

Nonprofit Hiring Tools: Sample Interview Questions



Written by: Charity Village
February 14, 2013

Interviews are often challenging for both the interviewer, and the person being interviewed. While both parties are usually aiming to impress, the quality of the questions asked often determines whether or not an interview is a meaningful exchange of information.

Not only should most "yes" or "no" questions be avoided, but the interviewer should also ask for examples that substantiate such common claims as "I am a people person". It is the interviewer's role to probe further and gain insight into what the candidate's behaviour might be in a real world situation.

Below are two lists of sample interview questions, one for managerial and supervisory positions and one for non-supervisory positions. The questions are designed to give the potential candidate an opportunity to expand on their achievements, rather than on unsubstantiated claims, and allow the interviewer to get a better sense of the candidate's experience, attitude and ability.

These generic questions should be modified to reflect the specific position involved and the day-to-day situations that the candidate may face. Please also ensure that your questions are in compliance with Human Rights Legislation in your jurisdiction.

Managerial and Supervisory Positions

Knowledge

1. How have you prepared yourself for this kind of position?
2. What have you been doing to keep up to date in your field?
3. How would you rate your level of expertise in [insert major function to be performed] compared with others in similar positions? Why do you rate yourself that way?
4. In which areas do you feel you need to upgrade your knowledge? Why do you feel that way?
5. What improvements did you introduce in your last position?
6. How good is your knowledge of [insert essential knowledge area]. Please briefly summarize that for me.

Skills

1. Tell me about the 2 or 3 biggest problems you have encountered in your work, and how you handled them.
2. What would you say are your 3 major strengths? How will these strengths help you in this position?

3. What would you say are your principal weaknesses or shortcomings? How might these interfere with your success in this position? How might you overcome them?
4. What was the most creative or original contribution you made to your last organization?
5. Could you describe a few situations in which your work was criticized? How did you handle that?
6. What skills or abilities do you possess which have not yet been used in your career?
7. How skillful are you at [insert a major function to be performed]? Describe a situation where you needed that skill.
8. How skillful are you at [insert a major function to be performed]? Where have you used that skill in the past?
9. How many people were in the largest group that you have supervised? What kinds of positions were involved?
10. What has been the hardest thing you have ever had to do as a manager? How did you approach that?
11. As a manager, what do you look for when you are selecting people for your team?
12. Describe a situation where you had to deal with a poor performer. How did you handle that?
13. Tell me about your approach to motivating employees.
14. If you had a general morale problem among your subordinates, what would you do about it?
15. How would you set about building an effective work team in your branch/department?
16. If you had to choose between retaining a poor performer and operating with a short-staffing situation, which would you choose?
17. What would you do if you discovered an employee taking illegal drugs or drinking on the job?
18. What would you do if you suspected that two of your unmarried employees have an intimate relationship? How would your approach be different if you had proof of such a relationship?
19. What would you do if you suspected that two of your married employees are having an extramarital affair? How would your approach be different if you had proof of the affair?
20. How would you respond if a subordinate asked you directly about an organization change/downsizing that had not yet been announced?
21. What would you do if you suspected, but could not prove, that a subordinate was selling the organization's property for personal gain? How would your approach be different if you had proof?
22. What would you do if you suspected that an employee was conveying sensitive information to an outside party/the media/a competing organization?
23. What would you do if you suspected that an employee was selling member contact information to someone compiling mailing lists?
24. What would you do if you discovered that a group of employees was having discussions with a union organizer?
25. What would you do if two of your subordinates refused to co-operate with each other?
26. What would you do if a subordinate was charged with a criminal offence?
27. What would you do if a subordinate accused another employee of sexual harassment?
28. What would you do if another manager's subordinate came to you with a serious complaint about her manager?
29. What would you do about an employee who is chronically late for work?
30. What would you do about an employee who exhibits excessive absenteeism?
31. What would you do about an employee who appears to be padding her out-of-pocket expenses?
32. What would you do about an employee who spoke abusively to a customer?
33. How would you convince employees to reduce unnecessary waste and costs?

