This book will provide an overview and checklist for each interview category.

First, consider the definition of communication:

The transference of ideas, facts and feelings between two or more people in order to achieve an understanding between them.

Conversation:

It is a natural form of communication between people.

The interview is a bit different:

The interview is a conversation which has a purpose and is directed towards its object by the interviewer. The interview is a face-to-face meeting and discussion between two or more people for a specific purpose.

The four essential ingredients are:

- 1) Communication
- 2) Between 2 or more parties
- 3) One of which is in control
- 4) With a purpose

These four ingredients are common to all interviewing categories.

Initial Contact



Any first interview between two or more people contains potential difficulties. One such problem area is the effect of *first impressions*. The initial assumptions, perceptions, and inferences made by both you and the interviewee are often inaccurate yet lasting. It is difficult for an individual to discard preconceived or immediately framed impressions and then allow either of you to receive more information before making a decision or passing judgment.

One of the most effective means of managing this issue is to discuss the accuracy of initial impressions with the individual under consideration and to allow enough time for the absorption of information beyond that received in the first few minutes of contact. The impact of *expectations* must also be taken into consideration. Unrealistic expectations on the part of you or the interviewee most often lead to disappointment and frustration. Destructive expectations can be avoided if both parties state clearly their agendas and needs.

The final major area of potential difficulty is that of establishing some degree of *trust* between the participants in the interview. The interviewer's power to make

decisions cannot be ignored. However, if you show sensitivity in setting the pace and tone of the interview and in establishing an open and honest dialogue between yourself and the interviewee, you can do much toward laying a foundation of mutual trust that will be valuable both during and following the interview.

Preparing for the Interview

Thorough preparation will allow you to conduct a well-structured, smooth-flowing interview that will yield the maximum amount of useful information in the shortest amount of time. The more you know at the outset of the interview, the more useful information can be increased. Before contact with the interviewee(s), you should obtain and review all relevant information. You should formulate some plan, whether formal or informal, for conducting the interview. Very often the plan may involve nothing more than a rough outline or a short list of key questions to be addressed. Generally, it is best for you to keep any written outline or plan immediately available as long as you are not distracted by referring to your outline.

One of the most neglected areas of interview preparation concerns an awareness of self. Are you tired? Are there personal issues that may interfere with the interview? Are there external stress factors, unrelated to the person(s) to be interviewed that may affect the outcome of the interview? Are there specific or general hidden agendas that may interfere in an unbiased interaction? You are not a machine that can be turned on and off just because a specific meeting has been scheduled.

Numerous variables can affect your listening accuracy, attention span, tolerance, responsiveness, and clarity of presentation. If distractions are present, I suggest that the interviewee be informed. You model appropriate, responsible behavior. You should remove possible barriers to an effective exchange. If you are experiencing too much anxiety to conduct the interview competently, it is advised that he reschedule the meeting.

Preparation

- Gather facts: all interviewing requires the interviewer to gather facts prior to the interview. Whether it is analyzing the job specification and knowledge, skills and abilities before a selection interview or investigating and fact-finding before an employee complaint.
- Ensure privacy and no interruptions: pick a place where you will have privacy and make sure you are not interrupted. If you are constantly interrupted you will lose momentum and communicate that the interviewee is not important to you.
- Allow adequate time: make sure in your planning you allow enough time for each

interview. Some interviews will take longer than others; be clear about the purpose so you will be able to carve out enough time in your schedule.

- Plan your approach: do your homework, plan your method with your technique in mind, and make room for the unexpected. Develop a list of preplanned questions that will help you stay on track.

Barriers to Communication

Physical	The room - its size, warmth, comfort, untidiness. The layout of the furniture - large desk, small chair etc. Bad positioning of applicant - sun in eyes. Interruptions - secretary, telephone. Distractions - glass office, road works outside. Distracting mannerisms - biro chewing, foot tapping.
Speech Problems	Use of Jargon. Talking too much by interviewer. Foreign interviewee. Physical problems - stutter, deaf. Speaking down to interviewee. Talking above applicant's head. Not establishing rapport.
Other	Lack of understanding. Misunderstanding. Bias. Status. Lack of confidence.

Setting the Climate

A responsive interview does not just happen; it is created out of a specific design that lends itself to maximum benefits for you and the interviewee. The lighting, the placement of chairs, the use and type of background music, the organization of meeting space, and the degree of privacy all have a bearing upon the initial receptivity of the information being passed between participants. However, the most important consideration in establishing the proper climate is your attitude and the

interviewee's. If both parties are willing to listen without bias, are open to the other person's perceptions, allow enough time to foster accurate understanding, and show a respect for each other's self-worth, then they themselves create a responsive environment.

Other factors can also assist in developing a comfortable climate. If you offer the interviewee a cup of coffee or a cold drink, this provides enough time to allow the individual to become accustomed to the environment before the interview moves into substantive areas, discusses general issues in order to reduce any unnecessary anxiety, and states clearly the purpose of the meeting; this will add considerably to the development of an effective setting. Attention to the physical and emotional tone of the environment will generally pay off significantly for both you - in obtaining the information you pursue - and the interviewee, in feeling that he or she has been taken seriously and treated with respect.

Conducting the Interview

It is important for you to work into the body of the interview as smoothly as possible. You should look for a natural break in the general conversation. However, if a natural break does not appear, you should take the initiative in beginning a directed exchange. The difficulties most commonly encountered during the course of an interview are the result of poor questions and ineffective listening. A good question has a specific purpose. By asking the right questions and listening attentively, you can be assured of obtaining the information you need or of avoiding wasted time when the information is unavailable. It is important that you listen "between the lines" and, of course, observe interviewee's nonverbal behavior. In conducting an interview, seven key points should be kept in mind:

1. Avoid the use of questions that can be answered "yes" or "no".
2. Do not furnish answers to the questions.
3. If the interviewee hesitates, you can reword the question.
4. Avoid asking "loaded" or "leading" questions.
5. Be as natural as possible during the interview.
6. Avoid disagreeing with an interviewee's statement; disagreement signals that the "wrong thing" has been said.
7. Do not jump to conclusions; prejudging before the interview is over can hinder information gathering.

Effective interviewing does not depend merely on asking the "right" questions. If you are uncertain about what the interviewee has said, you can use three primary techniques to facilitate the communication process:

1. *Restating*, simply repeating exact words, is an effective method for you to indicate that you are listening attentively, and it encourages further elaboration on the part of the interviewee.
2. *Rephrasing*, summarizing the interviewee's statements, is an excellent method for ensuring that you understand what the respondent has intended.
3. *Reflecting*, using statements that mirror the interviewee's feelings, indicates that you are attempting to understand the other person's perspective, but does not imply agreement.

Conduct

- Put interviewee at ease and establish rapport: interviewing is stressful enough. You will get better results by establishing rapport with the person you are interviewing. People feel comfortable talking about things they are familiar with. You might try the weather or as I did – the traffic and parking.
- Explain the purpose: take time to verbally outline what you will be focusing on during the interview and how you will conduct the interview.
- Encourage the interviewee: establishing rapport is the first step in encouraging the interviewee. Verbally explaining the structure and purpose of the interview gives you the opportunity to explain the person will be given ample time to present his or her back ground or his or her issues, etc.
- Do not ask leading questions or those which can be answered with yes or no: open ended questions are the best way to get the person talking. You sequence your questions by using a mixture of open and closed questions depending on the subject.
- Listen and observe: get the interviewee talking and listen to what he or she is saying as well as what is not being said. Observe body language and make eye contact with the person. Be respectful of cultural differences.
- Investigate areas which are not clear: if you encounter something that is not clear explore it further. You can ask the person, “help me understand...” or you can make a note and come back around to it later in the interview.
- Take notes: how can you make a decision if you don’t take notes? Practice taking notes without looking away from the interviewee. It will seem strange at first, but with some practice you will get the hang of it. Record verbatim answers to questions and use descriptions of behavior; avoid judgmental language.
- Check information before making a decision: review your notes and all of the available information before you make a decision.
- Judge impartially: avoid bias. We all have preferences and prejudices; filter yours

and recognize how they might impact your final decision.

- Summarize at regular intervals; during the interview make sure you summarize periodically to secure understanding of the interviewee's statements and presentation.
- Conclude on a positive note by stating what action if any will be taken and by when: if you have planned your interview you will know what will transpire after the end of the interview. To present yourself and your organization in the most positive light, tell the person what the next steps are and when to expect the event.

Contract Setting

Many interviews are conducted within one session. However, an initial interview often forms the beginning of what will be an ongoing working relationship. If there are more sessions, you have the responsibility for initiating a contractual agreement. This is a crucial juncture: it is a period when both parties must state their commitments to the ongoing process of contact and to the specific responsibilities required.

Contract setting is often done with you explaining the conditions which need to be met, so that the interviewee can determine what her or his role will be and whether he or she can accomplish the task. Thus, job criteria, measurable outcomes, risks, etc., need to be clarified. If you are person's direct supervisor, you must communicate the amount of support that you can offer as well as how you will evaluate the individual's performance.

