

Developing Interview Questions Guidelines

MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY MOORHEAD

A major responsibility of the committee is to design interview questions. The most effective interview questions:

- ❖ Are factual or behavior-based
- ❖ Are directly related to the qualifications and tied to success in the position
- ❖ Have a correct answer
- ❖ Are legal

Factual – these questions help committee members learn more about a candidate’s experience and qualifications. They provide an opportunity to share information beyond what was listed in the resume. Examples include:

- “Have you ever been recognized for good work?”
- “What excites you about this position?”
- “What is a personal strength that others would describe about you?”

Behavior-based – these questions ask candidates to describe specific experiences they have had rather than asking them how they might handle a theoretical situation. An example is:

- “Describe a time when you were leading a project team and a key requirement changed.”

Correct Answer – effective interview questions have a preferred answer that committee members can assess.

Agreeing on preferred answers makes it easier to compare responses across candidates. For example:

- If the committee asks about project management skills, they might prefer to hear about how the candidate develops project charters, manages stakeholders, and holds people accountable for timelines. A candidate who appears to be unfamiliar with project management tools and terminology would receive a lower rating.

Legal – Minnesota law and MnSCU policy provide guidelines to help search committees design fair and non-discriminatory interviews. They provide direction on topics that may and may not be discussed:

- Topics that may be discussed include the job, its duties and responsibilities, the organization and its mission programs and achievements, career possibilities, where the job is located, the applicant’s qualifications, abilities and experience, etc.
- Topics that may NOT be discussed include marital status, place of birth, health history, sexual preference, arrests, political or social views, living arrangements, physical characteristics etc.

Examples of Effective Interview Questions

Search committees are expected to gather the data needed to make well informed recommendations about the position. Effective interviews often begin with factual questions to help the committee learn more about the candidate. These topics could include:

- Former positions
 - o “What would a past supervisor say was one of your strengths in your role?”
 - o “What did you find frustrating about your past positions?”
- Career goals
 - o “What has been your career path?”
 - o “Where do you see yourself in 10 years?”
- Motivation
 - o “When you are fully motivated and engaged in a job responsibility, what does that look like?”
 - o “What makes you excited to come to work in the morning?”
- General
 - o “What would you need to be successful in this position?”
 - o “What makes you a strong candidate for this position?”

Questions need to be asked in a manner that does not imply potential discrimination. All candidates should be asked the same questions, don't single out certain individuals for special scrutiny based on assumptions or stereotypes. The chart below provides examples of appropriate and inappropriate interview questions.

Don't Ask	Instead Ask
Which is more important to you, a family or a career?	What are your career goals?
What arrangements do you have for taking care of your children?	Are you able to work a flexible schedule when it is required? or Are you able to work overtime when it is required?
Jews don't work on Saturdays. You are Jewish, aren't you?	We often work on weekends. Are you able to work weekends when it is required?
Do you have transportation to work?	We begin the workday at 8:00am. Would you be able to be at work at this time every day?
You are overweight. Can you get around ok?	The essential functions require a lot of moving around, carrying things, climbing up and down stairs. Are you able to perform all these functions? (asked of all candidates)

In addition to being fair and legal, effective questions provide specific information about how each candidate would perform the job responsibilities. Your specific questions and preferred answers will be based on the work responsibilities and the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to perform them.

The following chart contains examples of work responsibilities, behavior-based interview questions that might address them, and the type of answers a committee might be looking for.

Work Responsibility	Example of Behavior-based Question	What You Might Be Looking For
Problem Solving (Analytical Skills)	Describe a time when you had a problem which you did not have either the resources or the authority to resolve. What did you do?	Right answers might show ability to break problem down into parts and select an appropriate strategy to solve it. Problem answers show lack of intent and conceptual ability, such as “things just seemed to work out”
Project Management (Manage Multiple Projects)	What tools and strategies have you used to manage multiple projects simultaneously? OR Describe a situation where one of your projects had a set-back.	Right answers show knowledge and application of project management tools, realistic assessment of things that typically go wrong and ability to learn from mistakes. Problem answers show lack of depth in project management knowledge, such as “I’ve never had a problem”
Customer Communication (meeting needs of diverse customers; listening)	Describe a situation where you served a diverse customer base. How did you meet their differing needs? OR Describe a time when you handled “the customer from hell”. What was the situation and how did it turn out?	Right answer includes at least one example of how different groups of customers have different needs and how the person addressed it. Indicated knowledge of active listening; ability to assess needs and demonstration of courtesy and respect, professionalism. Problem answers indicate lack of understanding about listening skills, lack of awareness about professional standards
Working with Diverse Populations	Clients served by this position are multi- generational and come from racially diverse backgrounds. How have you supported diverse populations in your past positions?	Right answers indicate an understanding of issues faced by the clients. The committee could follow up to seek specific stories to illustrate how the candidate provided service to different types of clients. Problem answers indicate little or no appreciation for how diversity affects the work.

Supervision (Coaching)	Describe a time when you were involved in the development of one or more of your employees. What did you do?	Right answers demonstrate the belief that supervisors should always be coaching employees to support their development.
	OR Tell us about an employee that was not meeting your expectations and how you dealt with the problem.	Right answers show experience in coaching problem behavior, use of specific tools and strategies and self- reflection about the process. Problem answers demonstrate a belief that development is only for problem employees or that it's important but there isn't enough time.

Examples of Interview Questions – MSUM Core Values

The core values at MSUM (Grit, Humility and Heart) provide us with the definition of “how we behave”. Incorporating interview questions that address the core values will provide a look into how the candidate will/or has behaved in the past when demonstrating these values and if that behavior is consistent with how we define the core values and “behave” at MSUM.

Grit, Humility and Heart –

- One of MSUM’s core values is grit. Please provide us with an example of when you have demonstrated grit in your personal or professional life?
- One of the definitions of grit is that we have the courage to do what is right. Tell us about a time in which you had grit in your current or previous position.
- Grit is a core value at MSUM. Describe for us what grit means to you and how that translates into being a successful employee.
- Humility is an important core value at MSUM. Tell us about a time in which you demonstrated humility in your professional life.
- Humility means that we don’t take ourselves too seriously. Give an example of when you demonstrated humility in the workplace.
- Describe what humility means to you and how you demonstrate this on the job.
- At MSUM we are passionate about our purpose and that comes across in our core value of heart. Tell us about what heart means to you and provide an example that demonstrates your belief.
- One of the definitions of heart is going the extra mile for our students and each other. Provide an example of a time in which you demonstrated heart.
- Heart is a core value at MSUM, describe how this core value translates into a successful workplace.

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