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Guide to Interview Questions

TALENT ACQUISITION, OFFICE OF HUMAN RESOURCES
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Begin by reviewing the position description and ideal candidate profile. List the target qualifications (knowledge, skills, abilities, education/work experience, competencies, characteristics) needed. Revolve the interview around those target qualifications along with team, department, and agency fit.

Types of Interview Questions

Generally, interview questions fit into one of three categories. Ask a variety to get a complete assessment of each candidate and whether or not they are the right fit for the job.

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<th>Types of Interview Questions</th>
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<td><strong>Technical</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus on knowledge, skills, abilities, and work experience.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Behavioral/Competency-Based</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus on temperament, attitude, and interpersonal and communication skills.</td>
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<td><strong>Organizational Fit</strong></td>
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<td>Focus on the workplace and team environments to determine whether a candidate is a good match.</td>
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Technical Questions

Focus on knowledge, skills, abilities and work experience.

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities
• Tell me about your relevant technical skills as they pertain to this position.
• Give me an example of a technical problem you had to solve. How did you implement the solution?
• What training and/or professional development have you completed in the last year?
• How do you stay current on industry trends?
• Describe the types of technology you deal with on a daily basis.
• Tell me about the types of software you use most often.
• What software do you have experience with? How would you describe your experience level for that software?
• How would you describe your experience level with Microsoft Office?
• What types of equipment have you used?

Work Experience
• How have your previous positions prepared you for this one?
• What special skills or knowledge have you gained to help in this job?
• Describe how you have progressed through past positions to reach your current one.
• What parts of your job do you consider most important?
• What was your favorite job? Why?
• Why have you decided to leave your current role?

Job Performance
• What is your most significant professional accomplishment?
• What is the biggest failure you've had in your career? Why do you believe it was your biggest failure?
• What kind of developmental feedback have you received?
• What are your areas for improvement?
• How have you had to reinvent or redefine your job to meet your company’s changing needs?
• How have you added value to your job over time?
Behavioral/Competency-Based Questions

Focus on temperament, attitude, and interpersonal and communication skills.

**Conflict Management**
Manages and resolves conflicts, grievances, confrontations, or disagreements in a constructive manner to minimize negative personal impact.

- In general, how do you handle conflict?
- Tell me about a time you had a conflict with a colleague, what was the conflict and how did you resolve it?
- Tell us about a time you mediated a conflict between colleagues.
- Tell me about a professional relationship that started off on the wrong foot. How did you continue working with that person?
- Tell me about an occasion when your work or your idea was criticized, what were the circumstances and how did you handle it?
- Tell me about a time you disagreed with your manager or someone more senior than you.
- If your supervisor unfairly criticized you, what would you do?
- Would you like to have your manager’s job? Why or why not?

**Customer Service**
Interacts with customers in a friendly and professional manner, works to resolve issues quickly and effectively, and is knowledgeable about products and services.

- What does excellent customer service mean to you?
- Describe a time you feel you provided excellent customer service.
- Give an example of the most difficult customer you’ve dealt with, how did you handle the situation and how could you have handled it better?
- Describe a time when you tried to help a customer resolve a problem.
- Have you been involved in any efforts to assess customer needs and improve processes to deliver better service?

**Decision Making**
Specifies goals and obstacles to achieving those goals, generates alternatives, considers risks, and evaluates and chooses the best alternative in order to make a determination, draw a conclusion, or solve a problem.

- How do you go about making important decisions?
- Tell me about an important decision or judgment call you’ve had to make on the job.
- What kinds of decisions are most difficult for you?
- Describe a situation in which you developed an innovative solution or a new or better way of performing a task.
- Describe a situation in which you did something novel or thought “outside the box.”
- Describe a situation in which you made a decision that had an impact on others.
- Describe a situation in which you made a decision that caused change to occur.
- Describe a situation in which you had to make the best decision possible when all the information that you needed was not available.
- Describe a situation in which you considered alternatives to reach a decision.
Influencing/Negotiating

Specifies goals and obstacles to achieving those goals, generates alternatives, considers risks, and evaluates and chooses the best alternative in order to make a determination, draw conclusion, or solve a problem. Persuades others to accept recommendations, cooperate, or change their behavior; works with others towards an agreement; negotiates to find mutually acceptable solutions.