Concluding the Interview

Before concluding, you should make sure that the interviewee has had ample opportunity to ask questions and share perceptions. Then, when the entire interview has been completed, you should thank the interviewee, when appropriate, for his or her cooperation. If there is to be another meeting, you should be certain that the interviewee understands when and where the next interview will take place.

Your responsibility for closure involves your willingness to listen to the feelings, thoughts, and ideas of the interviewee. If the relationship has existed over an extended period of time, you may wish to begin discussing closure well in advance of the last scheduled meeting time. Key questions you might pose to the interviewee include: How do you feel about the loss of our relationship? What issues may arise in the future that you are concerned about facing alone or with another supervisee? What unfinished business can be taken care of before the end of our formal

relationship? What does a change in structure mean to you? How can the benefits of our contact be continued without the structure we have developed? And, What unmet expectations can be achieved without the continuation of our relationship?

Last-minute complaints or problems will often surface, and they may reflect the interviewee's concern about terminating the relationship. Such concerns need to be addressed. If the relationship between you and interviewee has become closely bonded, then sadness, disappointment, or loss may be expressed. Your goal is to achieve closure with the knowledge that both you and the interviewee have done their best to carry on a beneficial exchange during your time together.

Follow Up

Check that proposed action has been taken and that desired results have been achieved, either by further interview or informal discussion.

Types of Interviews

While the sequence and the general guidelines generally hold true regardless of the nature and scope of the interview, specific types of interviews require additional strategies, techniques, and considerations.

The following format, used to compare and contrast the types of interviews explored in *Practical Interviewing*, provides an "at a glance" outline.

The headings used in the interview outlines focus on the following elements:

1. *Purpose of Interview* lists primary goals as well as the function of the interview type. This section also indicates the number of sessions generally required to complete the interview.
2. *Preparation* indicates specific information that the interviewer must possess in order to conduct the interview effectively. The section suggests key concepts, questions, and/or issues with which the interviewer needs to be familiar.
3. *Conduct* notes key points of information that will assist the interviewer in thoroughly assessing the interviewee's strengths, weaknesses, needs, etc. And *suggests* a general approach to conducting the interview. The methods used will generally have a significant impact upon the outcome of the exchange.

Skills of Interviewing

A good interviewer will control an interview without doing all the talking. He/She will use a variety of skills to draw out the information needed. The main 'tools' for achieving a successful interview are questions, statements, summaries, listening and observing.

Types of Questions

A good interviewer will alternate questions of different types. Most interviewers need to discover both facts and feelings - a combination of open and specific questions -although the balance may alter.

TYPE OF QUESTION	EXAMPLE	USAGE
OPEN (Cannot be answered yes or no)	'Why did you decide to join your local squash club' OR 'Tell me about your local squash club'	To get the interviewee talking about ideas and feelings as well as facts. A good question in a non- directive situation.
CLOSED (Should be answered yes or no)	'I understand from what you say that you don't like the squash club, am I right?'	To summarize. To bring back to the subject at hand if the conversation has wandered. To check if you have understood correctly.
SPECIFIC (Fact Finding)	'On what date did you join the local squash club?'	To find out the facts. A good directive approach. Good for the talkative interviewee.
REFLECTING (avoids bias; keeps talking)	'You aren't too happy with the squash club then?'	Reverses a statement of question by rephrasing and sending it back to the interviewee. Keeps the interviewee talking. Avoids personal involvement or bias showing. Encourages interviewee to expand the subject further.
LEADING (test reaction)	'I think it's disgraceful that the squash club is closed don't you?'	The answer is given in the question Dangerous if used inadvertently. Good for testing reaction, or relaxing a nervous person initially.
HYPOTHETICAL (obtains general views)	'If the squash club were to close what would you do?'	Good for selection -testing possible reaction to certain situations.

Statements

It is necessary for the interviewer to have the facts to be able to feed information into the interview for two reasons:

- To clarify misunderstandings
- To give information where it is needed to give understanding

Summaries

Interim

- To keep control of the interview
- To point out clearly how the interview has progressed

Final

- To give a positive finish. To make the final position clear
- To sum up what has been achieved during the interview
- To make sure the interviewee is clear about future action that was decided

Listening

Obvious but essential. The interviewer has to provide the "triggers" and listen and learn from the responses. It is not an opportunity for the interviewer to show off his/her knowledge or expertise. Concentrating throughout and analyzing what is said and not said and its significance:

- Picking up points for later expansion.
- Noticing discrepancies.
- Listening for generalization that may need to be questioned more specifically.

Being **seen** to be listening - an important part of establishing and maintaining rapport. Eye-contact is very important here -remember under 30 per cent there will be not enough contact -over 60 per cent becomes uncomfortable.

The Pregnant Pause - useful for probing. Don't afraid of silence; use it.

How Do You Show You Are Listening?

- Asking relevant questions
- Eye contact - 30 to 60%
- Body language
- Summaries
- Nodding

- Paralinguistics - Paralinguistics are vocalized indications of attention: e.g. grunts, "uh hmm", "uh huh", "oh yes", "really", etc.
- Aim for 80/20 – interviewee/interviewer talking

Hints to Good Listening

- Stop talking
- Listen for emotion as well as fact
- Put own issues aside
- Put talker at ease
- Look and act interested
- Remove distractions
- Try to put yourself in the talkers place
- Allow plenty of time
- Keep control of your temper
- Do not argue or criticize
- Ask questions to clarify points
- Listen for what is said as well as what is not said
- Ask searching but objective questions
- Reflect on meaning and summarize
- Stop talking!

Observing

Like listening. Important clues can be gained by watching expression and body language. These cannot be interpreted in a vacuum, but depend on the person and the situation.

General Interviewing Checklist

Objective

- What am I to achieve by the end of the interview?

Preparation

- What can I do before the interview?
- Mental
- Environment

- Material

Skills

- What can I do during the interview to stimulate communication and retain control?

Questioning Efficiency

- Listening and observing
- Making statement when necessary
- Using summaries
- Establishing and maintaining control

Follow Up

- Do I need to take action?
- If so - when?

Mental and Environment

Mental

- What is the objective?
- How long should it last?
- What do I know about the interviewee?
- What approach should I take?

Environment

- What sort of room? Is there a choice?
- How should we sit?
- Are there any distraction?
For example: sun in eyes, wobbly chairs, no table for coffee or water, noise, etc.
- Interesting view out of the window
- Interruptions
- Telephone
- People

Material and Conduct

- Material: What information do I need?
For example: Company policies, Reports; Personnel file, Applicant form, Relevant statistics, Names of specialists, Job description, etc.
- Establish rapport
- Explain purpose
- Encourage interviewee
- Be interested

The following will give you guidelines for each specific category of interview. Use these guidelines to formulate your interview process and integrate them into your own style.

Hiring, Employment and Selection Interviews

Purpose

To select the best available candidate to do the job and work for the company. That is, to determine if the applicant is right for the job and the organization and if the job and organization is right for the applicant.

To assess the strengths, weaknesses, and needs of the individual being interviewed in light of the specific requirement(s) of the position and the general needs of the organization. The employment interview is usually conducted in one session. To select from a number of qualified applicants that individual who is best suited for a position requiring significant responsibilities. The selection interview is generally conducted over a period of time and requires several separate interviewing sessions

Preparation

The success or failure of hiring or selection interview is directly related to the amount and type of preparation that you put into it. Too many people prepare for a 9:00 am interview by glancing at the applicants resume at 8:30 am. If you are doing this, don't be surprised when qualified candidates turn down the job and unqualified get hired.

The first question you should ask your self is: Is the job really necessary?
It is always useful to go through the process of analyzing if the job is necessary; has it changed? Do we need to alter the job description to encompass these changes?
Why did the last person leave?

Requirements of the position. Precisely what will the individual who fills this position be required to do? What are the educational, work experience, technical background, and other requirements of this job? See the following section on Job Descriptions.

Critical aspects of effective behavior. What specific behaviors will ensure successful entry to and maintenance of the position? What ineffective traits or characteristics would decrease the likelihood of success?

Since the selection interview takes place with highly qualified individuals, the interviewer must detect often subtle differences among applicants. The interviewer should consider a rank ordering of ideal overt and covert traits before the interview takes place.

Organizational details. What is the salary range? What are the organizational policies and procedures relevant to the position under consideration? What benefits and restrictions are present for the new employee?

The implications if we get this wrong are obvious:- it can lead to aggravation and upset, waste of resources, waste of money and time; or, if we haven't made clear what the job entails, the person may get bored and won't stay.

The second questions we should ask: What is the job? We must be perfectly clear about what the job needs is all about and what the performance standards are expected.

Draw up an interview plan - decide on the main areas of consideration; use an assessment system to compare candidates in these areas. Check all essential background information, write-up if necessary:

- Job description (written picture of the job) – see Job Description section below
- Person specification (written picture of the person able to do the job)
- Who will the person have to work with - large team, or small etc.?
- Application form (look for clues, omissions, note further detail needed; questions).
- Internal file if applicant is an employee of the company
- Know the conditions of employment, salary etc.
- Allow adequate time, ensure privacy and if possible prevent interruptions
- Arrange reception and order tea/coffee

What a Job Description Does

You can't hire the best person for the job if you have not established what the job is. A job description is the best description or complete picture of the job, at the time of the interview. It should describe:

- What the person will do,
- With whom,
- With what resources,
- According to what standards,
- Under what conditions,
- The role within the organization – Where does it fit? What happens if it done poorly, or not done at all.
- The amount and type of discretion,
- Reporting relationships,
- With what equipment, and

- Any unusual conditions.

