

Not so Obvious Interview Questions

by Jennifer Potter

So, you're conducting an interview, you have a great candidate in front of you - at least you think this person looks great on paper. You get the small talk over with and then it's time to get the interview started. So, what will you ask?

We want to pull information out of the person - no, not how they figure out how many shark teeth fit into an olympic-sized swimming pool (we'll leave those for Google to ask), but to see first and foremost - do they know how to do the job. Then we need to see to see what their work ethic is like, and whether the candidate will indeed fit into the culture of the company. A good point to keep in your mind: Skills can be taught, but personal qualities like honesty, willingness to learn, compatibility, attitude and passion cannot.

I took a poll around my office, and did some digging in cyberspace and came up with the following questions. There are three basic categories that will help you determine whether the candidate is a good fit for your company. Work Experience/Habits, Personality and Culture. Most of us who have been interviewing for some time know the basic interview questions and probably have your own favorites. The following questions are ones you may not currently ask.

Work Experience - Aside from the skills necessary to do the job and the questions you'll ask to discern whether the applicant has them, the following may give you some insight as to how they work and what they think about their job.

- 1) Why are you looking for a new opportunity?
- 2) What's the most important thing you learned at your last/current job?
- 3) If I asked your current/former boss what your greatest strength is - what would they tell me? (you could change that to weakness)

Personality - If the applicant does have the skills necessary, these additional questions may help you decide if the applicant is the type of person you want in your office all week long. Will their personality mesh with their colleagues or will there be major clashing? Do they take responsibility for their actions? Do they have goals, and what are they?

- 1) Tell me about a time when you did something wrong. How did you handle it? What did you learn from it?
- 2) What is your proudest achievement outside of work?
- 3) What is one thing you'd like to achieve in life?

Culture Fit - Finally, will the person fit into the culture of your company? You probably have a good vision of your company and know it well - what types of people make it run smoothly and how your colleagues work together. Does the job you are hiring for require a team person, or

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someone who works better independently? Do they enjoy company activities or prefer not to mingle?

- 1) What is your ideal working environment?
- 2) What attracted you to this company?
- 3) What will you miss about your last job?

The one *Not* to ask: One question that is tossed around frequently is “Where do you see yourself in 5 years?” There are those interviewers who say this gives them insight into what the applicant thinks of the company, if they are invested in it and whether they are a career person. But there are more people who say that this tells us nothing except, well, that the applicant is well-versed in knowing what questions will be asked. Most likely they don’t know if they will like the culture and fit, or even the job itself - remember, the applicant is as concerned about all of this as you are - and doesn’t really know if this is where they want to land permanently.

Let’s skip that question and use your time to delve into meatier questions - the ones you want to use to *really* get to know the applicant, as well as you can in 2 or 3 interviews anyway.