34. What do you think would affect productivity levels in an operation like this?
35. If you had to choose between satisfying a [client/customer/member] and following policy, which would you choose?
36. Tell me how you would expect to spend your time in a typical day in this position?

Interests

1. What do you want to be doing 5 years from now?
2. If you had complete freedom of choice, what would you choose to be doing at this stage in your life?
3. What did you like best about your last job?
4. What did you like least about your last job?
5. What do you want to avoid in your next job?
6. Where do you see your career going in the longer run?
7. How did you get into this field?
8. Why did you select the educational program you chose?
9. Which courses did you like best?
10. Which courses gave you the most difficulty?
11. What do you enjoy most about being a manager?
12. What have been the major surprises you encountered in being a manager?
13. What are you doing to continue developing your management skills?
14. What are the qualities that make for a great manager?
15. Which work-related organizations have you joined?
16. What kinds of books and periodicals do you read?
17. How do you spend your leisure time?
18. If you had it to do over again, would you take the same [education/career path]? Why/Why not?

Values

1. What is your definition of success?
2. Who has exercised the greatest influence on you? What did you learn from her/him?
3. For what kind of organization can you do your best work?
4. What are the qualities that make for a great organization, in your opinion?
5. What do think might be your most important contribution to our organization?
6. What would make an organization unattractive to you as a prospective employer.
7. What would you expect would happen if you and a fellow employee could not cooperate?
8. What would you expect would happen if you were often late for work or absent?
9. What would you expect would happen if you were discovered drinking or using illegal drugs on the job?
10. What would you expect would happen if a client/member/customer complained about your work, or the way you spoke to her/him?
11. What would you expect would happen on your first day on the job?

Working Climate

1. Why are you interested in joining our organization?
2. Why are you looking for a new position right now?
3. Describe your [last/current] boss. How did you get along with her/him?
4. What makes you angry or frustrated?
5. What makes you feel happy or satisfied?
6. Describe the person you would like to report to.
7. Have you ever been fired? Tell me about it.
8. When you call an employee into your office, what do they expect is going to happen?
9. On the Friday before a long holiday weekend, if you had to choose between working overtime yourself, or having a subordinate work overtime, which would you choose?
10. If you had to choose between solving a problem for a key customer, or solving a problem for a key employee, which would you choose?
11. If your planned annual vacation conflicted with a major problem arising at work, what would you do?
12. How many hours per week, on average, do you put in on the job? Is that about right?
13. Describe your management style.
14. What kind of people do you like to work with?
15. Why did you close down your business?
16. If we called your [last/current] employer, what would they tell us about you?
17. If we talked to your previous/current subordinates, what would they tell us about you?
18. Does your present boss know you're looking? How did she become aware of that?
19. For each of your previous jobs, please tell me the reason for leaving.
20. How long do you think you would stay with us?
21. Do you have any weaknesses on or off the job that I should know about?
22. How would you describe your use of alcohol?
23. How would your [last/current] boss describe you?
24. How would your best friend describe you?
25. Describe your personality for me.
26. How many hours per week, on average, would you expect to put in on the job?
27. Have you ever been affected by organization politics? Tell me about it.
28. Describe your method of working.
29. What kind of people do you like to work with?
30. Why is it taking so long for you to find a new job?
31. In your last organization, were you satisfied with your rate of advancement? To what do you attribute your rate of progress?

There seem to be some gaps in your resume. Would you explain those for me?

32. What do you know about our organization?
33. What appeals to you about us?
34. What concerns do you have about joining us?
35. What salary were you receiving in your last position?
36. What do you expect to be earning in 3 years?
37. Who could we check with for references?