Generally the job description:

- Enables both employer and employee to have a common understanding about what the job is and what it involves.
- Any newcomer to the job can be told exactly what the job entails, and what other people's jobs are.
- It can be used as the basis of an induction course.
- It can help in the recruitment, both by providing a basis for the job advertisement and telling the applicant what the job entails.
- It can be used as the basis for assessing performance.
- It can be used to indicate the level of knowledge and skill required to do the job properly

Conduct

- Establish rapport, be friendly and enthusiastic (try not to keep candidate waiting)
- Encourage candidate to talk freely about their job and themselves
- Use open-ended questions for expansion - probe for facts
- Test knowledge and reaction (e.g. quick thinking) by hypothetical questions
- **LISTEN AND OBSERVE**
- Write brief notes of important facts, but maintain eye contact regularly - do not make note-taking distracting
- Check that all information needed to make an assessment has been collected (check interview plan)
- Give details of job and company
- Ask candidates if they have any questions
- Finish positively - shake hands, thank them for coming and state when you will be contacting them regarding the outcome
- Settle any expenses incurred

Career orientation. The applicant's immediate and long-range career goals must be obtained. In addition, the interviewee's expectations and perceptions of the position must be discussed.

Educational background. The schooling, grades, subjects, honors, and

extracurricular activities of the applicant need to be obtained. Such information can give some indication of the interviewee's intelligence, initiative, and reliability.

Work experience. The applicant's previous work performance is one of the best indicators in predicting his success or failure in the position under consideration. His previous responsibilities, knowledge, skills, and reason(s) for changing positions should be explored.

Social history. The major interest here, depending on the nature of the position, is the applicant's ability to get along with others. The interviewee's activities, hobbies, community interests, and additional responsibilities may shed light on his use of personal resources.

Follow Up

- Write up notes more fully
- Assess candidate against needs in the main areas of consideration decided on earlier
- Compare with other candidates
- Make the decision
- Follow up with references
- Inform all candidates of the decision by letter within the time given to them at their interview
- Prepare training program for new member of staff

The employment interview is generally conducted within a highly structured format; before the meeting you should prepare a standardized list of questions. You should focus on factual information and at the same time observe relevant non-verbal cues: voice inflection, body posture, appearance, eye contact, and general demeanor. Since the information gathered must be organized and retained, the interviewer should take notes unobtrusively or jot down important points immediately after the meeting.

Questioning

Assuming that the applicant(s) have been prescreened, the interviewer should design questions that are self-evaluative in nature. For example, he/she might ask the following behavioral questions:

"Tell me about some of the problems you encountered in your last position and how

you dealt with them?"

"When do you realize that you have made a poor decision? How do you react when that occurs?"

"Where do you see yourself five years from now?"

"What do you consider to be your primary professional asset? What is your major professional liability?"

"What benefits do you see yourself deriving from the organization?"

"What is your philosophy on the management of others?"

"What values do you espouse for an organization? Do you feel your values would be consistent with those of this organization? If so, why?"

Your goal is to seek examples of job relevant behaviors. See the section on: Employment or Selection Interview Questions

Questioning Risks

You want to draw out and interpret examples of past behavior and actual experiences that relate to job content. You are asking the applicant to "tell you a story."

Sometimes the applicant can't remember any specific details that relate to the question under the tension of the interview. As the interviewer do you think the applicant is avoiding? Is the applicant not forthcoming? Is the applicant avoiding an embarrassing situation?

All applicants are trying to put their best face on. Behavioral questions help filter and minimize that so you can get to the real person's performance. However, they don't solve the issue completely.

Avoid questions that suggest the answers. Here are a few that might be suggestive:

- Do you think you can delegate effectively?
- How well do you accept criticism?
- Do you feel you can handle the pressure of this job?
- It helps to a sense of humor on this job. How is yours?
- Do you like to travel?

Hiring or Selection Interview Questions

Typically, a wide variety of questions can be used to help gain information about a candidate's job skills. Use these questions as guides to help you develop questions which focus on a specific job's skill requirements. The questions that follow are considered behavioral because they are focused on the person's behavior in prior

and related situations.

1. Describe a time in any job you've held when you were faced with problems or pressures which tested your ability to cope. What did you do?
2. Give an example of a time when you had to refrain from speaking or you were unable to finish a task because you did not have enough information to go on. Be specific.
3. Give an example of a time when you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.
4. Tell me about a time when you had to use your spoken communication skills in order to get a point across that was important to you.
5. Can you tell me about a job experience in which you had to speak up in order to be sure that other people knew what you thought or felt?
6. Give me an example of a time when you feel you were able to motivate your colleagues or subordinates.
7. What do you do when one of your people is performing badly, just not getting the job done? Give an example.
8. When you had to do a job that was particularly uninteresting, how did you deal with it?
9. Give me an example of a specific occasion when you conformed to a policy with which you did not agree.
10. Describe a situation in which you felt it necessary to be very attentive to your environment.
11. Give an example of a time when you had to use your fact-finding skills to gain information in order to solve a problem - then tell me how you analyzed the information to come to a decision.
12. Give me an example of an important goal which you have set in the past and tell me about your success in reaching it.
13. Describe the most significant written document/report/presentation which you have had to complete.

14. Give me an example of a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
15. Give me an example of a time when you were able to communicate with another person, even though that individual may not have liked you personally.
16. Describe a situation in which you were able effectively to 'read' another person and tailor your actions according to your understanding of their individual needs or values.
17. What did you do in your last job in order to be effective with your organization and planning? Be specific.
18. Describe a situation in your job when you could structure your own work schedule. What did you do?
19. Describe the most creative work-related project which you have carried out.
20. Describe a time when you felt it was necessary to modify or change your actions in order to respond to the needs of another person?
21. What experience have you had with a misunderstanding with a customer or fellow employee? How did you solve the problem?
22. What did you do in your last job to contribute towards teamwork? Be specific.
23. Give me an example of a problem which you faced on any job you have had and tell me how you went about solving it.
24. Describe a situation in which you were able to influence positively the actions of others in a desired direction.

You may find out more about selection and behavioral interviewing techniques online by searching using the term “behavioral interviewing.”

You do not need to compile a fresh set of questions for every position. Once you have identified common competencies for position profiles you have a template for applicant interviews. You can then adapt and tailor your questions for each open position.

Negligent Hiring

Every hiring decision should be documented with a checklist of information to be verified from the resume and the application including:

- Contacting the previous employers, verifying dates of employment, salary history, job performance, relationships with co-workers, and reasons for leaving employment.
- Checking and verifying education history.
- Background checks: if you use a background check service or do it yourself, the Fair Credit Reporting Act specifies that applicants must be allowed to see the information collected by a credit bureau and told if that information led to their rejection.
- Don't promise anything in a hiring or selection interview. Courts are ruling with increasing frequency that if you make a promise to an applicant you are obligated to keep it.
- You may convey enthusiasm for your organization. However be careful not to overstate:
 - Risky: "We are the positioned to be leaders in the industry and you are going to be riding along with us."
 - Best: we aim to be the leaders in this industry. We hope to be able to offer you some great opportunities.

Measuring Your Hiring Interviewing Success

At some point you should measure the success of your interviewing and hiring process by asking yourself these questions:

- Is the person hired or selected working out as predicted?
- Are strengths, weaknesses and developmental areas identified in the interview popping up on the job?
- Did you fail to explore some factors or stress some too much and other too little?
- Did you correctly evaluate the applicant based on job relevant facts that were part of the interview?
- Is the job description complete, accurate and job relevant?

Information-Gathering and Program Evaluation

Adapted in part from: *Investigations at Work: the art fact-finding and investigating employee complaints (2nd edition)* © 2007 Orlando Blake, PhD CPT, The Blake Group.

Purpose

To solicit information and/or feedback on awareness, perceptions, feelings, and ideas about the department, agency, organization, personnel, and/or policies.

This interview is often used as part of an attitude survey directed toward the betterment of the work setting or to evaluate a program or process. The information-gathering interview is often conducted in association with a written survey and is commonly completed in one session with an interviewee.

Evaluative interviews are focused on measuring outcomes and include questions that ask about changes and levels of performance for the organization and for people affected.

As you define the evaluation's purpose and scope, the following questions should be considered:

- Why is the evaluation being done? What information do stakeholders need or hope to gain from the evaluation?
- What requirements does the evaluation need to fulfill?
- Which components of the program are the strongest candidates for evaluation?
- How does the evaluation align with the long-term agenda for your program?
- What resources (budget, staff, time) are available for the evaluation?

Preparation

Background information. You should understand thoroughly the purpose and type of information being sought. You should also know how the data being generated will be used. Before the interview takes place, you should prepare a concise outline of those items to be covered during the exchange.

