



LESSON 1

MASTERING PROBING TECHNIQUES: THE ART OF THE FOLLOW-UP

Introduction: Digging for Gold

In a behavioral interview, the initial answer to your question is just the beginning of the conversation. The real magic happens in the follow-up. Probing questions are the tools you use to dig deeper, to get past the surface-level, rehearsed answers, and to uncover the rich, detailed information you need to make an accurate assessment.

Mastering the art of the follow-up is what separates a good interviewer from a great one. It is the key to unlocking the full power of the SOAR method and getting a true understanding of a candidate's abilities.

The Purpose of Probing: Why Dig Deeper?

- **To Get More Detail:** Probing questions help you to flesh out a candidate's story and to get a clear and complete picture of the situation.
- **To Separate "We" from "I":** It is common for candidates to talk about what their "team" accomplished. Probing questions help you to isolate the candidate's individual contribution.
- **To Assess Their Thought Process:** Probing questions can help you to understand why a candidate took a certain course of action and what their thought process was.
- **To Test for Honesty and Consistency:** If a candidate is exaggerating or being less than truthful, they will often struggle to provide specific, consistent details when you probe deeper.

A Toolkit of Powerful Probing Questions

Here are some of the most effective probing questions, categorized by what they are designed to uncover:

To Get More Detail:

● “Can you be more specific about that?”

● “Walk me through that step-by-step.”

● “What did that look like in practice?”

To Isolate the Candidate’s Contribution:

● “What was your specific role in that project?”

● “What part of that were you personally responsible for?”

● “Tell me about a decision you made in that situation.”

To Understand Their Thought Process:

● “What was your rationale for that decision?”

● “What other options did you consider?”

● “What were the key factors you had to weigh in that situation?”

To Explore the Result and the Learning:

● “How did you measure the success of your actions?”

● “What was the feedback from your manager or your customers?”

● “What did you learn from that experience?”

● “What would you do differently next time?”

The Funnel Technique: From Broad to Specific

One of the most effective ways to structure your probing is to use the funnel technique. You start with a broad, open-ended question to get the conversation started, and then you use a series of increasingly specific probing questions to narrow the focus and get to the heart of the matter.

Example: The Funnel in Action

- **Broad Opening:** “Tell me about a time when you had to implement a new process with your team.”
- **Narrowing the Focus:** “What was the biggest challenge you faced in getting the team to adopt the new process?”
- **Getting to the Specifics:** “What specific steps did you take to overcome that resistance?”
- **The Heart of the Matter:** “Tell me about a specific conversation you had with a team member who was particularly resistant. What did you say, and how did they respond?”

Activity: The Probing Gauntlet

Working in groups of three, you will take turns playing the roles of interviewer, candidate, and observer.

- ① The interviewer will ask a behavioral question.
- ② The candidate will provide an initial answer.
- ③ The interviewer will then use at least five different probing questions to dig deeper into the candidate’s story.
- ④ The observer will keep track of the probing questions used and provide feedback to the interviewer on their effectiveness.

Rotate roles until everyone has had a chance to be the interviewer. This exercise will give you hands-on practice in using a variety of probing techniques to get the information you need.

