
What Hiring Questions Should You Ask?

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Did you ever reach the point in a job interview when you needed to extract crucial information, but didn't know how to ask the right question? Worse yet, did you ask it in such a way that could lead to potential discrimination charges? Below, we provide the questions you should ask to make the best possible hire while avoiding legal problems.

Your practice now has an open position. You have done the preliminary work in developing a job description, deciding on a pay range, and running the ads. Now an applicant has been scheduled for an interview.

You know that this is your chance to learn whether the applicant is properly qualified for the position, and a good "fit" with your office. In order to draw out the information from the candidate, however, you must ask questions.

Improper questions can lead to a wrong hiring decision, which may prove extremely costly. Moreover, seemingly innocuous questions can lead to charges of discrimination in the workplace. Various federal, state, and local laws prevent an employer from basing employment decisions on age, race, gender, disability, religion, marital or parental status, veteran status, or even sexual orientation. Thus, you are challenged to devise legally acceptable questions that help get the answers you need to make the best possible selection.

Doctors can conduct an effective employment interview and minimize their legal risk by following two basic guidelines. First, don't ask questions indicating that your hiring decisions violate laws designed to protect certain classes of individuals. Furthermore, make sure every question is designed to elicit information that will help you determine the applicant's ability to perform the job (skills) and get along with your current staff, the doctors, and patients (fit). If a question won't reliably get that information, simply don't ask it!

For example, don't ask:

- "Are you married?"
- "Do you rent or own your home?"

Do ask:

- "What education and/or experience makes you qualified for this job?"
- "Why are you interested in joining our practice?"

Don't ask:

- "How old are you?"

Do ask:

- "What date did you begin and end each of your previous positions?"
- "What were the reasons for each of your job changes?"

Don't ask:

- "What religion are you?"

Do ask:

- "We sometimes work on Saturday; will that be a problem for you?"

Don't ask:

- "Do you have children?"
- "How old are your children?"
- "Do you have child care?"

Do ask:

- "We sometimes have to work past 5 p.m., and you will need to stay until all patients are gone. Will that be a problem for you?"

Don't ask:

- "What is your nationality?"
- "How do you feel about foreigners?"

Do ask:

- "We have some patients who do not speak English very well; is that a problem for you?"
- "Do you speak any other languages?"

Don't ask:

- "Have you ever been arrested?"
- "Have you ever been convicted of a felony?"

Do ask:

- "We bond all employees. Will that be a problem for you?"

Don't ask:

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- “What is your physical condition?”
- “Do you have any disabilities?”
Do ask:
 - “Sometimes the pace of our practice is hectic and stressful; how do you handle stress?”Don’t ask:
 - “How long will you work here?”
 - “Do you plan to get pregnant?”Do ask:
 - “What is your favorite task?”
 - “What is your least favorite task?”
 - “What are your career plans for the next few years?”

Don’t feel limited to simply asking about those qualifications set forth in the applicant’s resume or application. For example, you can ask applicants how they may react in workplace situations. Their answers are indicators of their strengths and interpersonal relationships, a valid employment qualification.

Accordingly, we recommend the following additional queries:

- “Does your current position adequately reflect your capabilities?”
- “Describe workplace situations that you find

frustrating.”

- “Describe a situation in a prior job that involved a conflict, and tell me how you resolved it.”
- “Describe a situation when you did not have enough information to solve a problem. What did you do about it?”
- “Give me one or more examples of when you did more than was expected or required in your job.”

We recommend writing out all interview questions in advance. This keeps the interview focused on evaluating the candidate’s qualifications, and makes it less likely that you will stray into illegal areas of questioning. This also helps you follow the same general agenda with each candidate, thereby making it easier to compare their qualifications as part of a totally fair hiring process.

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