Four Design Steps

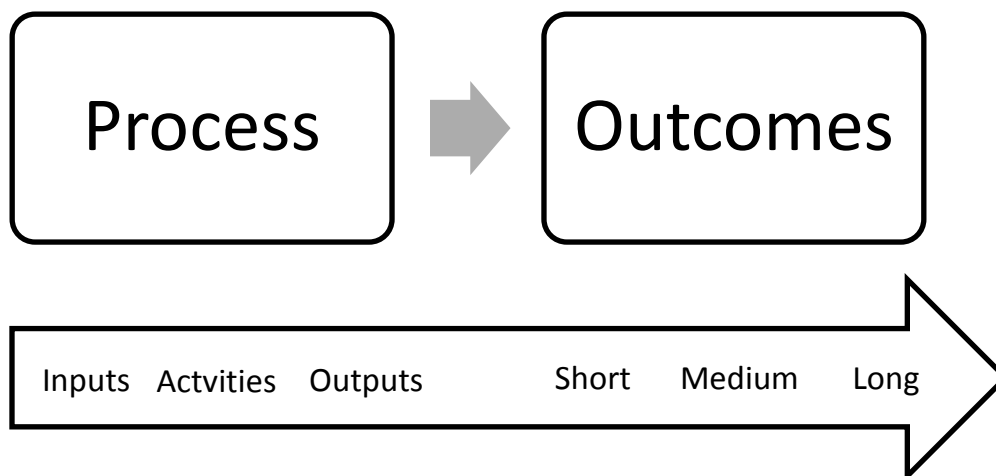
Step 1: Develop your logic model to clarify the program design and change expectations.

A logic model is a graphic “snapshot” of how the program is projected to work (its concept of change or improvement); it communicates the intended relationships among program components.

Inputs, activities, and outputs on the left side of the logic model depict a program’s processes/implementation.

Changes that are expected to result from these processes are called outcomes and are depicted on the right side of the logic model

Evaluation questions should test some aspect of the program’s change outcomes as depicted in a logic model.



Step 2: Define the evaluation’s purpose and scope

As you define the evaluation’s purpose and scope, the following questions should be considered:

- Why is the evaluation being done?
 - Each evaluation should have a primary purpose
- What information do stakeholders need or hope to gain from the evaluation?
- What requirements does the evaluation need to fulfill?
 - Stakeholders may have specific expectations

- Which components of the program are the strongest candidates for evaluation?
 - You do not need to evaluate your whole program at once
- How does the evaluation align with the long-term research agenda for your program?
 - What do you want to know in 1, 3, 5 or 10 years?
- What resources (budget, staff, and time) are available for the evaluation?
 - Evaluation's scope should align with resources

Step 3: Determine the type of evaluation design: process or outcome

Process Evaluation	Outcome Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Goal is generally to inform changes or improvements in the program's operations▪ Documents what the program is doing and to what extent and how consistently the program has been implemented as intended▪ Does not require a comparison group	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Goal is to identify the results or effects of a program▪ Measures program beneficiaries' changes in knowledge, attitude(s), behavior(s) and/or condition(s) that result from a program▪ May include a comparison group (impact evaluation)▪ Typically require quantitative data and advanced statistical methods

Step 4: Draft and finalize evaluation's questions

Evaluation questions should be:

- Clear, specific, and well-defined
- Focus on a program or program component
- Measureable by the evaluation
- Aligned with your logic model

Process Questions are focused on:

- Who?
- What?
- When?

- Where?
- How?
- Why?
- Focus on the program or a program component
- Ask who, what, where, when, why, or how?
- Use exploratory verbs, such as report, describe, discover, seek, or explore

About:

- Inputs/resources
- Program activities
- Outputs Stakeholder views

Examples:

- How is the program being implemented?
- How do program beneficiaries describe their program experiences?
- What resources are being described as needed for implementing the program?

Outcome Questions are focused on:

- Changes?
- Effects?
- Impacts?
- Be direct and specific as to the theory or assumption being tested (i.e., program effectiveness or impact)
- Examine changes, effects, or impacts
- Specify the outcome(s) to be measured

In:

- (Short-term) Knowledge Skills Attitudes Opinions
- (Medium-term) Behaviors Actions
- (Long-term) Conditions Status

Examples:

- Did program recipients change their (knowledge, attitude, behavior, or condition) after program completion?
- Did all types of program recipients benefit from the program or only specific subgroups?
- Are there differences in outcomes for program participants compared to those not in the program?

Interviewee's background. An awareness of the background of the interviewee is often helpful in formulating the specific questions to be covered. In addition, you should take any known biases into consideration when he evaluates the responses.

Conduct

The questions asked during an information-gathering interview are usually open-ended—ones that cannot be answered by a "yes" or "no" response. Attitudes, perceptions, feelings, thoughts, ideas, comments, and concerns about specific issues will generally be solicited during this interview. Key questions might include the following:

"How would you go about improving the present ...?"

"When did you first observe ..?"

"What are your observations of the last ...?"

"What ideas do you have about ...?"

"How have you avoided . . .?"

"What recommendations do you have on .. .?"

"What events, in your opinion, caused ...?"

"How could we go about accomplishing...?"

"What procedure enables you to...?"

"What do you think the major issues are about ...?"

"Is the discrepancy between ideal and actual conditions of ...?"

"What are the consequences (positive and negative) of...?"

Who experiences these consequences...? How many people are affected?"

"How often and for how long are they affected? What is the intensity of the effect?"

"How much does the fact that the problem is experienced to this degree by these people matter to them?"

Important Points to Remember

- Evaluation questions are the keystone in an evaluation from which all other activities evolve
- Evaluation questions vary depending on whether you will conduct a process vs an outcome evaluation
- Prior to developing evaluation questions, define the evaluation's purpose and scope and decide the type of evaluation design – process or outcome.
- Evaluation questions should be clear, specific, and well- defined

- Evaluation questions should be developed in consideration of your long-term study agenda

Key issues to be addressed should be identified openly. You should not possess any hidden agendas, or unspoken motives, for the interview; rather, you have a responsibility to inform the respondent about the rationale for the meeting and the purpose for which the information will be used.

The information-gathering and evaluation interview is conducted within a predetermined format (which you develop) that can provide information and feedback on the issues under investigation in the least time consuming manner. Establishing a climate of trust is essential in gaining useful data. You must be cautious about any potential violations of confidentiality and, unless otherwise agreed, must ensure the interviewee of anonymity.

Career Counseling

Purpose

To assist the interviewee in assessing alternatives to determine future professional plans and goals. The career counseling interview might be initiated by the interviewee and may require several meetings. If more than one meeting is needed, the first session should result in some plan of action for the interviewee to complete before the next meeting occurs.

Preparation

Interviewee's background. Once you have been asked to conduct a career-counseling interview, you should obtain, with the interviewee's permission, all relevant background information, i.e., work history, aptitude test results, educational background, performance evaluations, etc. This information will provide a general overview of the interviewee's previous efforts and experience.

Resources within reason. If you have some advance indication of the general area the interviewee wishes to pursue, you can gather information regarding opportunities, qualifications, and resources. Consequently, you can provide immediate information, which may be all the interviewee needs. You can reasonably be expected to acquire available resources (college brochures, information about financial assistance, or pamphlets on career options) which correspond to the interviewee's abilities and interests.

Much of your role in a career-counseling interview is nondirective since the majority of information should be supplied by the interviewee. However, to assist the interviewee further, you may guide the conversation toward the following self-assessment areas:

Strengths. You might ask the interviewee to assess his or her personal and professional strengths and their relationship to present career considerations.

Weaknesses. You might guide the interviewee in assessing previous and present personal and professional weaknesses which might hinder future endeavors.

Priorities. You should at some point acknowledge personal and professional priorities. He or she can then explore corresponding values associated with these priorities as he examines career alternatives.

Conduct

While you may furnish objective information regarding openings, requirements, organizational policies, and resources, be cautious about giving direct advice or instructions on the individual's career decision. The interviewee's choice of options must be dictated by her or his own values and motives.

Employee Appraisal and Performance Evaluation

Adapted in part from: The Blake Group's May 2016 Newsletter.

Purpose

A performance evaluation is literally, to set a value on something or someone. In this interview situation it is a two way process for you and the interviewee to indicate how they feel the work is going. The appraisal process addresses the two most important factors in motivation of people at work: "achievement" and "recognition" for work done.

Trend: Moving Away From Traditional Reviews

In September 2015, global management consulting firm Accenture PLC announced that it was ending traditional annual reviews. The company said in an August 2015 statement that it would begin a "new approach" that will "enable employees to receive timely feedback from their managers, on an ongoing basis, throughout the year." In making the change, Accenture joined other large firms that made similar moves; including accounting firm Deloitte, Microsoft Corp. and Netflix.



However, informal reviews that aren't uniform have the potential to become highly individualized, which could lead to more claims of inequality and bias, such as in compensation or promotions. It's difficult to speculate whether companies will have an easier or more difficult time using less formal documents, records of conversations and data points to defend against or disprove allegations of unlawful discrimination

The YAHOO! Case

The lawsuit against Yahoo was filed February 1, 2016 by Gregory Anderson, and alleges, among other things, that he and about 600 others at Yahoo were unfairly fired in 2014 after managers retooled a numerical ranking system to downgrade their performance.

