

# Creating and Conducting a Structured Interview

For any employer or business, a structured interview has higher validity and reliability, than an interviewer asking random questions to different candidates. Structured and hand-tailored interview questions provide employers with more consistent information about the various candidates, and thus help employers predict future work performance with greater accuracy. For each position, employers should create placement specific targeted interview questions for each interviewee.

## Some of GCC's™ Insider Tips to Creating and Conducting a Structured Interview

A structured interview is possibly the most important component in the hiring process. A well designed and properly conducted structured interview helps to find future leaders for the company and each set of interview questions needs to be fully developed. The following checklist would help you with a structured interview:

- Before deciding upon the formal set of interview questions a hiring manager must clearly define the desired attributes, qualifications, and performance indicators of the ideal candidate to fill the position.
- For each identified quality, attribute, and performance, a hiring manager should develop a set of one or two formal questions.
- Develop a list of the ideal answers to the questions you have created. How would your ideal candidate respond?
- Create close-ended questions to probe further into the candidate's™ experience and ability to perform required tasks. [Example: Your resume shows you worked for so-and-so, what type of work does he/she do?]
- Ask only as many questions as required to gather the information you need to make a decision for the relevant stage of the recruitment process.
- Use telephone interviews to pre-screen candidates – an in-house counsel attorney has to spend a lot of time on the phone.
- Use open-ended questions and behavioral questions to learn about soft skills and attributes that are not tangible.
- Use behavioral questions and ask a candidate to reflect on and share past experiences and

achievements.

- Ask hypothetical problem solving questions: candidates usually predict with a fair degree of accuracy how they would handle a certain given situation.
- If a candidate steps out of the way to honestly provide any job-relevant information that is not a part of responses to the structured interview questions, it should be noted and taken into account for later consideration. [For example, if a candidate tells you she is pregnant, you might be concerned about the medical leave, but cannot afford to discriminate or fail to take note.]
- Give the candidates sufficient notice for interviews and try to schedule according to their convenience.
- Greet properly and be on best behavior with each in-house counsel candidate. On numerous occasions, interviewers find out to their chagrin that they missed the chance to impress a potential business leader when they had it.
- Always make a little introductory session of small talk to put the candidate at ease and finish exchanging pleasantries and introducing any other interviewer on board. You are seeking to develop a relationship critical to your business; there is no cause to rush the process.
- Explain the interview format before you start questioning the candidate. Additionally, consider explaining why you will be taking notes.
- Provide the candidate with sufficient time to think on answers and explain or elaborate on his/her answers.
- Invite the candidate to ask any questions he/she may have about the organization.
- Discuss the career objectives of the candidate.
- Inform about the advantages of the offered position and growth opportunities truthfully.
- Provide a realistic preview of job responsibilities.
- Provide a high-quality meal or snacks.
- Inform the candidate properly and with courtesy (even if it is the worst candidate, you are dealing with an attorney) about when he/she can expect to hear back from you.

### **Some Tips on What to Avoid While Creating or Conducting a Structured Interview**

It is not unheard of for interviewers themselves to become overzealous or lose control of the interview process. To ensure that does not happen, it is useful to follow the following checklist:

- Do not use an interview to measure whether a candidate can formulate legal strategy, rather focus on finding out whether the candidate has proper understanding and experience on law, regulations, and procedures sufficient to undertake the tasks required in the offered position.
- Do not ask more questions than necessary.
- Do not ask questions that are not job or performance related or do not have any bearing on future performance.
- Try to avoid obvious behavioral questions, as attorneys are able to recognize the purpose of this line of questioning and provide canned answers.
- Do not collect or record information which is not job related.
- Do not ask a personal question unless it is specifically job related, or related to a bona fide occupational qualification.
- Do not ask about assets, marital status, or family in structured interviews.
- Do not entertain or consider candidates who let information about past illegal activities slip through during interviews or brag about their abilities to fool the system.
- Do not stress upon points where the career objectives of a candidate do not align with the offered position.
- Do not keep prompting interviewees or go into sessions of elaboration.
- Do not reject candidates to their face, but always tell them that you will get back to the candidate and provide a rough estimate of the time the candidate can expect to wait.

Structured interviews help to protect the business and the interviewer from discrimination claims and also increases respect in the mind of the interviewee who, as a professional, recognizes the importance of structured interviews. Depending upon the candidate, his/her background and track-record, the interview mix is created including the formal structured component to help you find the best candidate.

Source: Peg Thoms, *Finding the Best and the Brightest: A Guide to Recruiting, Selecting, and Retaining Effective Leaders* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005)

