

4.8: Follow Up Questions

More on Follow Up Questions

What are the most important interview questions to ask candidates? Good follow-up interview questions ensure that the candidate, not the interviewer, is talking. They help the interviewer uncover the real story of a candidate's accomplishments.

After every question you ask in an interview, what are some good follow up interview questions to ask?

- *Why so?*
- *Interesting. Please tell me more.*
- *What made that important to you?*
- *How did you go about accomplishing that?*
- *What were the most important steps you took to make that happen?*

But how do you put these into practice? It's easy to imagine yourself interviewing the perfect candidate, but every situation is different, and you won't always have a perfect opportunity. Ensure the most effective interview possible and get the most value out of your time with the candidate by asking good follow up interview questions.

You Are Not Being Interviewed

Many interviewers talk too much early in the interview process, rather than waiting for a candidate to ask questions. Particularly in a first interview, talk as little as possible. Remember, it's not about you.

Although your job seeker should be looking just as closely at your company for the desired fit, the only way to assess a candidate's strengths is through their responses to your questions. This can be a hard line to draw, but ultimately you are the one making the decision on the part of the company. Let the worker explore their own lines of questioning, should they see fit, and focus on listening.

The best way to ensure the candidate does most of the talking is to ask two or three follow up questions for every initial question that you ask:

- "What did you like most about your last job?"
- "Interesting! Tell me more about that?"
- "You say you didn't like project management. Why so?"

This approach ensures you get the context you need to make an informed hiring decision and gives you valuable information about the worker's prospects within your company. Hiring managers and recruiters are often the first points of contact, at least functionally, and part of that is making a good impression on the candidate. Getting better at asking good follow up interview questions will increase your effectiveness as a recruiter and interviewer.

The Second Answer Is the Real Answer

A candidate's first response is their programmed, or rehearsed, response. The second response is the real answer. While this isn't always true, of course, it's a rule of thumb worth keeping in mind with every answer. Some candidates may have already thought through their answers, especially if your question is generic, while others may need more coaxing or clarifying questions at the start.

Rehearsed answers don't give you much insight, so employ good follow up interview questions to dig beneath the surface and get to the candidate's real story. It's the one they want to share, even if it's not the one they prepared.

Details Are Everything, Including the Truth

Details typically indicate truth. Most of us can remember details about things we actually accomplished but get vaguer when we're embellishing or making things up. Follow-up questions that require more detailed explanations mean a better picture of what a candidate has really accomplished.

Nobody is accusing your job seeker of lying, but you want to get the clearest picture—and follow up questions are the key. Part of recruiting and working as a hiring manager is reading people, and you can tell a lot from what a candidate evades or glosses over.

Reproducible Processes

Any candidate you're likely to hire will come with at least a few exciting stories of accomplishments and accolades. These and their follow ups are an interviewing goldmine. You not only get the chance to see how the candidate can reproduce their accomplishments for you but you also get key insights into their methods and style of thinking and problem solving.

"Can you please tell me, step by step and in as much detail as possible, exactly how you did that?"

To accomplish the same kind of result for your company, this candidate must be able to explain the specific steps they took and why they were important. You can also see how they attack a problem, how they take it apart, and even notice steps they missed or information they didn't get. There's a lot of actionable information you can get by asking follow-up questions. When asked correctly, this method puts the ball in the candidate's court even though it doesn't put them on the spot.

Improve Your Interview IQ

Interviewing is hard work. Asking good follow up interview questions means you immediately increase the amount and value of the information you get out of the process. As a result, there will be less stress for you, a more effective interview, and better hiring and candidate selection.

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