



The interview questions in this guide are organized within the following five categories:

1 Organization Culture

2 Mission & Vision

3 Knowledge & Skills

4 Intelligence

5 Performance

1 Corporate Culture

Company culture is the ethos of the environment; it's made up of the values and practices shared by the group.

Your Challenge: Hiring candidates that fit within your organization's culture. Decide if they match your company's culture. Hiring the candidates with values that align with the company's values.

INTERVIEWER TIP: Consider writing two or three questions which specifically refer to the culture within your company.

Examples of culture:

Structured/ Unstructured • Formal/Casual • Linear/Reactionary • Tranquil/Chaotic • Hierarchical / Flat • Nurturing/Draconian (harsh and strict) • Sterile/Hostile • Organized/Disorganized • Friendly/Pragmatic • Creative/Restrictive • Loose/Rigid • Laid back/Rigorous

- 1) In what type of environments have you worked, and which were the most comfortable?
- 2) What type of working environment do you think would be ideal for you? (Address areas such as work hours, dress code, physical environment (formal vs. informal, in office vs. outside the office).)
- 3) Which is more desirable to you: A business that is run in an efficient, business-like manner or a business that is run in a personal and friendly way?
- 4) How would you describe your work style/habits?
- 5) What do you think are the best and worst parts of working in a team environment? How do you handle it?
- 6) In what ways do you express your personality in the workplace?



- 7) Think back in your career. Define the leadership style of those you worked for. Who was your favorite manager/leader? Describe his or her demeanor, personality, and communication style. Were they quiet/not very expressive or emotional/demonstrative, very hands-on, lots of communication and reporting versus someone who let you be very autonomous, didn't interfere with your work process.
- 8) What are some of the qualities you don't like in the person you report to?
- 9) What kind of people do you like to work with?
INTERVIEWER TIP: Ask about areas like temperament/personality, communication style, ethics, willingness to work together on projects, accountability, messiness or neatness of co-workers' personal working space and shared spaces.
- 10) Is it important to you if co-worker/colleagues socialize outside of work?
- 11) Is it important to you if the company supports philanthropic activities of their employees?
(Examples: buying Girl Scout cookies, sponsoring someone in a walk-a-thon, buying tickets to an event, etc.)
- 12) How important are the following things to your comfort level in a work atmosphere: enthusiasm/vitality, cooperation/a helping attitude, teamwork, praise?
- 13) How comfortable are you working with people who are very different than you are?
- 14) How comfortable are you working with people whose: primary language, age, religion, or ethnicity is different than yours?
- 15) If you were asked to talk about yourself to a large group people, what would you say?
- 16) How do you feel about working more than 40 hours a week – rarely, sometimes, consistently?
- 17) What do you think about SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures)?
- 18) What values would you like to see emphasized in the company for which you work?
- 19) Please describe what values you hold near and dear, both professionally and personally.
- 20) If a company has strong values and you have strong values, how do you handle colleagues who do not hold these same values?
- 21) Explain the phrase "work ethic" and describe yours.
- 22) Define professional behavior and/or conduct appropriate in the workplace.
- 23) If you observed a colleague who made inappropriate sexual or racial remarks to another employee, and it was obvious to you that the situation was creating an uncomfortable environment, what would you do?

- 24) Have you ever faced a significant ethical problem at work? How did you handle it?
- 25) Suppose your supervisor asked you to get information for them that you know is confidential and to which s/he should not have access. What would you do?
- 26) If your company was having financial problems and a slight alteration of numbers meant the company would stay out of bankruptcy or filing bankruptcy, would you compromise yourself to save the company?
- 27) If you found out the organization was doing something illegal, what would you do?
- 28) If you were shopping at a store and you discovered that you had received too much change or had not been charged, what would you do?
- 29) If you discovered this when you got back to your car and it was pouring rain outside, what would you do? (If it was a petty amount, would you go back in?)
- 30) It's 4:30 on a Friday afternoon. You have a project that needs to be finished by 8:00 Monday morning. You have already made plans to be away the entire weekend with your family. What would you do?
- 31) To what extent will you go to meet the needs of your client/customer?
- 32) It's Friday at 5:00 and you're in a mission critical meeting with your client. It seems that the meeting may extend into the evening, and you have very important plans with your family this evening, what do you do?
- 33) A new policy is to be implemented organization-wide. You do not agree with this new policy. How do you discuss this policy with your staff?
- 34) When making a decision to fire an employee, do you find it easy because of the company's needs or difficult because of the employee's needs?
- 35) Are there any programs, policies, or actions of our company that you know about with which you have concerns or differences?
- 36) When have you actively confronted indications of discrimination or prejudicial behavior?
- 37) How have you added to diversity (ethnic, cultural, racial, gender) in a workplace?
- 38) Have there been any successful employment charges against you (EEOC, sexual harassment, etc.)?