- Tell me about a time you came up with a new idea. Were you able to get it approved? If so, how did you go about it?
- Can you think of a time an idea of yours was rejected? Tell me about it.
- What barriers have you come across when implementing your ideas?
- What do you do when you know you are right and others disagree with you?
- How do you build consensus?
- Describe a situation in your work where you had to use persuasion to gain cooperation from others to accomplish a goal.
- Have you acted in the role of a negotiator?
- Tell us about a time when you had to get information from someone who didn’t want to give it to you.

Interpersonal Skills

Shows understanding, friendliness, courtesy, tact, empathy, cooperation, concern, and politeness to others and relates well to different people from varied backgrounds and different situations.

- Do you function more effectively as a team member or as an individual contributor?
- How would your colleagues describe you?
- The successful candidate for this position will be working with individuals who have been with the city for a long time. How will you integrate with an established team?
- Tell me about an occasion when, in difficult circumstances, you pulled a team together.
- What do you find most challenging in working with co-workers?
- Describe a group project you were involved in where there were differences of opinion. How did you handle it? What was the outcome?
- Tell us about some of the toughest groups you have had to get cooperation from.
- Tell us about a project or a situation that required interacting with a diverse group of people and establishing cooperative relationships to accomplish a specific goal.
- Define cooperation.
- Define teamwork.

Communication

Able to convey information to others effectively and efficiently.

- Tell me about a work situation you had that required excellent communication skills.
- How do you decide what form of communication is most appropriate? For example, having a conversation or sending an email?
- How important is communication and interaction with others in your job?
- Describe a time a conflict arose because of poor communication. What happened?
- Describe a situation where you had to explain technical material to people without a technical background.
Oral Communication
Expresses information to individuals or groups effectively; taking into account the audience and nature of the information; makes clear and convincing oral presentations; listens to others, attends to non-verbal cues and responds appropriately.

- Describe a time when you gave verbal instructions to someone about how to complete a task.
- Describe the types of audiences you have addressed as part of your work and the type of information you presented.
- Describe a presentation you have made to an individual or group including the audience and topic.

Written Communication
Composes, reviews, edits, and issues written materials for diverse audiences and communicates purpose in a succinct and organized manner that is appropriate for context, time, and place.

- Describe a document that you wrote. What was the document about? How did you organize it?
- Describe the kinds of documents you have been responsible for writing or editing including the target audience and subject matter.
- Describe the types of documents you have proofread or edited. What changes did you suggest?

Planning and Evaluating
Organizes work, sets priorities, and determines resource requirements; determines short or long-term goals and strategies to achieve them; coordinates with other organizations or parts of the organization to accomplish goals; monitors progress and evaluates outcomes.

- How do you organize and plan for major projects?
- Describe a project that required a significant commitment over an extended period.
- How do you structure your typical workday?
- What do you do when you have multiple competing priorities?
- Tell me about the last time you failed to complete a project on time.
- Tell me about a task you started but just couldn't seem to get finished.
- Describe a situation when you had to modify an existing plan or otherwise had to reprioritize your work in response to a changing situation.
- Give me an example of the last time you went above and beyond to get the job done.
- Describe a time you were given a project with limited instructions and your manager was unavailable to help you. What did you do?
- Describe a fast-paced environment you have worked in.

Problem Solving
Identifies problems; determines accuracy and relevance of information; uses sound judgment to generate and evaluate alternatives, and to make recommendations.