The complaint alleges: "The employees were never told their actual metric numeric ranking or how it had been determined." The quarterly performance rating process

“therefore permitted and encouraged discrimination based on gender and any other personal bias held by management.”

Is it worth the effort?

You may be asking: - "Is it really worth the effort?"

A study reported in Harvard Business Review indicates that companies that use Performance Management Processes (PMPs) perform better financially than companies that don't. An analysis of 437 publicly held U.S. companies from 1990 through 1994 shows that PMPs encourage employees and managers to channel their time and energy toward defined strategic goals.

To appraise a person's performance over a given period against set targets in order to:

- Assess performance, building on strengths and identifying weaknesses.
- Identify areas of improvement, ways of overcoming weaknesses and consequent training needs.
- Discuss potential and future prospects.

In addition, most performance evaluation interviews develop a specific plan of action that details any behavioral changes or new strategies to be undertaken in the accomplishment of agreed-upon tasks. Additional or re-agreed upon goals may also be set. This interview is usually conducted in one session every 6 to 12 months.

Preparation

- Give due warning to allow employee to prepare
- Ask employee to think about own performance
- Study job description and targets
- Consult with others who might help assessment of employee
- Allow adequate time and avoid interruptions

Conduct

Present situation. You must learn how the interviewee perceives his or her work record. The employee can be asked to evaluate the positive and negative aspects of his or her present performance, production, goals, growth, responsibilities, etc. If you and the interviewee differ considerably in perceptions, you should discuss the interpretation of the documented evidence.

Make it Meaningful

How management can assist. You should encourage the employee to consider ways in which he or she as well as the organization can assist in creating more opportunities, improving work flow, removing barriers, increasing productivity, etc.

According to recent research (Jamie A. Gruman, Alan M. Saks. Performance management and employee engagement. *Human Resource Management Review*, 2011; 21 (2): 123 DOI: 10.1016/j.hrmmr.2010.09.004) the performance management process should evaluate and focus on employee engagement in addition to job performance.

Employees who feel engaged in their tasks do a better job, are less likely to make mistakes, and bring more energy, dedication and vigor into their performance. There is mounting evidence that higher levels of engagement correlate with lower turnover and less absenteeism.

The three psychological conditions that support personal engagement:

- Psychological meaningfulness associated with perception that one's role is worthwhile and valuable
- Psychological safety associated with one's perception of how safe it is to bring oneself to a role without fear of damage to self-image, status or career
- Psychological availability associated with the physical, emotional and psychological resources that can be brought to a role

Managers can make simple changes so that each employee may experience meaningfulness, safety and to become fully engaged in their work. Some employees might need more autonomy in their work, more challenge, more input, or perhaps more support or training. Making these changes signals to employees that it is important and the organization is committed to improving the engagement of its employees.

How the employee can improve the situation. You should request that the interviewee explore alternative actions that he might take to improve performance, increase responsibilities, meet goals, etc.

The performance evaluation interview often creates anxiety for both of you. Because the primary function of this interview is to give and receive feedback on previously

specified tasks and responsibilities, documentation on performance is essential. Just as important as constructive criticism is the use of reinforcement and praise when the employee has met or exceeded the previously agreed upon level of expectation.

Key Performance Indicators (KPI's). To evaluate performance, you should be familiar with the existing KPI's agreement between himself and the interviewee. This is usually in written form and will typically outline expectations on productivity, responsibilities, and specific tasks to be completed. The KPI's provides a base from which to measure performance during the next evaluation.

Work record. Before the interview takes place, you should study the interviewee's performance record so that specific issues can be addressed. In addition, you should formulate an outline of strengths and weaknesses as indicated by the employee's past efforts.

Expectations. You should prepare a list of expectations to be used in developing the KPI's for the next time period. Therefore, you and the interviewee must be aware of the needs of the interviewee, the organization, and the other personnel affected. The working draft of the KPI's should be flexible enough to accommodate the input of the interviewee so that a consensus can be achieved in establishing an agreement.

Performance Evaluation Steps

- Put at ease
- State purpose of interview
- Ask open questions, allowing employee to talk through points raised
- Summarize points as covered
- Re-summarize at end, underlining agreed action
- Set date for discussion of new targets

Target Setting

What do you need to know to help the interviewee set targets for the next performance period?

- Who is my boss?
- What is my job?
- What standards do I have to achieve?
- How am I getting there?
- Where do I go from here?
- How do I get there?
- What training and development do I need?

Typical Questions for the Appraisal Interview

By using these reactive questions you can cut through generalities and make people answer more specifically. In this way you can more clearly assess what is being said and where the targets lie.

- What was the most interesting task you had to do this year?
- What was the most successful project in the past year?
- In retrospect, how do you feel you handled the re-organisation?
- What areas of your work would you say require more attention?
- What extra help do you need to improve those areas?
- What do you think you need to learn now to develop the job further?
- What have been the most difficult problems that you have faced?
- Where do you see your future with the organisation?
- How do you see this job developing?
- What would you say are the priorities for the next twelve months?
- I'm not quite sure I understand what you are saying. Will you please go over the main points again?

Follow Up

- Complete appraisal form, show it to employee
- Allow employee to comment in writing, and sign
- Take steps to implement agreed action
- Follow up to ensure action has taken place

Nonthreatening Culture

No organization is going to be without politics. However, the more that an organization has a nonthreatening culture that facilitates ongoing communication and feedback among employees, the more productive and beneficial the performance appraisal process will be.

Frequent feedback is much more likely to create real-time changes in employees' job performance behaviors. It becomes difficult to pinpoint areas of improvement or identify potential growth with infrequent or annual formal feedback sessions, all of which does little good for the employee, supervisor or the company.

Compared with formal feedback, informal feedback occurs naturally and is perhaps unexpected. This is why there needs to be an environment in which people feel comfortable about providing and receiving frequent informal feedback.

Management does not bear the entire burden of performance. Employees should always be thinking about their own interpersonal skills for their own career advancement and development, if not for their own happiness and satisfaction at work.

Successful PMP's share several characteristics:

- Implementation at the Top
 - Senior management helped design
- A Simple Process
 - Integrated into their daily work
- A reasonable number of goals.
 - Limited to four or five
- Additional feedback
 - Supplemented by *frequent informal regular* feedback



Successful PMP's are:

- Flexible enough to accommodate the variety of functions and diversity in which it will be used.
- Able to reflect the changing attitudes of both the courts and regulatory agencies in this area.
- Able to support the need of the compensation programs for individual performance and group performance.

When people can see the bigger picture and understand how their contribution fits with the greater goals of the company, they will do a better job.

Problem Solving

Adapted in part from: The Blake Group's March 2016 Newsletter

Purpose

To examine a specific problem, conflict, or issue that is unacceptable to the interviewee and to explore various possible resolutions. Your primary function is to assist the interviewee in developing problem-solving abilities independent of anyone else's support or intervention. The goal of the problem-solving interview is to foster critical and independent thinking. The number of sessions required to complete this interview will vary according to specific circumstances.

There are several good **business** reasons to try to help a person rather than giving up:

1. The employee would be hard to replace.
2. The problem has come up repeatedly.
3. Giving up would send the wrong message.
4. You may lack the legal grounds for discharge.

Do You Have a Toxic Employee

Having a toxic employee on your team costs \$12,489, as frustrated co-workers flee and productivity dips as much as 30%. That cost does not include other potential costs, such as litigation, regulatory penalty and reduced employee morale.

A toxic worker is a bad apple that can spoil other employees' workplace. According to researchers Michael Housman, chief analytics officer of talent management company Cornerstone OnDemand, and Dylan Minor of Harvard Business School, in their November 2015 paper, "Toxic Workers," for Harvard Business School. **Toxic employees are people that are damaging to the firm and are a "worker who engages in behavior that adversely affects fellow workers or other company assets."**



Housman and Minor found that "toxic workers seem to induce others to be toxic," and that "although toxic workers are quicker than the average worker, they are not necessarily more productive in a quality-adjusted sense."

Preparation

You do not need to possess any previous information to be of exceptional support. In fact, prior knowledge of the specific issue or problem may lead to a biased, detrimental exchange. Exceptions occur when the interviewee has a legitimate dependency need for information that you possesses or can obtain, or when the problem or the outcome is clearly your responsibility.

Conduct

Through the use of a directed approach (as long as solutions are not provided and direct advice is not given), you can guide the interviewee toward a process in which he or she can become self-sufficient in problem solving. The process involves you focusing the interaction on the following areas:

Problem awareness. You should be directed toward examining the following questions: Whose problem is this? What needs to be changed and why? How was the conflict created?

Information gathering. You should next explore the five key items: Who? What? When? Where? and Why? Sources of information and their reliability should be discussed.