2 Mission & Vision

Mission clearly defines an employee's responsibilities, and the company's expectation of him/her. Each employee's individual *mission* is critical to the fulfillment of the company's *mission*.

Vision represents a compelling declaration of the future that an individual or company intends to create or achieve. **Vision** is about passion and ambition.

Your Challenge Clearly defining the mission for a position and relating it to the larger organizational mission. Determining how well a candidate will be able to execute their individual mission, and contribute to the organization's mission. Communicating a strategic vision that both inspires enthusiasm and high performance, and attracts and keeps high performers.

INTERVIEWER: Know how you'll respond to these questions:

- 1) *What is the overall strategy of this company and what is the role of this position in realizing our company strategy?*
- 2) *What are the critical success factors for this position, and how are these tied to the organization's overall success factors?*

- 1) What do you know about our organization?
- 2) How would you define our organization's mission?
- 3) What is your understanding of the "mission" for the position for which you are interviewing?
- 4) Why have you applied for this position?
- 5) What was your mission in your last position, and how did you fulfill that mission?
- 6) Why did you choose that position?
- 7) What were your responsibilities and accountabilities?
- 8) How do you think your work background relates to our current opening?
- 9) What size teams /departments /organizations do you like to lead, or be a part of?



- 10) In your opinion, is it more important to be a detail-oriented person, or a big picture person?
- 11) Describe the type of work that allows you to fulfill your larger (career) mission, what elements would you find in this work? (INTERVIEWER TIP: Ask the candidate to talk about responsibilities, breadth of jurisdiction or control, leadership or not, degree of autonomy, degree of creativity, type of support – level of infrastructure, field office-based or headquarters-based, incremental acknowledgment of accomplished missions, opportunity to expand mission role).
- 12) What circumstances contributed to your leaving your last two positions?
- 13) What were your supervisors' names and titles?
- 14) Where are they now?
- 15) May I contact him/her? (Ask permission to contact supervisors in the past ten years, in order to understand the candidate's developmental patterns.)
- 16) What is your best guess as to what (supervisor's name) honestly felt were/are your strengths, weaker points, and overall performance?
- 17) What were the starting and final levels of compensation?
- 18) Is the salary range we have set for this position within your acceptable range?
- 19) Are you willing to travel for your work, and, if so, how much?
- 20) Are you willing to relocate for your work?
- 21) How far would you relocate? How much time would you require in order to relocate?
- 22) Why should we hire you?
- 23) Now that you have learned about our company and the position for which you are applying, how does this opportunity match up to your ideal position? What do you view as opportunities and advantages as well as risks and disadvantages in joining us? What hesitation or reluctance would you have in accepting this position if we offer it to you?
- 24) Are you best at dealing with details and day-to-day operations or with concepts, envisioning, and future planning? Give me an example.
- 25) Tell me about your experience in leading and managing an organization similar to ours.
- 26) What did you do for your previous organization that made a difference for which you believe you will be remembered?



- 27) What were your expectations for the position?
- 28) What did you find when you arrived? (Resources, problems, challenges.)
- 29) At your last two positions, what sort of talent did you inherit and what changes did you make?
- 30) What results were achieved in terms of successes and accomplishments? (Get specifics, such as individual versus shared accomplishments, barriers overcome, bottom line results, and impact on career – bonus, promote-ability, performance review.)
- 31) We all make mistakes --- what would you say were mistakes or failures experienced in this position? If you could turn the clock back, what would you do differently?
- 32) What actions would you take in the first weeks, should you join our organization?
- 33) What are your long-term career goals, or personal vision?
- 34) If you could define a career vision for yourself spanning one year from today, define what you see yourself doing differently then than what you are doing today.
- 35) If you could define a career vision for yourself spanning three years from today, define what you see yourself doing differently then than what you are doing today.
- 36) If you could define a career vision for yourself spanning five years from today, define what you see yourself doing differently then than what you are doing today.
- 37) If you could define a career vision for yourself spanning ten years from today, define what you see yourself doing differently then than what you are doing today.
- 38) In looking at your most recent two positions, did your career path give you the opportunity to fulfill your vision? Please explain.
- 39) Of all the positions you've held, which position allowed you to most fully carry out your vision? Why?
- 40) If you are hired for this position and are still with our organization five years from now, how do you think the organization will be different?
- 41) Based upon what you know about our company, what ideas do you have about continuing and increasing the success of this company?
- 42) What do you think is the role of the President/CEO in strategic planning for this organization?
- 43) In what specific ways have you changed an organization the most (direction, results, policies)?
- 44) What positive impact do you see yourself having on this industry?



