



Behavioral-based interviewing helps get the right people on your bus!

*Another great article from The Rooms Chronicle, the #1 journal for hotel rooms management! ***Important notice: This article may not be reproduced without permission of the publisher or the author.*** College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Niagara University, P.O. Box 2036, Niagara University, NY 14109-2036. Phone: 866-Read TRC. E-mail: editor@roomschronicle.com*

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I was at a professional conference recently and one of the keynote speakers was talking about hiring the right people; he talked about making sure as a manager you had the right people on your bus.

When you think about that concept, it is very powerful. If you don't have the right people on the bus, as you know these are the people who are serving your guests, your guests may not receive the level of service or the type of experience you want them to receive while a guest at your hotel.

You might be asking yourself, "How do I get the right people on my bus?" Oftentimes new supervisors or managers never learn how to interview candidates effectively. Frequently, they rely on first impressions or gut feelings. Using either one of those techniques may not be the most effective way to select the future employees who will be serving your guests.

Behavioral-based questions

There is a more effective technique to interviewing; it is known as behavioral-based interviewing. This concept is based on the theory that one's past performance is the best indicator for his or her future performance. Humans will typically react to a current situation as they have reacted to that same situation in the past. For example, if an applicant becomes argumentative when another person questions or challenges their competency the applicant will very likely become argumentative again at some point in the future.

The key is for the recruiter or manager to structure the interview process to provide them with a person's behavior patterns. To do this one needs to ask open-ended questions that have been specifically designed to reflect the essential job functions of the position for which the applicant is interviewing for.

Job description groundwork

To start, review the job description for the position; perhaps it is for a guest service agent. The recruiter or manager will need to identify the performance skills needed for the position. Performance skills are the tasks that relate to the position. For a GSA position this would likely include balancing a cash drawer, possessing the ability to work independently, being able to make difficult decisions on the spot, dealing with difficult guests, resolving guest complaints, having the ability to multi-task, and the list goes on. Once the essential skills for the position have been identified, the recruiter or manager can now begin to draft their open-ended questions to obtain the information they need to make a more effective selection, rather than relying on their gut feelings or instincts.

Seek out specifics

It is best to design interview questions that ask for specifics rather than generalities. For example, a recruiter may want to be able to determine how a candidate would deal with a difficult guest. A typical probe-type question might ask, "How do you deal with difficult customers?" Realistically though, the candidate is going to tell the recruiter exactly what she thinks he may want to hear. Remember, the applicant is trying to get the job! The recruiter would be better served to instead ask, "Think of a time in your last position, as a retail clerk, when you had to deal with an angry customer. Tell me exactly what you did to calm the customer and what the result was." This question undoubtedly is going to give much more detailed information to better enable the recruiter or manager to make an informed employment decision, more than the first question would have.

Another behavior-based question that is related to cash handling might ask, "You mentioned in your last job that you were responsible for balancing your cash drawer at the end of your shift. Tell me what steps, if any, did you take when your drawer did not balance on the first attempt?" This specific, situation-based question will yield much more useful information than merely asking the applicant, "How do you balance a cash drawer?" In contrast, the first question will indicate to the recruiter about the applicant's problem solving skills and his or her ability to work through the problem on their own versus just leaving the drawer unbalanced or calling someone else for help. The latter question merely tests the applicant's knowledge on standard operating procedures or technical skills.

Regardless of what position a manager or supervisor is interviewing for, employees need to be able to interact with other co-workers in a courteous and professional manner. An interviewer may want to ask a candidate a behavioral-based question such as, "Think of a time when you had a conflict with a coworker. Describe the situation. What did you do to resolve it and what was the outcome?" This type of question can indicate not just the number of different skills a candidate might have, but more importantly the maturity level that they likely possess.

The non-question question

There are a number of different types of open-ended questions an interviewer can develop. One type that is very effective is called a "non-question" question. It goes like this: Instead of asking, "What would you consider your best skills?", ask instead, "It would help me to get to know you better if you tell me what you think are your best skills?" This type of question can make the candidate feel more comfortable.

When developing behavioral-based questions keep in mind that every candidate who is interviewed may not have previous experience in the same position for which they are applying. It may become necessary to tweak questions based on the candidate's previous job or personal experiences that could be related to the position for which they are currently applying. If a manager was interviewing a candidate with no direct experience for a front desk agent position, who is returning to employment after years of absence in the workforce, and he wants to ask her about cash handling experience, he might inquire of the applicant, "Do you currently or have you in the past balanced your checkbook? If so, what steps did you take if your account did not balance with the bank?"

Once a manager has developed a set of questions for each position within his department there will not be a need to change them unless the job description changes. To keep the interview process consistent and to minimize potential bias, ask every candidate who is interviewed the same questions.

In the next issue of TRCSM

There are more types of open-ended questions one can use in the interview process. In Part Two of this subject we will explore some of the different types of open-ended questions and how to use them when interviewing for guestroom attendants. ✧

(Rebecca Roth, CHA, CHT, is a hospitality management trainer for Best Western International, Inc., The World's Largest Hotel Chain®, and is based in Phoenix, AZ. E-mail: rothr@bestwestern.com.)