- Describe the most difficult problem you had to solve. What was the situation and what did you do? Would you do anything different next time?
- Describe a creative solution that you have developed to solve a problem.
- What are the most common challenges during your workday?
- Tell us about an important idea or solution you came up with at work.
- Tell us about a time you had to solve a problem with the assistance of others.
Reasoning
Identifies rules, principles, or relationships that explain facts, data, or other information; analyzes information and makes correct inferences or draws accurate conclusions.

• Describe a situation in which you analyzed a situation or information and made a recommendation to someone.
• Describe a time when you had to support a decision that you made.
• Describe a time when you used information from several different sources to make a decision.
• Describe a situation in which you researched and synthesized information for others.

Leadership
Identifies and produces innovative ideas and thinks strategically. Takes responsibility for actions, projects and people; makes quick, clear decisions which may include tough choices, after considering risks. Sets high standards for quality, quantity and timeliness. Provides others with clear direction, motivation, and empowers. Shows respect for the views and contributions of other team members. Shows empathy, listens, supports, and cares for others, and reconciles conflict.

• Describe your leadership style.
• How do you motivate people?
• Tell us about the structure and roles on your team.
• Tell us about a time you had to coach an employee with performance issues.
• Describe a time you had to implement an idea that you did not support. How did you get your team to rally around that idea?
• How do you deliver unpopular organizational decisions to your team?
• What have you done with your team to build morale? What have you done to recognize your employees’ contributions to the team?
• Describe your approach to hiring.
• What do you look for in candidates?
• How do you orient new employees to your team?
• What do you think makes someone a good manager?
• How do you measure success as a manager?
• Describe a change you made in your last job that was beneficial to your team.
• What have you done to become more effective as a manager in your job?
• Give me an example of your ability to facilitate progressive change within your organization.
• How do you typically stay in the information loop and monitor your team’s performance?
• How do you delegate responsibilities to your team?
• What did you like about managing people?
• What do you not like about managing people?
Cultural/Organizational Fit Questions

Focus on the workplace and team environment.

**Personal**
- What five adjectives describe you best?
- What do you consider your greatest strength?
- What do consider an area for development?
- How do you set goals for yourself?
- What motivates you to do your best work?
- What qualities do you think are necessary to be successful in this position?
- Tell me about the one thing in your career you're most proud of.
- If you are hired, what will you do in your first 30 days?
- What was the last job-related book you read?

**Stress Tolerance/Flexibility**
- Describe the last time you took a professional risk.
- What do you find most frustrating at work?
- What keeps you up at night at your current job?
- What do you do to manage your stress when you feel overwhelmed?
- Tell me about the last change which occurred in your office. How did you handle it?

**Work Environment**
- How would you define a good working atmosphere?
- What energizes and depletes you at work?
- Under what conditions do you work best?
- How can we best help you get your job done?
- Describe the best and worst managers you’ve ever had. What qualities did each of them have?
- Describe the best and worst teams you’ve ever been a part of. What qualities did each of them have?

**Organizational Fit**
- Why did you apply for this position? What interests you most?
- What do you know about the City and County of Denver? What is your impression of the city as an employer?
- Why do you want to work at the City and County of Denver?
- Why should I consider you for this position? Why are you the best candidate for this position?
- What will you bring to this position? Why should I consider you?
Permissible and Impermissible Inquiries