Before you can deal with a problem, you have to understand exactly what the problem is all about. Here are three typical types of issue that you may uncover in you information gathering:

- A decrease in or lack of productivity
- A decrease in or poor morale
- An increased frequency in arguments between the employee and others
- A sense that the employee is increasingly frustrated because "things just aren't going right"
- A negative, antagonistic attitude
- An increase in negative comments and personal attacks
- An increase in hateful, harmful or nasty gossip and rumors
- An unwillingness to work overtime or stay late without reason
- An unwillingness to "go the extra mile" while encouraging others to refuse as well
- An unwillingness to help out others.
- Bullying

Problem definition. You should next define the exact issue/problem based upon the information he or she has gathered. Then you should assist the interviewee in recognizing where his or her responsibility starts and stops in the resolution of the matter.

Goal statement. You should now be directed toward developing a specific goal, i.e., the result desired when the problem is resolved.

Solution generation. You and the interviewer should "brainstorm" together as many solutions as possible. The primary responsibility of solution generation should fall on the interviewee. No judgments or critical assessments should be made during this period.

Solution selection. The interviewee, with some assistance from you, should then select that solution which appears to be the most effective in the resolution of the existing problem.

Implementation. A strategy should be designed for the execution of the selected solution. The interviewee must become aware that any solution she or he implements must have two primary characteristics: it must be of high quality, and it must be acceptable to those individuals who will have to live with it.

Evaluation. Whether elaborate or simple, the evaluation serves to obtain feedback on the success or failure of the implemented solution. Without the evaluation phase, the interviewee will never know if his or her strategy has been effective or ineffective. A plan for evaluation should be discussed and agreed upon before the problem-solving interview is considered complete.

Many interviewers unintentionally foster a destructive dependency relationship in their problem-solving interviews. Too often the interviewer begins to provide direct answers when there is no legitimate need to do so. Thus begins a cycle in which the interviewer's time and resources are required whenever a problem occurs. The problem-solving interview should ideally assist individuals in thinking for themselves. If employees are provided with a supportive environment, most of them are fully capable of resolving their own conflicts, and they feel better about themselves for doing so.

Transforming the Situation

One strategy, suggested by Housman and Minor, is for a manager to screen potential workers for these traits to reduce the chance of hiring toxic workers.

There are basically two possibilities for dealing with a toxic employee:

- Either offer a reward of something valued by the bullying employee or
- Create a negative consequence for the bully if he/she continues to be abusive.

As their manager, you just need to find out what would motivate the toxic employee to change his or her ways, and since everyone is motivated by something, there is always a way.

First identify the problem:

- Did the employee have a good understanding of the expectations of the job?
- Did you provide the employee with adequate and consistent evaluations?
- Focus on performance
- Enforce the rules of the workplace in a consistent and fair manner



Image courtesy of Pakorn
at freedigitalphotos.net

Engage in an Interactive dialogue with employee:

- Maintain adequate professional boundaries with the employee
- Listen to employee's reasons for poor performance
- Identify your responsibilities as a manager for addressing the performance problem.
- Collect and prepare the 3 D's: Data - Document – Details
 - Be specific. Avoid general and vague phrases such as “frequently late,” “poor performer,” “constant complainer,” or “poor team player.” Cite specific dates, times, quotes, etc. Also cite policies being violated and job requirements not being adequately performed.
 - Lastly, cite employee's excuses or reasons for poor performance.

As their manager you need to take the high road and bring the team together and reestablish a common goal and common ground. Then help each person see the role they can play in achieving it.

Counseling or Coaching Interview

Purpose

To confront and assist a problem employee in resolving those behaviors or issues that you find unacceptable. The counseling or corrective action interview is considered a high-risk exchange which carries the potential for defensiveness on the part of the interviewee. This interview is usually conducted in two or three sessions. If no progress is made, other courses of action are usually followed: termination, referral to professional help, shifting of responsibilities, etc.

A deeper purpose of a counseling interview is to help a person or to come to terms with a problem which is affecting his or her work. To discuss and advise on problems affecting a person's work with the object of solving or alleviating the problem, bearing in mind the needs of both the employer and the individual.

Preparation

Any coaching or counselling session is a meeting rife with anxiety; a manager who must judge and employee who is being judged. Preparation can reduce your nervousness. You can't anticipate every problem or predict how a person will react. You can minimize the problems and head off discrimination with proper planning.

- Plan approach according to individual
- Ensure privacy
- Allow adequate time
- Check details
- If applicable, addresses of specialists who could help
- Check file on individual

Documented evidence. When interviewing the problem employee, the interviewer must possess documented evidence of the unacceptable behavior(s) or attitude(s). If the interviewer does not have documentation, he leaves himself open to potential legal and emotional repercussions.

Directed expectations. The interviewer must clearly formulate his expectations for change or modification within a given time frame. In addition, the interviewee has a right to know the consequence(s) he faces if he does not meet these expectations.

Referral sources. In cases involving emotional or physical problems, the interviewer should, prior to the interview, have prepared specific recommendations for referral sources.

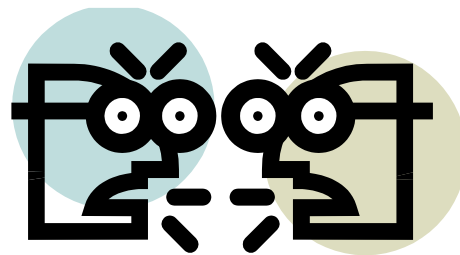
Conduct

- Interview in private
- Put at ease
- Establish rapport
- Show understanding not sympathy
- Establish problem clearly
- Guide interviewee to finding out solution
- Get them to identify courses of action
- Use open, reverse, and reflecting questions
- Listen carefully
- Be sincere and show you wish to help
- Be sensitive and understanding
- Maintain confidentiality if possible
- Come to a positive conclusion with positive ideas and points for action

There is no good way to soften the blow of criticism. What does help is to make sure your comments serve the right purpose; helping the person to correct their behavior.

When people are *poorly criticized* by bosses they only hear three things:
You're stupid!
You're lazy!
You're crazy!

Then they become defensive and the constructive aspects of the process are inhibited.



It is a multi-step process:

1. Use "I" statements: "I am concerned that you refused overtime and walked off the job."
 - a. "I'm concerned you missed the deadline."
 - b. "I want to discuss your attendance record."
 - c. Avoid loaded or judgmental "I" statements:
 - i. "I want you to stop wasting time."

- ii. “I want you to put more effort in your work.”
 - iii. “I want you to stop arguing.”
 - iv. “I want you to change your attitude.”
 - d. Avoid “you statements”:
 - i. “You don’t follow instructions.”
 - ii. “Aren’t you ever going to get something done on time (right)?”
 - iii. “What were you thinking?”
 - e. Avoid “Why” questions. Instead use “What” questions.
 - i. “What do you think when...?”
- 2. Give the person credit where credit is due” “Your work has always been strong in this area...”
- 3. Describe the behavior and the business consequence: “Because you walked of the job and refused overtime, an important order went out late and the customer was angry. So not only was our business was affected but the customer’s business was affected.”
- 4. Explain or reiterate the performance standard. For a person to improve, you must be able to tell them what is expected: “We will try to give advance notice of overtime needed and as early as possible. However, you need to come up with emergency plans.”

Perceptions. The interviewee must be allowed to share his or her perceptions of the situation or problem, for you might be unaware of extenuating circumstances. In many cases the problem is nothing more than a misunderstanding that can be clarified easily during the interview.

Emotional Airing

If you consider yourself capable of conducting, and then decide to engage in, an interview that allows the interviewee to air emotional concerns, then you may choose to use the following techniques:

- Reflective listening (repeating back the interviewee's key words to underscore concern and investment in being of assistance). **See section on: Exercise: Reflection Techniques**, to practice your technique.
- Dynamic listening (listening between the words and repeating back those feelings that may underlie the interviewee's concerns), and
- Silence (simply saying nothing while allowing the interviewee to take responsibility for the amount, intensity, and depth of the interaction).

Emotional airing is effective with many individuals if you are competent in the use of listening skills and are willing to make the investment in time.

Reasons for Deteriorating Performance

There are many reasons for deteriorating or poor job performance. Consider these as clarify the need and your approach for a counseling interview:

- Wrong person in the job (poor selection procedures)
- Poor induction procedures; the person doesn't know where they fit in or precisely what they are meant to be doing.
- Job has changed; new skills needed
- Low morale; uncertainty about the organization, people in the dark about progress, Not involved/informed/consulted
- Not valued/appreciated (or no-one remembers to tell them that they are valued)
- Don't know if what they are doing is right
- Job too vague - too much to do - overwhelming
- Poor Job Description
- Being asked to do too little (!)
- Boring/repetitive work - no new challenges under-achieving
- Antagonism - personality conflicts
- Stress and emotional problems (flight/fight)
- Environment
- Incompetent management
- Unprofessional management (sexist/racist)
- Threatening management
- Politics (who you know is more important than how you are doing).
- Mental illness (1 man in 7 and 1 woman in 4 suffer from some mental illness during their lives)
- Alcoholism
- Drug/substance abuse
- Medical disorders

Follow Up

- Arrange for future interview to check developments

- Carry out any action promised

Grievance or Employee Complaint Interview

Adapted from: *Investigations at Work: the art fact-finding and investigating employee complaints (2nd edition)* © 2007 Orlando Blake, PhD CPT, The Blake Group. You may purchase a copy of the book by visiting www.blake-group.com.



