



# Human Resources

by Rebecca A. Roth, CHA, CHT

## Behavioral interviewing gets the right people on the housekeeping 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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*Editor's note: This article is the second in a two part-series by Rebecca Roth on behavioral-based interviewing for hotel managers.*

In the January/February '06 issue of TRC, readers learned about a different technique to interview applicants – behavioral-based interviewing. The principle theory behind behavioral-based interviewing is to structure an interview using open-ended questions to determine an applicant's ability to perform the essential job functions of a position. It is theorized that an applicant's past performance with previous employers is the best indicator of his or her future performance for the position for which they are applying. Keep in mind that the managerial function of hiring is about matching the RIGHT employee (not necessarily the best or most qualified employee) with the RIGHT job at the RIGHT time at the RIGHT wage.

### Wouldn't it be nice if...

If the manager conducting the interview could just pick up the phone and ask the applicant's previous employer about the work ethic, compatibility, and job performance of the applicant, the hiring process would be more reliable and streamlined for the hiring hotel. But unfortunately, tenuous legal requirements, a former employer's fear of a lawsuit, perhaps ambivalence towards the separated employee or even personal resentment or animosity can preclude the reliability of any such gained feedback, assuming the former employer is even willing to divulge any information. Hence, many hotel managers often choose to cultivate this information for themselves directly from the applicant through a series of behavioral-based questions.

### Hiring room attendants

Understandably, some positions are more difficult than others for hiring the right candidate, especially those jobs that require employees to perform strenuous and repetitive labor with minimal supervision for less than optimal wages. Probably no position is as difficult to hire AND retain employees for as the guestroom attendant position. Considering the low historical pay rates associated with this position and the lack of advanced education among most guestroom attendants, it is not surprising that turnover rates in housekeeping departments are often as high as 300% annually, especially in limited-service properties. According to *Human Resource Executive*<sup>®</sup> magazine, the cost of recruiting, hiring and training a new employee at a hotel or resort can reach as high as USD\$10,000. So hiring the right person the first time is more important than ever.

As described in the last issue of TRC, the first thing the recruiting manager should do is review the job description for the position. What duties will a guestroom attendant be required to fulfill in a normal day at the hotel? Typical responsibilities may include cleaning guestrooms and public space areas, assisting with laundry, maintaining storage areas, ensuring housekeeping carts are stocked and organized, conducting supply inventory, etc.

### Behavioral-based questions

Once the areas of responsibility have been identified, what questions should the manager conducting the interview consider asking? Hopefully, the interviewing manager will recall the mantra of behavior-based interview-ing...*past behavior is the best indicator for future behavior.*

Let's get started developing some questions for a room attendant. Everyone knows that housekeepers clean guestrooms. Rather than asking the applicant how they clean a room, it might be more effective to ask them to describe the steps they have used in the past to ensure they clean the room within 30 minutes. This approach will not only reveal how the applicant actually cleans the room but it may also indicate how organized they are. Organization is critical for room attendants to ensure they work within the time frame given for each room and minimize excessive effort and repetition to accomplish the cleaning tasks to standard.

Paying attention to detail is also important for a room attendant. One might consider asking, "Describe to me how you know when a guestroom is absolutely perfect and ready for inspection?"

The ability to work independently and the ability to get along with others is essential for not only room attendants but for all employees. The interviewing manager might ask, "Describe to me a time when you had a conflict with a co-worker in a previous job. What was the conflict and how did you handle or resolve the conflict?"

### **Unique interviewing situations**

Note that each of these sample questions is based on the assumption that the applicant whom one is interviewing has had previous experience as a room attendant. What does the interviewing manager do when the applicant has not had any previous experience?

Remember that despite the applicant's lack of work experience, the essential job functions have not changed. Examine the application to ascertain if the candidate possesses previous job experiences with similar or transferable skills. Attempt to solicit behavioral-based responses about previous jobs regarding those aspects that are of an essential nature to the job for which the applicant is applying. Perhaps ask, "Describe how you organized your work station/area in the last job?" "Describe a time when you needed to make last minute changes, what did you do?" "What was the outcome?"

If the applicant possesses no previous work history, the interviewer can then become creative and call upon the applicant's personal experience at home. An example might be, "Describe to me how you organize your day when you have multiple errands to accomplish in a short time frame?" "When you clean your home, what steps and in what order do you take to accomplish this? How long does it take you to clean your bathroom?"

Just make sure that all questions asked of any applicant have a direct relevance to the potential employee's future performance. Questions pertaining to race, religion, national origin, cultural identity, age, gender, potential or visible disability, marital or family status, sexual preference, veteran's status or reserve/national guard obligation are never appropriate unless the elicited information directly pertains to the applicant's ability to perform the essential functions as described in the job description or to the applicant's legal employability status.

### **Conclusion**

In closing, turnover is costly for many reasons. It is each manager's responsibility to hire the RIGHT candidate. Behavior-based interviewing is an excellent technique to assist in the selection process. Start by reviewing the job description, identify the essential job skills needed to perform the job, and then develop open-ended questions to seek the information needed to make the best selection.

***Past behavior is the best indicator for future behavior to get the right people on your bus! ✧***

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