Non-Supervisory Positions

Knowledge

1. How have you prepared yourself for this kind of position?
2. What have you been doing to keep up to date in your field?
3. How would you rate your level of expertise in [insert major function to be performed] compared with others in similar positions? Why do you rate yourself that way?
4. In which areas do you feel you need to upgrade your knowledge? Why do you feel that way?
5. What improvements did you introduce in your last position?
6. How good is your knowledge of [insert essential knowledge area]. Please briefly summarize that for me.

Skills

1. Tell me about the 2 or 3 biggest problems you have encountered in your work, and how you handled them.
2. What would you say are your 3 major strengths? How will these strengths help you in this position?
3. What would you say are your principal weaknesses or shortcomings? How might these interfere with your success in this position? How might you overcome them?
4. What was the most creative or original contribution you made to your last organization?
5. Could you describe a few situations in which your work was criticized? How did you handle that?
6. What skills or abilities do you possess which have not yet been used in your career?
7. How skillful are you at [insert major function to be performed]? Describe a situation where you needed that skill.
8. How skillful are you at [insert major function to be performed]? Where have you used that skill in the past?
9. If you had to choose between satisfying a [client/customer/member] and following policy, which would you choose?
10. Tell me how you would expect to spend your time in a typical day in this position?

Interests

1. What do you want to be doing 5 years from now?
2. If you had complete freedom of choice, what would you choose to be doing at this stage in your life?
3. What did you like best about your last job?
4. What did you like least about your last job?
5. What do you want to avoid in your next job?
6. Where do you see your career going in the longer run?
7. How did you get into this field?
8. Why did you select the educational program you chose?
9. Which courses did you like best?
10. Which courses gave you the most difficulty?

11. What do you enjoy most about being a [insert occupation]?
12. What have been the major surprises you encountered in being a [insert occupation]?
13. Which work-related organizations have you joined?
14. What kinds of books and periodicals do you read?
15. How do you spend your leisure time?
16. If you had it to do over again, would you take the same [education/career path]? Why/Why not?

Values

1. What is your definition of success?
2. Who has exercised the greatest influence on you? What did you learn from her/him?
3. For what kind of organization can you do your best work?
4. What are the qualities that make for a great organization, in your opinion?
5. What do think might be your most important contribution to our organization?
6. What would make an organization unattractive to you as a prospective employer.
7. What would you expect would happen if you and a fellow employee could not cooperate?
8. What would you expect would happen if you were often late for work or absent?
9. What would you expect would happen if you were discovered drinking or using illegal drugs on the job?
10. What would you expect would happen if a client/member/customer complained about your work, or the way you spoke to her/him?
11. What would you expect would happen on your first day on the job?

Working Climate

1. Why are you interested in joining our organization?
2. Why are you looking for a new position right now?
3. Describe your [last/current] boss. How did you get along with her/him?
4. What makes you angry or frustrated?
5. What makes you feel happy or satisfied?
6. Describe your perfect boss.
7. Have you ever been fired? Tell me about it.
8. If we called your [last/current] employer, what would they tell us about you?
9. Does your present boss know you're looking? How did she become aware of that?
10. For each of your previous jobs, please tell me the reason for leaving.
11. How long do you think you would stay with us?
12. Do you have any weaknesses on or off the job that I should know about?
13. How would you describe your use of alcohol?
14. How would your [last/current] boss describe you?
15. How would your best friend describe you?
16. Describe your personality for me.
17. How many hours per week, on average, would you expect to put in on the job?
18. Have you ever been affected by organization politics? Tell me about it.
19. Describe your method of working.

20. What kind of people do you like to work with?
21. Why is it taking so long for you to find a new job?
22. In your last organization, were you satisfied with your rate of advancement? To what do you attribute your rate of progress?
23. There seem to be some gaps in your resume. Would you explain those for me?
24. What do you know about our organization?
25. What appeals to you about us?
26. What concerns do you have about joining us?
27. What salary were you receiving in your last position?
28. What do you expect to be earning in 3 years?
29. Who could we check with for references?