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Beyond the bland: 11 questions to identify 'must hires'

The interview remains a hiring manager's most effective tool for evaluating job candidates. Unfortunately, managers too often rely on a list of standard interview questions for which most applicants have canned responses.

The message: Ask generic questions and you'll get generic answers. Instead, try these queries, each designed to get applicants to really tell you about themselves and their skills.

Career initiative

1. "Walk me through your progression with your current employer, leading me up to what you now do daily."
2. "Why would this be a good move in progression for you from a career development standpoint?" (i.e., "What are you adding to your résumé?")
3. "On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being a perfect match for this job), how would you grade yourself from a technical standpoint? What would make you a 10?" (This second question identifies the gap in their current skills.)
4. "Where would you need the most support, structure or direction in your first 90 to 180 days?" (Ask this instead of the standard "What's your greatest weakness?" question.)

Achievement

5. "What makes you stand out as a rarity among your peers?" (This tells you how much self-confidence they have.)
6. "What have you done in your present/last position to increase your organization's top-line revenues, to reduce expenses or to save time?"
7. "Why is your current organization a better place for you having worked there?"
8. "Tell me about your reputation at work: What are you known for?"

Pressure-cooker questions

9. "Tell me about your last performance appraisal: In which area were you most disappointed?"
10. "From an interpersonal standpoint, where do you disagree with your boss most often? What kind of constructive feedback would you give him if he were here right now?"
11. "What do you know about our organization?"

Your favorites! 'What's the most bizarre thing you've ever experienced in a job interview?'

The results are in—and we have a winner! At the beginning of HR Professionals Week, which we celebrated last week, we asked you to tell us about memorable things that have happened to you during job interviews. And tell us you did.

What's the most bizarre thing you've ever experienced in a job interview?

Next came voting, in which you chose your favorite response. Thanks to everyone who took the time to cast a ballot. Now we've got the results. Here they are in descending order:

#5. "BINGO! We Don't Have a Winner" (12.9% of the vote)

"I always ask applicants what they do for fun, to relax the person. One woman started off by telling me she liked to play bingo on Monday nights. Then she said she liked to play on Wednesdays, too. Then she then started to cry, told me she played almost every night, had lost all her money, and her husband had divorced her because of bingo. Needless to say, she didn't get the job, but I found out where every good bingo hall was in the area." — **Pat**

#4. "A Job to Die For" (19.1% of the vote)

"I once worked in an office where a candidate died during the interview! It was about 20 years ago during an interview for a senior government post. The interview panel asked a question, and the man took a long time to answer— apparently because he was, in fact, in the throes of some sort of seizure. He died before the ambulance arrived." — **Graham**

#3. "Get a Room!" (21% of the vote)

"I had an applicant come to the interview with her boyfriend. We have a large window between my office and where applicants sit, so I could see them, and vice versa. While filling out her application, the two became amorous and proceeded to 'make out.' I had to go out and ask them to leave." — **Mary Carol**

#2. "Do You Offer Dental Insurance?" (21.4% of the vote)

"I was interviewing a receptionist candidate. Halfway through the interview her false teeth fell out onto the table. She said, 'I'm not getting the job, am I?' She didn't." — **Ivonne**

#1. "Face-to-Face Interview?" (25.6% of the vote)

"I was interviewing a candidate for an accounting manager position. He was sitting in a revolving chair and spent the entire interview with his back to me and looking at me over his shoulder. Needless to say, he didn't get the job." — **Carol**

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