Anatomy of a Good Interview Question

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In today’s world, it costs a lot, both time and money, to hire someone. Asking the questions that provide you with the decision making information you need is the heart of a good hire.

While there are no sure fire methods for hiring the right person, you can increase your chances of a good hire and maximize your time and recruiting dollars with solid preparation. One part of preparing is knowing specifically what skills and qualities are needed for the job and develop your interview questions accordingly. The main thing to remember is to use the right type of question to get the information you really need to make a hiring decision.

To carry our anatomy scenario forward... the body of questions must be framed on a skeleton’s backbone of relevancy. Make sure you ask all the candidates a set of core questions so you have comparable data. Then ask individual questions based on their resumes and cover letters. Most important is that you really know the needs of the job for which you are hiring, don’t guess. Are you asking questions that relate to the skills, experience and qualities of the job you are hiring for at this time, not what you wish the job or person was, but what you need right now and maybe in the near future?

Now for the arms and the legs... the information verification type question that is used to check skills and experience. It is used to check or get sustaining details in areas such as education relevancy, computer program proficiency or levels of knowledge in the industry or profession for which they are being interviewed. An example of that type question might be: rate your level of proficiency with the following editing programs on a scale of 1 – 5 and tell me why you gave yourself that rating. Or you might ask, “What specific courses did you take in college that relate to this job, and what grade did you receive?”

The other commonly used question is the open-ended question generally used to provide detail about skills and behaviors that can reveal to you how this person approaches work and their work environment; the head and the heart of the candidate. You are giving them a chance to tell you their story in a directed way. The applicant should be doing 70% of the talking in an interview while you are actively listening to their answers. Be sure you listen to not only what they say, but how they organized their thoughts, how they presented facts versus speculation and did they give you verifiable data or a lot of generalized information that can’t be checked out?

Phrase your question by asking them to describe or tell you about themselves, their previous jobs, people they worked with, etc. ...a typical day in their current job, for instance, which will give you a comparison to a typical day in your company. Or you might ask them to tell you about a time when they failed at something and what did they learned; a way to see if they can admit to mistakes and learn from them or if they play the blame game?

If you are just starting out in the interviewing world or need refreshing on asking the right questions, there are many resources available to you... use them.... be sure the feet that walk into your company are coming in the front door and going to stay awhile.