3 Knowledge & Skills

Knowledge is the awareness or possession of information, facts, ideas, truths, or principles about a situation or fact, gained through *experience* or *study*. **Skills** are abilities gained through experience or training.

Your Challenge Asking questions that are relevant to establishing a candidate’s level of knowledge regarding their skills, industry, formal learning, informal learning, and wisdom. Determining whether the candidate has the skills necessary to perform in the position.

Interviewer: Identify knowledge/skills areas required that are specific to your industry, and within these areas:

- Administrative
- Conflict management
- Coaching and counseling
- Communication (written & verbal)
- Computer literacy
- Change Management
- Customer service
- Decision making
- Finance
- Human Resources
- Industry-related
- Information technology
- Leadership / influencing others
- Marketing
- Negotiation
- Organizational development
- Organization & delegation
- Problem-solving
- Project management
- Public speaking
- Team-building
- Quality Control
- Recruiting / hiring
- Relationship-building
- Sales
- Staff supervision
- Technical
- Time management
- Work scheduling & planning

Executive Skills:

- Business ethics
- Business procedures
- Business regulations
- Change management
- Competitive pressures
- Corporate finance
- Employment & labor laws
- Legal
- Management theory
- Mergers & Acquisitions
- Operations
- Performance evaluations
- Stakeholder representation
- Strategic planning
- Succession planning

- 1) You are being considered to work for our company in X position, describe to me what level of knowledge you possess that specifically relates to this position and how it would be beneficial to our company and its clients.
- 2) How would your level of knowledge benefit your peers and your team, if you were the team leader?

- 3) In order of priority, list three areas of professional knowledge that you would like to expand or enhance.
- 4) In order of priority, list three areas of your personal knowledge that you would like to expand or enhance.
- 5) Who is the most knowledgeable person you've ever known? Describe them. (What kind of knowledge did they have?)
- 6) How would you rank yourself amongst your peers in your company in having empirical knowledge of your company's products and services? (Percentage – top 10, top 5%.)
- 7) How would you rank yourself amongst your peers in your industry in having empirical knowledge of the industry's products and services? (Percentage – top 10, top 5%.)
- 8) What was your attitude toward school? If you are in school today, what is your attitude toward school now?
- 9) I see that you attended college (or trade school). Give me a feel for what kind of school it was. (If necessary, specify large/small, rural/urban, highly competitive/not competitive, etc.). Generally, what were your college years like?
- 10) What was your major, minor, and in what kind of school activities did you participate?
- 11) What sort of grades did you receive, what was your class standing, and what were your study habits like?
- 12) What were high points during your college years? (Look for leadership, initiative, and particularly what competencies the interviewee exhibits now while discussing those years.)
- 13) What were low points, or least enjoyable occurrences, during your college years? (Again, what happened back then is only important in relation to what is revealed about the interviewee now.)
- 14) INTERVIEWER TIP: If the applicant went to graduate school, ask the above three questions in regard to their graduate work.
- 15) Give me a feel for any jobs you held during college – the types of jobs, whether they were during the school year or summer, hours worked, and any high or low points associated with them. (Don't spend much time on these jobs, but look for indications of extraordinary initiative, motivation, etc. If the person did not work during the summer, ask how the summer months were spent.)
- 16) What activities, classes, or events influenced your career decisions?
- 17) What languages do you know and what is your level of proficiency in each?
- 18) If being hired for this position depended on your learning a new field, how would you respond to that?

