

Interview Skills: Finding the Best Match TELNPS Course

Objectives

At the conclusion of this course, you should be able to--

- Explain how the Merit System Principles and Prohibited Personnel Practices apply to your interview process.
- List the steps involved in the interview process.
- Explain the benefits of using a matrix in the interview and selection process.
- Develop criteria for evaluating candidates.

Objectives

- Recognize the "red flags" that come up in the application and during the interview.
- State which questions to ask, and more importantly what NOT to ask.
- Identify questions for interviewing former supervisors, peers, and references.
- List the documentation you need to keep during and after the interview process.

Think About:



What are some challenges you have experienced, or that you have seen other supervisors experience, when it comes to interviewing or selecting applicants for a vacant position?

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Why Take the Time?

- Personnel costs make up the biggest portion of your budgets.
- One “bad” employee can tie up 80-90% of your time as a supervisor.
- Our goal is to hire the best of the best.

MSPB Report

The structured interview is among the most valid assessment tools available...

MSPB Report - Costs

- Entry level \$5,000-7,000
- \$20,000 \$40,000
- \$100,000 \$300,000

And the costs keep going UP!!

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Today's Goal

- Will be filling a vacant seasonal position for a Visitor Use Assistant (VUA)
- Has already been advertised
- HR office provided certificate of eligibles
- You will be making a decision

Merit System Principles

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Fair and Open Competition

Recruit, select, and advance on merit after fair and open competition.

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Equal Opportunity

Treat employees and applicants fairly and equitably.

High Standards of Conduct

Maintain high standards of integrity and concern for the public interest.

Prohibited Personnel Practices

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Discriminate

Illegally discriminate for or against any employee/applicant.

Obstruct Right To Compete

Obstruct a person's right to compete for employment.

Influence Someone To Withdraw

Influence any person to withdraw from competition for a position.

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Give Unauthorized Preference

Give unauthorized preference or improper advantage.

Who Enforces the Prohibited Personnel Practices?

Office of Special Counsel (OSC)

- Investigates allegations of violations and serves as a prosecutor before MSPB
- If allegations proven, OSC can seek corrective action, disciplinary action, or both

Exercise: Which Path Is She/He On?

The path to hiring a new employee or the path to having to hire an attorney?

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Which Path? Case #1

While reviewing applicants for a VUA position, the supervisor notices that Jane has a B.S. in Computer Science. He immediately moves Jane's application to the top of the pile.

Which Path? Case #2

A supervisor has one veteran on her certificate of eligibles. When describing the job to the veteran, the supervisor tends toward the negative aspects of the job. When describing it to others, she is more neutral to positive.

Which Path? Case #3

The Chief of Interpretation calls the Fee Supervisor in his park and encourages him to be on the lookout for an application that his son is submitting for a seasonal VUA position. He mentions that he feels that his son would be very responsible and is looking forward to the opportunity to work at the same park as his dad for the summer.

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Which Path? Case #4

A supervisor is struggling with accomplishing the unit's workload because two employees are out for 12 weeks each on FMLA leave related to the birth of new children. During the course of interviewing applicants, the supervisor asks whether or not the applicant is expecting, or in the case of male applicants, whether the spouse is expecting.

How To Develop Rating Criteria (Job Analysis)

- What is your "vision" of a successful incumbent?
- Go beyond KSA's to actual experiences and demonstrated understanding
- Beginnings of performance elements for position—preliminary rating
- Strategic way to approach the interviews consistently and legally

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A & C

Example of a "Job-Related Quality" for a VUA

Job experience in dealing with the general public

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Developing a Detailed Rating Scale

- Incorporates behaviors of high-performing employees
- Promotes objectivity
- Promotes consistency
- e.g., give numerical scores to the applicant's answers or categorize them

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Simple Rating Scale

Should identify
“unacceptable” responses,
“acceptable” responses, &
“excellent” responses

(do this before the interviews)

Rating Summary for VUA

Criteria: *Job experience in dealing with general public*

Rating Scale:

- **Excellent (2 pts.)** = *2+ years' total experience in customer service positions*
- **Acceptable (1 pt.)** = *Held at least 1 job involving contact with public*
- **Unacceptable (0 pts.)** = *No actual customer service experience*

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Exercise: Developing a List of “Job-Related Qualities”

- Think about your vision of a successful incumbent for the position. How would you identify this person?
- Refer to the VUA position description in Appendix A, then use the matrix in Appendix C to record your criteria.

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Application Red Flags

- Gaps in employment history
- Questionable dates/short-term employment
- Level of responsibility
- Cannot contact current employer
- Dramatic departure from educational background
- Departing a permanent Federal job before the end of 1 year

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Capture the Flag!

Look at the excerpts from the VUA candidate applications in Appendix B and identify Red Flags

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B-C

Annotate on the Matrix (Appendix C)

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Who Will Be YOUR Top 3?

