



LESSON 2

THE INTERVIEWER'S TOOLKIT: ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

Introduction: The Heart of the Interview

Asking the right questions is the single most important skill of a great interviewer. The questions you ask will determine the quality of the information you receive and, ultimately, the quality of your hiring decision. A well-crafted question can unlock a wealth of information about a candidate's past performance, their problem-solving skills, and their behavioral competencies. A poorly crafted question, on the other hand, will elicit a vague, rehearsed, and uninformative answer.

This lesson will provide you with a toolkit of different types of questions and teach you when and how to use them to conduct a thorough and insightful interview.

The Three Types of Questions That Get Results

1. Closed Questions: For Quick Facts

Closed questions are designed to elicit a simple, direct answer, often a "yes" or "no." They are best used for quickly gathering factual information or confirming basic requirements.

- **When to Use Them:** At the beginning of an interview to confirm non-negotiable requirements (e.g., "Are you available to work weekends?") or to get a specific piece of information (e.g., "How many years of experience do you have with the Opera property management system?").
- **The Danger:** Overusing closed questions can make an interview feel like an interrogation and prevent you from getting the rich, detailed information you need.

2. Open Questions: To Get Them Talking

Open questions are the cornerstone of a behavioral interview. They are designed to encourage the candidate to provide detailed, narrative answers and to share specific examples from their past experience.

- **Starter Phrases:** The most effective open questions often start with phrases like:
 - “Tell me about a time when...”
 - “Describe a situation where...”
 - “Walk me through how you would...”
 - “Give me an example of...”
- **Restaurant Example:** “Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a difficult customer in a busy restaurant environment. What was the situation, and how did you handle it?”
- **What This Reveals:** This type of question reveals a candidate’s problem-solving skills, their customer service philosophy, and their ability to perform under pressure.

3. Probing Questions: To Dig Deeper

Probing questions are follow-up questions that you use to get more detail and clarity after a candidate has given an initial response. They are the key to unlocking the full power of the SOAR method (Situation, Obstacle, Action, Result).

The SOAR Follow-Up System:

After a candidate has given an initial response to an open question, use probing questions to dig deeper into each part of the SOAR framework:

- **Situation Probe:** “Can you give me a little more context about that situation?” “What was your specific role?”
- **Obstacle Probe:** “What was the biggest challenge you faced in that situation?” “What made it so difficult?”
- **Action Probe:** “What specific steps did you take?” “How did you decide on that course of action?” “What other options did you consider?”
- **Result Probe:** “What was the outcome of your actions?” “How did you measure success?” “What did you learn from that experience?”

The Power of the Pause: One of the most effective probing techniques is silence. After a candidate has finished their answer, pause for a few seconds. More often than not, they will fill the silence with more detailed and valuable information.

Questions to Avoid: The Legal Minefield

It is crucial to avoid any questions that could be perceived as discriminatory. This includes questions about a candidate's:

- Age
- Race or ethnicity
- Gender or sexual orientation
- Religion
- Marital or family status
- Disability

Even seemingly innocent questions like, “Where are you from originally?” or “Do you have children?” can land you in legal trouble. Stick to questions that are directly related to the candidate’s ability to do the job.

ACTIVITY: BUILD YOUR QUESTION BANK

Time needed: 30 minutes

What You'll Do

Create powerful behavioral interview questions that reveal if candidates truly have the skills you need. Build a question bank you'll use forever.

Why This Matters

Generic question: "Are you a team player?"

Answer: "Yes" (Tells you nothing)

Behavioral question: "Tell me about a time your team missed a deadline. What was your role and what did you do?"

Answer: Reveals actual teamwork skills through real examples

Instructions

Step 1: Choose Your Skill (5 minutes)

Pick ONE skill to assess:

Hospitality Skills:

- Customer service recovery
- Handling pressure/multitasking
- Teamwork
- Attention to detail

Corporate Skills:

- Problem-solving
- Communication
- Time management
- Adaptability/flexibility

Step 2: Create 5 Behavioral Questions (15 minutes)

Download the worksheet.

Good behavioral questions:

- Start with "Tell me about a time..." or "Describe a situation..."
- Ask for specific past examples
- Focus on actions, not opinions
- Can't be answered with yes/no

Example - Customer Service Recovery:

- ① "Tell me about a time you dealt with an extremely angry customer. What happened and how did you handle it?"
- ② "Describe a situation where you made a mistake that affected a customer. How did you fix it?"
- ③ "Give me an example of going above and beyond for a customer when you didn't have to."
- ④ "Tell me about a time you had to say 'no' to a customer request. How did you handle it?"
- ⑤ "Describe the worst customer complaint you've received. What did you learn from it?"

Now create YOUR 5 questions for your chosen skill:

Skill:

Question 1: _____

Question 2: _____

Question 3: _____

Question 4: _____

Question 5: _____

Step 3: Add Probing Questions (10 minutes)

For each main question, write 2 probing follow-ups.

Probing questions dig deeper into their answer. They ask:

- Why they made that choice
- What they were thinking
- What happened next
- What they'd do differently

Example for Question 1 above:

- Probing Q1: "Why did you choose that approach instead of calling your manager?"
- Probing Q2: "What would you do differently if the same situation happened today?"

Now add probing questions for YOUR questions:

Main Question 1:

Probing Q1: _____

Probing Q2: _____

Main Question 2:

Probing Q1: _____

Probing Q2: _____

Main Question 3:

Probing Q1: _____

Probing Q2: _____

Main Question 4:

Probing Q1: _____

Probing Q2: _____

Main Question 5:

Probing Q1: _____

Probing Q2: _____

Self-Check

Review each question:

- ✔ Starts with "Tell me about..." or "Describe..."?
- ✔ Asks for a PAST example, not hypothetical?
- ✔ Focuses on their actions, not opinions?
- ✔ Can't be answered yes/no?
- ✔ Probing questions ask "why" or "what if"?
- ✔ Questions reveal the skill you're testing?

Common Mistakes

- ✗ "How would you handle an angry customer?" (Hypothetical)
- ✔ "Tell me about a time you handled an angry customer"

- ✗ "Are you good under pressure?" (Yes/no)
- ✔ "Describe your most stressful day at work. How did you manage it?"

- ✗ Probing: "Did that work?" (Yes/no)
- ✔ Probing: "What did you learn from that experience?"

Bonus: Test Your Questions

Pick one question. Answer it yourself using SOAR:

- Situation: _____
- Obstacle: _____
- Action: _____
- Result: _____

Could you answer it easily? Good = your candidates can too

Did it feel vague? Rewrite it to be more specific

Submit Your Work

- ① Your chosen skill
- ② 5 behavioral questions
- ③ 2 probing questions for each (10 total)

- ④ Self-check score
- ⑤ Your SOAR test answer for one question