- 19) [For a person who is interviewing for a new industry:] Beyond what we will provide you about our industry, how do you intend to acquire additional knowledge? (INTERVIEWER TIPS: If hiring a candidate from a different industry, it's important to ascertain the challenge the company will have in bringing the new candidate up to speed.)
- 20) In the past year, what specifically have you done in order to remain knowledgeable about the competitive environment, market and trade dynamics, products/services, technology trends and innovations, patterns of customer behavior?
- 21) Do you feel your prior employers gave you ample opportunity to gain professional knowledge while working for them? Explain.
- 22) How have you changed in recent years?
- 23) Describe to me what level of knowledge you possess that specifically relates to managing your direct reports.
- 24) What is your own philosophy of management?
- 25) Why should employees seek to improve their knowledge and skill base?
- 26) How would you motivate them to do so?
- 27) How do you stay informed of current ideas on management and this industry?
- 28) How have you applied best practices?
- 29) Describe projects in which your best-practice solutions did and did not fully address customer/client needs.
- 30) What did you do to enhance your skills (i.e., Dale Carnegie Sales Training Courses, etc.)?
- 31) What did you do to enhance your sales team's skills (i.e., Dale Carnegie Sales Training Courses, etc.)?
- 32) What would you like to see from our company to support skills enhancement (money for sales training, seminars, coaching, personal development)?
- 33) What are your qualifications in your area of expertise (i.e., what skills do you have that make you the best candidate for this position? Include any special training you have had (on-the-job, college, continuing education, seminars, reading, etc.) and related work experience.
- 34) How will references rate and describe your technical expertise?
- 35) How have you participated in planning processes? If so, in what capacity and with what success?

- 36) Can you give an example of when you suggested a better way to perform a task/process and how it turned out?
- 37) What are your strengths? Describe how you see them contributing to your success in this position.
- 38) Describe what you see as your weaknesses related to this position. How would you compensate for those?
- 39) Are you better at juggling a number of priorities or projects simultaneously, or attacking a few projects, one at a time?
- 40) How would you rate yourself in public speaking? If we had a videotape of your most recent presentation, what would we see?
- 41) With what kind of people is it most difficult for you to work? Describe a situation where you would have to deal with a person very different from yourself, with whom it is difficult for you to work. What would you do?
- 42) What do you do when others resist or reject your ideas or actions?
- 43) How do you handle situations where deadlines and priorities change frequently and rapidly?
- 44) How do you know when you are stressed? What do you do to de-stress?
- 45) How would past employers describe your response to hectic or stressful situations?
- 46) If someone told you that you had made an error, describe how you would react and what you would say in your defense.
- 47) Tell me about a situation you wish that you had handled differently based on the outcome. What was the situation? What would you change (or will you change) when faced with a similar situation?
- 48) What have been the most difficult criticisms for you to accept?
- 49) When there is a difference of opinion, do you tend to confront people directly, indirectly, or tend to let the situation resolve itself? (Get specifics.)
- 50) Describe a couple of the most difficult, challenging, or frustrating company political situations you have faced, and how you responded to them.
- 51) If you feel a decision is unfair, and you are angry about it, how do you react?
- 52) What do you do when you know you are right and the person you report to disagrees with you? Give me an example of when this has happened in your career.

- 53) How would you respond if you were on a committee and you disagreed with a point or decision?
- 54) Tell us about your management style – people, teamwork, direction.
- 55) What coaching or mentoring experience have you had? With groups or one-on-one? How did you determine the appropriate way to coach/mentor someone and what were the results?
- 56) Management requires both good writing and verbal skills for good communication. When it comes to giving information to employees that can be done either way, do you prefer to write a memo or talk to the employee?
- 57) Managing requires motivating employees as well as accomplishing tasks. Do you find it more natural to point out what's wrong so employees can accomplish tasks competently or to praise employees for their work and then point out what may need correcting?
- 58) Describe for me a decision you made which would normally have been made by your supervisor. What was the outcome?
- 59) What is the largest number of employees you have supervised and what were their job functions?
- 60) Tell me about your fiscal management experience: budgeting, reporting, cutting costs, building and maintaining reserves.
- 61) Have you ever had to champion an unpopular change? How did you handle it?
- 62) Tell me about your experiences with staff development. How do you think your current or most recent staff would describe you?
- 63) Give me some examples of how and when you were the spokesperson for your current or most recent company.
- 64) Tell me about your experience working with a board of directors. What approach and philosophy did you follow in working with boards?
- 65) As our President/CEO, how would you proceed if the board of directors adopted a policy or program that you felt was inconsistent with the goals and mission of our company?
- 66) What was the most challenging personnel issue you've had to deal with and how did you handle it?
- 67) Have you gotten any sort of systematic or regular feedback from direct reports, clients, peers, supervisor, etc, and, if so, what did you learn?

- 68) What is your track record in both acquiring and retaining clients/customers?
- 69) How do you go about establishing goals for performance (bottom up, top down)? Are they easy or a stretch?
- 70) How are your expectations communicated?
- 71) What do you do or say when someone reporting to you has made a significant (serious, costly) mistake?
- 72) Cite examples of you giving negative feedback to someone.
- 73) Describe a situation in which you actively tore down walls or barriers to teamwork or situations in which you prevented or resolved conflict.
- 74) What, to you, constitutes a crisis? How would you handle one (please give an example)?