The following is a chart that can help distinguish permissible from impermissible inquiries when talking to candidates. The guidelines apply to questions asked or information sought on job application materials and in job interviews. Keep in mind, however, that any inquiry that is not job-related may be unlawful if it has an adverse impact on members of protected groups.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Cannot Ask</th>
<th>Can Ask</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Have you ever legally changed your name? What was your original name?</td>
<td>Have you worked for the City and County of Denver under a different name? Does the City and County of Denver need a different name to check your previous employment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>What is your date of birth? What is your age? Can you provide proof of age in the form of a birth or baptismal certificate?</td>
<td>If hired, can you provide proof that you are at least 18 years of age?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birthplace</td>
<td>Where were you born? Where were your parents born?</td>
<td>Will you be able to provide proof of employment eligibility to work in the United States upon being hired?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence</td>
<td>Do you own or rent your residence? Give the names and relationships of persons residing with you.</td>
<td>What is your present address? How long have you resided at that address? What was your former address and how long did you reside there?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td>What is your race? What color is your hair, skin, etc.?</td>
<td>None.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>What is your religious affiliation or denomination? What church do you belong to? What is the name of your pastor, minister, or rabbi? What religious holidays do you observe?</td>
<td>None. (If you need to know if an applicant is available to work on Saturday or Sunday shifts, ask: ‘Are you available to work on Saturdays or Sundays if needed?’ Ask this of everyone and only if required for the position.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Are you male or female? (Or any other inquiries that indicate sex.)</td>
<td>None.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photographs</td>
<td>Submit a photograph with your application form or after the interview.</td>
<td>None. You may inform the candidate that a photograph may be required after hire for identification card or other ID purposes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td>List the dates you attended or graduated from high school or college.</td>
<td>List your academic, vocational or professional education, and the schools you attended. Do you have any degrees?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Citizenship</strong></td>
<td>Of what country are you a citizen? Are you or other members of your family naturalized citizens? If so, when did you or they become citizens? Do you intend to become a US citizen?</td>
<td>None. (May ask all applicants: ‘Can you provide proof of employment eligibility to work in the United States upon being hired?’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National Origin/Ancestry</strong></td>
<td>What is your lineage, ancestry, national origin, descent, parentage, or nationality? What is your native language? What is your spouse’s nationality?</td>
<td>What languages do you read, speak or write fluently? (Only if another language is required or preferred to perform the job.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical Requirements</strong></td>
<td>What is your height and weight?</td>
<td>None. (Only if bona-fide essential function of the position may ask all applicants: ‘Are you aware that this position requires you be able to perform the following: [insert physical requirement]?’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arrests and Convictions</strong></td>
<td>Have you ever been arrested? Have you ever been charged with any crime?</td>
<td>Criminal history is not part of the initial screening process to determine a candidate’s eligibility. The only exception is positions where law or regulations prohibit employment of an individual with certain convictions. In that instance, criminal history inquiries must be limited to only written responses provided directly by a candidate. An offer of employment is contingent on the successful completion of a background check.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital or Family Status</strong></td>
<td>What is your marital status? What is your spouse’s name? What does your spouse do for a living? What was your maiden name? How many children do you have? How old are they? Are you pregnant? Do you plan to have children? What daycare provisions have you made for them?</td>
<td>None.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
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<tr>
<td>Military Service</td>
<td>What type of military discharge did you receive? Were you ever disciplined while in the service? Are you going to be deployed to another country for a long time? How often do you go to training? If you go to military training one weekend a month then I can’t consider you for this job because you must be able to work weekends.</td>
<td>Are you a veteran of the Armed Forces? If yes, what type of training or education did you receive while in the military?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatives</td>
<td>List names and addresses of your relatives.</td>
<td>Do you have any relatives already employed by the City and County of Denver? If yes, please name them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizations</td>
<td>List all social organizations, clubs, societies and lodges to which you belong.</td>
<td>List any professional, trade or service organizations of which you are a member.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>What is the name of your pastor, minister, or rabbi?</td>
<td>Who referred you for a position here? List the names of persons willing to provide personal or professional references for you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>Do you have a disability? Do you have any medical conditions? If a candidate volunteers medical or disability information, do not ask any questions on those topics; steer the conversation back to the interview questions, and notify OHR after the interview.</td>
<td>Are you capable of performing the essential functions of this position with or without accommodation? (Generally, if you are going to ask this question, it should be asked of all candidates).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>Do you have a car?</td>
<td>Do you have a reliable means of getting to work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay History</td>
<td>What is your current, past, or expected salary or pay rate for this position?</td>
<td>The hiring range or rate for this position is ______. Is this in line with your expectations?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>