- Elizabeth Adams
- James Hudson
- Mark Rodriquez
- Marie Saunders
- Daniel Vale
- Charles Williams

Finalists

- * Elizabeth Adams
- * Mark Rodriquez
- * Daniel Vale

To Ask or Not To Ask

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National Origin

There are NO legal questions that can be asked regarding this subject.

Sex

There are NO legal questions that can be asked regarding this subject.

Education – Don't Ask

- Don't ask questions that seek the nationality, racial, or religious affiliation of a school.
- Don't ask education level if not related to the job being filled.

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Education – May Ask

DO ask questions about candidate’s academic education as long as they pertain to the position being filled.

Work Schedule – Don’t Ask

Don’t ask questions related to child care, ages of children, or other non-related areas.

Personal Plans

There are **NO** legal questions that can be asked regarding this subject.

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Police Record – Don't Ask

Do not ask –
“Have you ever been arrested?”

Police Record – May Ask

Special requirements such as bonding or a required background check may be stated.

Example, “Does that present a problem to you?”

Medical Issues – Don't Ask

■ Disability-related questions

■ “Do you need reasonable accommodation?”

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Medical Issues – May Ask

- Questions about the applicant’s ability to perform the job
- “How would you carry out these responsibilities?”

Sample Questions That You May Ask

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Exercise: To Ask or Not To Ask?

- Write 1 appropriate, legal question that you will ask those you interview for the VUA position.
- Write 1 question that you may be tempted to ask, but that may be inappropriate or illegal.

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From Former Supervisor

- Work History
- Dependability
- Initiative
- Special Projects
- Suggestions

From Co-Workers/Peers

- Teamwork
- Support of the whole
- Personality, attitude
- Trust

From Direct Reports

- “Would you work for this supervisor again? Why or why not?”
- Feedback

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From References

- Same information as from co-workers/peers.
- The applicant gave you these names because they will make them look good. Phrase your questions to draw them out a little.

Don't Read Between the Lines

- Private industry, by policy, might only verify employment; that doesn't mean the applicant was a bad employee.
- If the answer to a question is "I can't discuss that," it doesn't mean the applicant was a bad employee.

Sample Questions

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Some Things To Remember

- Responsibility rests with you, the selecting official.
- Consistency in contacts you make with applicant is important towards achieving the overall goal.

Some Things To Remember

- The crediting plan is confidential. You should not have lower-graded employees involved because they may gain an advantage in future competition (primarily with permanent positions).
- Consider interviewing at least the top 3 applicants.

The Complete Interview Process

Some parks may require this...

- Interview references and former supervisor for each of the top 3 applicants
- Contact peers
- If supervisory position, contact direct reports

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Scheduling the Interview

- Verify interest in job
- Inform that you will be calling former supervisors, co-workers, references
- Provide information regarding the position, area location, housing, etc.
- Schedule time & place for interview
- Leave call back number and alternative contact

Setting the Stage

- Quiet place, free from interruptions.
- Relax.
- Be friendly.
- Document contacts.

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Taking Control of the Interview by Defining Objectives

- Review the purpose of the interview and your plan.
- Review the job duties/location/work schedule/other pertinent info.
- Tell applicant if you're taking notes.
- Remember! Talking=75% applicant, 25% you.

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Questioning

- Work through prepared questions.
Ask follow-up ?'s if necessary.
Ask ?'s regarding red flags on application.
- Don't allow answers to run on excessively.
- Be clear and concise.

Interview Red Flags

- Oral description doesn't match written description
- Level of expertise is not obvious from their oral description
- Argumentative
- Appears to be evasive and non-committal
- Speaks ill of former employers
- Angry body language
- Responses like "usually works well with others" from references

Selling Your Opportunity

- Be enthusiastic about your job and working for NPS.
- Do not offer comments about candidates' "fit" yet.

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Closing

- Answer applicant's questions.
- Don't feel obligated to answer sensitive questions.
- Tell them where you are in the process and when they will know the results of their application.
- End on a positive note and thank them.

After the Interview

- Take 5 minutes to write down your impressions.
- Review the matrix and other interview notes.
- Note particularly positive or questionable answers.
- Courtesy call to those interviewed but not selected. (Optional, but a "touch of class.")

Record Keeping

- CFR regulations – safeguard your cert and the information contained within.
- Interview notes – maintain for a reasonable period of time.
- Specific documentation – maintain for a reasonable period of time; copy to HR.
 - Declinations, questions, problems, etc.

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To Receive Credit for This Course

- Take the on-line evaluation at
 - www.nps.gov/training/tel
 - Click on the DOI Learn tab
 - Go to the link under Class Evaluations for *Interview Skills for supervisors: Finding the Best Match*

To Receive Credit for This Course

- Please complete the evaluation within 2 weeks of the course, by March 14

Thank you for participating in today's course!