Dealing with complaints can be tricky. If you keep these guidelines in mind it will help:

- Don't overreact
- Don't confuse opinions with facts
- Respect confidences
- Don't criticize
- Don't criticize others
- Don't assume
- Listen – don't promise what you can't deliver

Purpose

- To enable the individual to air the complaint.
- To discover and remove causes of dissatisfaction if possible.

Preparation

- Try to establish circumstances causing dissatisfaction (particularly attitudes, feelings)
- Consult with people concerned, check previous record/history
- Be aware of grievance procedure which may affect action which can be taken, and
- Your own limits of authority and the company policy.

Conduct

- Put at ease
- State purpose of interview
- Allow individual to state the grievance/problem
- Get feelings as well as facts - feelings are frequently paramount, facts minimal
- Listen attentively
- Do not evade the issue or belittle it
- Probe in depth to ensure all relevant details are known
- Check facts
- Do not commit yourself too quickly
- If possible get individual to suggest solutions
- State proposed course of action:
 - if the grievance has been resolved as a result of the meeting - what is

- to be done
- if more information is needed arrange another interview with the person to discuss action
- if you cannot resolve the grievance, refer the person to the next stage of procedure
- never say 'leave it with me'

You create an impression in the first 10 to 45 seconds of an interview. During these first few moments of the interview and continuing throughout the process, use the following tactics and factors to improve the investigative process:

1. Consider the human needs of the interviewee.
2. Continue to build and maintain rapport.
3. Apply flexible methods.
4. Cover suspiciousness.
5. Use creative imagination.
6. Display human warmth, sensitivity, empathy, respect, and authenticity.
7. Use nonjudgmental acceptance.
8. Cover personal values.
9. Use active, attentive listening.
10. Be patient.
11. Use positive silence, eye contact, proxemics, and nonverbal communication.
12. Maintain a positive, neutral stance.
13. Use positive power and positive control.
14. Control personal anger.
15. Avoid using coercive behavior.
16. Use observation evaluation and assessment.
17. Avoid using the third degree.
18. Use closed and open questions when appropriate.
19. Keep your questions simple.
20. Avoid using double meaning questions.
21. Ask tough questions.
22. Assume a positive response.

23. Use self-evaluative questions - "Has there been anytime when you have thought of stealing from the company, even though you never actually did?"
24. Use leading questions when attempting to assist the interviewee to rationalize or save face.
25. Handle trial balloon questions cautiously.
26. Assume that more information is available.
27. Think about what is being asked.
28. Focus on the information being sought.
29. If you asked a laundry list of questions, leave the door open for them to contact you with more information.

Interviewing the Claimant

The initial claimant meeting should last two hours or more. Get as much detail from the complainant as possible about the allegations so that they are clearly understood and can be sufficiently addressed. Additionally, it is essential to obtain a list of any witnesses and other people who might be able to shed light on the situations and event. It is more than likely that you will interview the complainant again to get clarification or additional elaboration on specific points.

Your aim in the initial meeting with the accuser is to:

1. Get the full story including all the details
2. Identify all the issues
3. Gather all the material facts
4. Obtain the names and location of potential witnesses or other people that may have additional information and details
5. Develop a timeline of the events
6. Determine if formal or informal investigations is needed
7. Instill confidence in the system

At this point, you are ready to begin your initial interview with the person raising the issue – the complainant or claimant. This critical interview will help you determine whether the issue can be resolved informally or whether an internal investigation is necessary. Your most important objective of this interview is to get the facts. Remember what your English teacher or Journalism teacher taught you. Get the:

- Who: participants, witnesses, etc.

- What: descriptions of the events
- Where: place or settings of the events
- When: time table of occurrences
- Why: motivation of the claimant or the accused
- How: description of how the participants did or did not behave

Claimant Question Outline

1. What happened?
2. Who was involved?
3. When did the incident or behaviors take place?
4. Was the person's ability to do his or her job work affected? If so, how?
5. Did anybody else see what happened or hear what was said? Was there any observers or witnesses? If so, who and where are they now?
6. Was this an isolated, one-time event or has there been a pattern? If so, how long and who else might know about it?
7. Has the claimant spoken to anyone else in the workplace or outside the workplace about the issue? If so, whom?
8. Are there any relevant written documents that the complainant knows about? If so, where might they be?
9. Has the claimant kept any written records or journals that are relevant to the complaint? Any expense reports, file memos, notes, computerized notes or emails, text messages or other?
10. Does the claimant know if anyone else, in or out of the workplace, has similar concerns?
11. Are there any other issues or concerns the he or she wants to discuss?
12. Does the complainant have any additional facts of information that would be helpful in an investigation if one goes forward?
13. Is there anything you should be asking or be considering from the complainant?

Use the following guidelines when questioning the claimant, the accused or witnesses:

- Ask one question at a time.
- Avoid why questions whenever possible. They appear to demand justification and may create a defensive response.
- Use encouraging probes: "what happened next?", "Go on with your story."
- Ask embarrassing questions in a nonevaluative and nonthreatening way: "I understand that you were embarrassed by your previous relationship with him, but what event kept you from reporting the touching sooner?"
- Encourage the person by showing you are actively listening:
 - Witness: "I wanted to tell someone about the harassment, but it

- seemed hopeless”
 - Fact Finder: “Uh-ummm, hopeless”
 - Witness: “What I mean is...”
- Be aware of all nonverbal behaviors. Make only positive and nonevaluative reactions.
- When urging the person to elaborate – restate, reflect, or paraphrase their statements or questions rather than offering ideas or solutions:
 - Claimant: “I didn’t know what to do?”
 - Fact Finder: “You weren’t clear about your options?”

Each situation dictates its own rules. People have their own personality, needs. Each interview has its own goals and variables. You must choose your questions based on your style and adapt to the behaviors and demands of the situation.

Effective & Ineffective Questioning

Effective questions are:

- Clear, concise, and direct. They allow room for the interviewee to provide examples.
- Are within the interviewee’s capacity of being answered.
- Focused on the “how” and “what” happened rather than closed ended.
- Those that allow the interviewee to express his or her views.
- Simple - Don’t assume that you should avoid simple questions or closed ended questions.

Ineffective questions are:

- Long winded, complex, indirect and meandering
- Too close ended – “yes” or “no” responses only
- Irrelevant or about things out of the range of the investigation.
- Unfocused or divergent to main purpose.

Follow Up

- Implement agreed action
- If not passing to the next stage of procedure, check at a later date that grievance has been resolved satisfactorily.

Periodically check in with the complainant to assure that he or she is not experiencing problems with retaliation or adjusting to any job changes that may have occurred because of the investigation. Although you asked the complainant to

report any problems following the investigation, he or she may be reluctant to do so.

Despite your efforts to maintain confidentiality, expect that people will gossip and speculate about investigations and spread rumors. This chitchat may or may not be founded on fact. If the accused is popular, co-workers may shun the complainant or be resentful toward him or her. Adjustment can be difficult when a complainant is transferred to a new job. New co-workers are reluctant freely interact and openly communicate with him or her for fear of accidentally generating a complaint against them.

These situations can hinder your harassment or policy violation prevention efforts and discourage other employees from making legitimate complaints. They might also be construed as retaliation and can escalate into serious employee relations and productivity issues. Therefore, you should not rely on the complainant for follow-up reports. You must be proactive and initiate conversations with him or her, probe for any problems and take immediate appropriate action if problems or concerns are uncovered.

Disciplinary Interview

Any disciplinary action must always be preceded by a well-structured and controlled interview. All disciplinary actions must be in strict accord with a written procedure.

The objective of a disciplinary interview is to inform an individual of, correct, poor work or unacceptable behavior, by helping the person to improve - thus preventing the situation from arising again and to establish an understanding of the standard required and to give guidance to the person in achieving this standard. Even for the most apparent, blatant gross misconduct, you are encouraged to suspend, with pay, while you carry out a thorough investigation.

If you have good, clear job descriptions with KPI's and Standards Of Accepted Performance (SOAP) clearly laid down, then it makes any disciplinary action you have to take much more straight forward. If you have effective Problem Resolution Policies and Procedures and a good appraisal system, Disciplinary Interviews should seldom be needed.

Most important - three quarters of the process - is to try to get the interviewee to "own" the problem; i.e. to identify the gap or the problem themselves.

Guidelines for Embarking on Disciplinary Action

Remember all your actions and comments may have to be defended at a tribunal, grievance committee or formal hearing, or in court. Even for those who would not be eligible to go to a formal hearing, it is good practice to treat everyone with the same degree of consideration and courtesy.

- Fully understand your responsibilities and authority within the organization's procedures.
- Before giving a formal warning, ensure you have done all you can to improve the situation.
- Inform the shop steward (where appropriate) of your action, provide an opportunity for representation.
- Keep a record of the date of the interview, the name of the staff member, the reason(s), and details of witnesses.
- Ensure the staff member understands the consequences of failure to improve.
- Set a time for review and keep to it.
- If you are not sure - **CHECK**
- Maintain close contact with other management team members to ensure consistency, try and help the staff member improve.
- Employees with limited English – provide a translator

- Where there is collective bargaining agreement – follow the process to notify and liaise with the union representative.
- Any disciplinary action must always be preceded by a well-structured and controlled interview. All disciplinary actions must be in strict accord with a written procedure.

