

## The Hiring Process

**NOTICE:** The following information is provided as a convenience to employers. It is not intended to represent legal advice. If you have specific questions regarding the interview process, you would be well advised to discuss them with a labor attorney. Information in this guide is subject to change without notice.

The most successful interviewee you will ever meet is the one that is most experienced. Unfortunately, the experience they are bringing to the table is not necessarily **work** experience but **interview** experience. These are the folks that jump from job to job, are never satisfied where they are at, or are so miserable to work with that they have trouble holding a job for longer than it takes to get to know them. Through constant interviewing they've learned what questions to expect, what order to expect them in, what the interviewer wants to hear and so on. Using a traditional interview style makes it impossible to weed out the truly exceptional **candidates** from the truly exceptional **interviewee**. We in turn become conditioned to expect certain answers and reactions in the interviewing process.

We all know what questions we can and cannot ask in an interview, but if the restraints of good manners were removed, we would have a laundry list of yes or no questions we would love to ask, if only we could believe the answers:

“Do you make a lot of mistakes at work, and make the same ones over and over?”

“Are you viciously passive-aggressive?”

“Are you a horrible gossip?”

“Do you find it impossible to admit when you are wrong?”

“Do you just give up when things get difficult?”

“Did any of your managers like having you on the staff?”

“Did you ever contribute to the success of the business?”

“Would I have to be completely crazy to hire you?”

Let's imagine you are looking to hire a new supervisor that is going to be in it for the 'long haul' and help you to build your team over the next five years. You want someone with experience, but who will also bring a natural commitment to their work and the team. Two candidates apply:

**Candidate #1** has been with their company for eleven years, and started out answering phones. She worked her way up to sales manager and has been in a supervisory role for three years. This was the very first job she had in high school.

**Candidate #2** has managed three sales teams for three different companies over the last 5 years. His resume states that he has increased profitability by 80% or more in all three companies. He emphasizes his record of building client relationships and thereby building sales.

When brought in for a traditional interview, **Candidate #1** arrives for her interview right on time, and sits quietly in the waiting area drying her sweaty palms on her pants. She is very nervous, stammers a bit at

first and pauses for what seems like a long time before answering each question. Her answers seem genuine, albeit rough and unpolished. Her body language hints that she can't get comfortable; she is shifting constantly in her seat and doesn't seem to know where to put her hands. You learn that she is somewhat reluctant to leave her current job and is only doing so due to the lack of further advancement opportunities within the company.

**Candidate #2** arrives 15 minutes early and makes small talk about the company with the receptionist while he waits. He looks you square in the eye as he firmly shakes your hand with exactly the right amount of pressure, while handing over a clean copy of his resume to refresh your memory. He seems completely at ease, answers your questions quickly, concisely and with just the right amount of charm. He emphasizes the record smashing sales achievements on his resume and promises to do the same thing for your company.

In the traditional interview, Candidate #2 outshines #1 tenfold, but in the non-traditional interview, the candidates might come across much, much differently. The traditional method is to ask simple, direct questions that are frankly easy to lie about. The non-traditional interview method requires candidates to relate **situational anecdotes** about previous jobs and to do more story telling than merely reciting pat answers by rote.

This method is quite simple: begin by explaining to the candidate that you are going to describe workplace scenarios and that you need them to describe times when they found themselves in that situation and how they handled it. Encourage them to be as detailed as possible and to give as much background history as they can. Be prepared to ask a lot of leading questions in an attempt to draw out as much detailed information as possible. Be certain they understand that you are looking for certain qualities in your candidates, and that this is the best method for doing that. The process should repeat; Question, Answer, Follow-Up.

**Example Question:** *“At one time or another, all of us have found ourselves in conflict with a co-worker; it is unavoidable in the modern workplace. Tell me about a time when **you** had a conflict with a co-worker, what caused it and how it was resolved.”*

With this particular question, there are several traits you should be on the lookout for. You definitely don't want the person that says, with their most dazzling smile, “Well, I just get along SUPER-DUPER with EVERYone ALL the time, so that has NEVER happened to me!” You want the person that admits reality by explaining a potentially unflattering anecdote and demonstrating a clear understanding of what caused it. You will most likely need to draw out more information than is originally offered:

**Example Answer:** *“When I was at my last job, there was a CVT there that was really hard to work with and one time she got really mad at me for cleaning out the x-ray processor, because I didn't do it her way. I had only been there two months. She yelled at me in front of some clients, and then just stormed out before I*

could even say anything to her. I talked to the owner about it the next day, and she told me that I just had to learn to deal with Employee because that was the way she was.”

**Example Follow-Ups:** *“Did you ever talk directly to Employee about what happened?”*

*“What was it that was so wrong about the way you cleaned the processor?”*

*“Did the owner seem to think you were in the wrong, or that Employee was?”*

*“Did that change your relationship with Employee?”*

*“Didn’t the owner care that the clients heard this?”*

*“Why didn’t you just quit and get out of there, since you were so new?”*

*“Did any of your other co-workers have anything to say about it?”*

*“You said that Employee was really hard to work with; what do you mean?”*

*“Did Employee seem to hold a grudge after this?”*

*“What do you think the manager should have done differently?”*

Show a genuine interest in what the candidate is telling you and encourage them to reveal the real details rather than a cleaned up version. Indicate sympathy for their side of the story: *“Wow, what a nightmare!”* *“It sounds like you were outnumbered.”* *“So, the clients saw that and the owner didn’t care?”* You can learn a massive amount of information about the person from the scenarios they describe and your follow up questions. In fact, you can get a strong feeling for the answers to that laundry list of yes or no questions you really want to ask.

In our pretend management search, **Candidate #2** shined like a diamond in a traditional interview because he was in his element; he has never held a job for more than 9 months and is always looking for the next big thing. He’s been on hundreds of interviews like this one and is very comfortable and ready with quick, clever answers. **Candidate #1** had not been on an interview in 11 years, and her last one was when she took her first job at 17 years of age. She is in what amounts to a brand new experience for her, and is being asked standard questions that are anything but standard to her. She is doing her honest best, but can’t compete on a traditional playing field with a professional interviewee.

In a non-traditional interview, the candidates are all placed on the same ground. Successful answers don’t come from knowing what questions will be asked and what answers are expected, but rather require a solid work history upon which to draw anecdotes and above all, **honesty**. The hardest lie to tell is a complicated one, and no one is able to create convincing fictions in response to all of these questions. If the proper work history, ethics and attitudes are not present in a particular candidate, you will learn that fact in a non-traditional interview and save yourself the time and money involved in hiring someone that only **seems** to have it all.

Don’t have the time to create these questions yourself? Contact [VMS](http://www.VMSMN.com) for non-traditional interview guides designed for; Practice Managers, Associate Veterinarians, Technicians and General Staff. Also available are Working Interview Guides for Technicians, Work History Templates, Interview Dos and Don’ts and More!