Preparation

- Gather the facts (consult others, records, rules and procedures)
- Do not prejudge the issue
- Plan the approach according to the individual concerned
- Ensure privacy and no interruptions
- Allow adequate time
- Clarify the disciplinary actions available to you
- Notify the time, place and reason for the interview
- Notify others who may be concerned that the employee will be absent from the place of work, especially first line supervision
- **Check** your disciplinary procedure, i.e.
 - Should you involve a representative?
 - Does the employee know the procedure and appreciate the consequences?
- Advise the individual of the right to be represented by the union and ensure that representation can be available at the agreed time

Conduct

- State the reason for the interview briefly giving those details of behavior or performance which have caused concern
- State the standards which your organization expects in relation to the matter under consideration
- Establish facts promptly
- Obtain witness statements if applicable
- Identify the '**gap**' between standards expected and those achieved
- Ask the interviewee **why** this 'gap' exists. Encourage the employee to talk and to give a full explanation, and if involved allow the representative to comment
- **Listen** closely and make notes of what the employee says in order to establish the cause
- Having listened to the explanation, **decide** whether disciplinary action is warranted and what **action** to take, if any, and **inform** the interviewee. At the same time advise the individual and the representative of any rights to appeal which may exist.
- Now switch to the **future**, and get agreement on how to bring performance back to standard by encouraging the interviewee to make suggestions

- Offer **help** where this is possible
- Set an agreed **review date** for the purpose of monitoring progress and state what the consequences of failure to meet standards will be
- Agree a date to review progress/plan - quite useful, especially
- You don't have to say at the end of the interview what you have decided, but you should say when you will let the interviewee know your decision.

Note: Do not negotiate on your actions. Make this clear at the outset.

Follow Up

- Record the interview
- Check: future behavior, attitude and performance against time limits on the agreed dates
- Check that help is given where this is either required or has been agreed with the individual
- Encourage and praise improvements
- If the required standard is met over a reasonable period consider removing file notes, and in any case check the steps to be taken within the written procedure
- Look at what you could have done as a manager which would have prevented the breach of discipline

Termination Interview

Purpose

To end the interviewee's employment or to assess why the employer is terminating his or her employment. The purpose of this interview, in either case, is to give and receive feedback on the rationale for termination and to reach a state of closure. Many termination interviews are dealt with in one session although circumstances and/or foresight may necessitate the use of several meetings.

Additionally, to discover a person's true reasons for leaving the organization with a view to taking any required action to prevent others leaving for the same reasons. Such reasons could be:

- Poor recruitment selection
- Inadequate training
- Company policy
- Salary
- Management/supervision
- Personality clashes

The second reason to conduct a termination or exit interview is to secure employee's goodwill and company's reputation.

Preparation

- Check resignation letter for reason stated
- Study employee's records and personnel file
- Where necessary check with other appropriate people, e.g. supervisor, etc.
- Ensure privacy and no interruptions
- Allow adequate time

If you are terminating the interviewee's employment, you should possess the following:

Documented work record. The reason(s) for dismissal should be fully documented. Infractions, tardiness, poor productivity, absenteeism, warnings, and other relevant information should be in hand. A documented work record reduces the potential for a personal confrontation and provides the employee with indisputable facts concerning the specific rationale for termination.

Transitional information. Prior to the actual interview, you should have a plan for the transition of responsibilities from the terminated employee to existing or newly hired personnel. You should discuss with the employee the lead time before

termination, compensation (if any), and any other issues regarding closure.

If the employee is voluntarily terminating employment, you should possess the following information:

Feedback on impact. If you are given advance notice, you may want to study the work record of the employee to provide open and direct feedback on his value to and impact on the organization/agency. This can provide for a constructive learning exchange during the course of the termination interview.

Transitional plan. You will be required to assess all issues regarding closure, including the length of time before the end of employment, the training of new or existing personnel assuming the interviewee's responsibilities, and any other foreseeable tasks associated with the change of position.

Conduct

- Put at ease - thank interviewee for coming
- State the purpose of interview
- Encourage and allow the employee to talk freely about the job, the company and the people
- Ask open ended questions
- Listen and observe; be alert for clues to underlying reason - this often differs from the reason that is stated on letter of resignation
- Thank employee for services rendered and wish them well

The termination interview provides an excellent opportunity to explore the reasons for separation. If employment you terminating the employee, you may want to obtain the following:

Feelings, thoughts, and ideas. The termination of employment is often a difficult meeting for both of you. If you are willing to listen with sensitivity to the employee's feelings, thoughts, and ideas about the set of circumstances leading to his or her dismissal, you may be able to defuse a potentially high-anxiety encounter. In addition, the feedback given by the interviewee on his or her perceptions of the work setting may prove to be valuable input for future consideration.

If the employee is voluntarily terminating employment, you should attempt to obtain the following:

Feedback. You should attempt to discover why the employee is terminating employment and any specific suggestions he or she may have for improving the organization or the interviewee's specific position. The use of nondirective questions

can assist in this process. Examples include:

- "Would you be willing to share your perceptions of the work environment?"
- "What suggestions do you have for improving the organization/ agency?"
- "What strengths and weaknesses did you observe during your time of employment?"
- "How can management better meet the needs of employees?"

The termination interview is considered a high-risk exchange which carries the possibility of either party's becoming defensive. If uncontrolled emotions take over, the interview may develop into a destructive meeting in which the interviewee, you, and organization lose. Yet, if you prepare adequately and conduct the interview in a nonthreatening manner, you can diminish the likelihood of a counterproductive interaction. You must avoid placing yourself in a position of defending the company/organization/agency and instead must foster constructive feedback while attending to the necessary transitional issues.

Follow Up

Decide if any action is necessary in the light of information gained and implement accordingly.

Improving Your Interviewing

The only way to become a competent interviewer is to practice. To improve your skills you can use this book and practice with someone else. To become an accomplished interviewer, it is critical to recognize and filter your own prejudices. A greater degree of self-understanding will help you appreciate your biases and understand how they impact the interview situation. Try some impromptu role playing with a colleague or friend. Get some feedback from them and provide them with assessments of their style as well. The purpose of practicing is to enable you to become an interviewer who is aware of both the objectives of the interview and of the skills which you must apply to achieve them.



Exercise: Reflection Techniques

Here are seven statements which could be made by interviewees. Decide which response by the interviewer is most appropriate.

1. **No, I didn't get on awfully well in the Army.**
 - a) That was rather bad luck wasn't it?
 - b) Oh, I think you did quite well; after all you got a commission.
 - c) It seems the Army was really too tough for you.
 - d) You feel you might have done better.

2. **I suppose I've always had a bit of an inferiority complex; it began when I was a child I think. My mother used to say, "Keep quiet; what do you know about it?" I still don't like to venture my opinion.**
 - a) Aren't you putting too much blame on your mother?
 - b) You feel hesitant about expressing your views.

- c) Your mother seems to have been rather overbearing.
- d) I find you quite intelligent.

3. I prefer to work on my own initiative.

- a) You like to organise things your own way.
- b) You are a solitary sort of person.
- c) In our Company we work as a team.
- d) You feel you don't get along well with other people.

4. I went to that church every Sunday for months and nobody ever spoke to me once.

- a) I quite understand how you feel.
- b) It doesn't say much for the Vicar, does it?
- c) That is just typical of too many churches these days.
- d) You feel nobody was interested.

5. I tried everything I could to make a go of things. But nothing I could do was ever right with her. It was nag, nag, nag from morning till night. In the end she packed up her things, took the child and went off to her mother. Of course everybody blames me. She can tell the tale so well, everyone thinks she is perfect and the fault is all on my side.

- a) You mustn't lose heart so easily.
- b) Don't you think it's important not to lose touch with the child?
- c) You feel people are putting all the blame on you.
- d) I should say you were both at fault.

6. Everyone is against you when you're young - parents, school teachers, police, the newspapers, the lot. Anything goes wrong and it's always your fault, never theirs. You get so fed up sometimes you'd just like to walk out on the lot of them.

- a) You feel pretty badly treated.
- b) I don't think things are quite as you've painted them.
- c) Don't run away from your problems.
- d) You just want to get away from everyone.

7. I've given up praying. It doesn't seem to make any difference at all. When my wife was so ill, I prayed every day. She died just the same. And in such pain. I can't believe in prayer after that. It seems no use any

more.

- a) You felt your prayers were not answered.
- b) Perhaps your prayers were answered in another way.
- c) I do understand how you feel about your wife's death.
- d) You feel you can't see any point in prayer any more.

Best reflections: 1 (d); 2 (b); 3 (a); 4 (d); 5 (c); 6 (d); 7 (d).

Source: Problem Solving Interviewing by W.E. Beveridge

The Blake Group will help you improve your interviewing capabilities and reduce your legal liabilities through their coaching, seminars and workshops.

You will learn how to:

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- Interpret the answers you get.
- Identify the best way to approach a person to get what you want.
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