4 Intelligence

Intelligence is the ability to learn and know, a quickness of understanding.

Your Challenge Determining whether your candidate has the intelligence required for the position, and the ability to make good decisions for the company, and within the position for which they are being considered.

INTERVIEWER TIP: Before the candidate comes in, have a model question (typical scenario that requires critical thinking and decision making) that you ask all the candidates so they go through the steps to analyze the data in front of them so you see how they come to a decision.

- 1) Describe to me what you believe is your level of intelligence. Why do you believe this is so?
- 2) How would you rate your intelligence amongst the peers you've worked with in your prior positions? Please explain. (What is your basis for saying that?)
- 3) Do you believe I.Q., or intelligence, is something you can grow? Explain.
- 4) If a person's answer is yes, what have you done in the past several years to continue to develop your intelligence and your critical thinking?
- 5) Are you presently engaged in any kind of formal education? (If not, ask: Do you plan to take any courses in the future?)
- 6) INTERVIEWER: If your organization reimburses tuition expenses, then ask this question: We offer ongoing education in our company under these conditions (then explain the conditions). Will you take advantage of it?
- 7) Are you presently reading any books? If so, what are they?
- 8) How many books do you read a year, and what are the genres?
- 9) Do you watch television? If so, please describe the format (genre) of the television content you like watching and why.
- 10) Do you read any periodicals, newspapers, trade magazines? If so, which ones?
- 11) In what kind of hobbies are you engaged? Why?

- 12) Are you considered to be an expert in any subject matter? Please explain.
- 13) Under what kinds of conditions do you learn best?
- 14) What was the most creative thing you did in your last position?
- 15) What is your management style in getting your subordinates to increase their intellectual capacity?
- 16) What are some examples of typical work decisions that you make and how you make them.
- 17) When do you find it most difficult to make a decision?
- 18) Tell me about the three toughest business decisions that you've had to make in the past 10 years.
(Interviewer: Question the critical thinking path for each one. Because you're trying to figure out how the person gathers data and discerns information to make decisions. Did the candidate have total autonomy making these decisions or were there other people controlling the process?)
- 19) Do you employ any structured process when making business decisions? If so, please describe. (Ex.: logic diagram, critical path analysis, etc.)
- 20) Describe a situation in your previous position in which you had an insight and used it make a change or take an action in your business.
- 21) How frequently do you discern a path of action that others are not willing to take?
- 22) Do you teach critical decision-making? And, if so, how do you impart that knowledge to your subordinates? (How do you teach it?)

5 Performance

Performance is the level of effectiveness at which a task or activity is achieved, as well as consistency in achievement.

Your Challenge Determining the performance goals for a position, screening candidates to find a high performer, and assessing whether a candidate will be a high performer in the position for which he/she is being considered.

INTERVIEWER: Know the following before interviewing:

- 1) *What are the performance goals for this position?*
- 2) *How will you measure that performance goals are being met?*

- 1) Describe to me what you define the word performance to mean. Give me some examples.
- 2) If you could work in a position where hitting 100% daily or weekly was readily accomplished, versus a position that had more upside potential for you, but was more difficult, which one would you take?
- 3) Tell me about a time when you were part of a great team. What was your part in making the team effective?
- 4) If I asked several of your coworkers / colleagues about your greatest strength as a team member, what would they tell me?
- 5) What would your last employer say about you?
- 6) Please describe a recent accomplishment of which you are most proud.
- 7) What do you think you would do for this organization that someone else wouldn't?
- 8) What do you expect from your subordinates in regards to performance?
- 9) What's the minimum acceptable sustained performance you'll allow from anyone on your team?
- 10) Tell me about accountability. What happens when people fail to perform?

- 11) How do you coach and mentor your staff to achieve high performance?
- 12) How do you help your players that you don't think have the skills and develop or externally develop these people?
- 13) Do you believe that performance is acquired or inborn?
- 14) Explain, step by step, how you have handled an employee who had performance problems.
- 15) Tell me about the performance management system you now use.
- 16) Why do you think a team of people – sports team, work team, may not work well together?
- 17) What is your interpretation of success?
- 18) What would you have liked to do more of in your last position? What held you back?
- 19) What was your primary contribution/achievement? Biggest challenge in your past positions?
- 20) Everyone procrastinates at times. What are the kinds of things that you procrastinate on?
- 21) How effective have been your methods for following up on delegated assignments?
- 22) Sales: If you were a manager, how did your team measure overall year to date sales to plan? If you didn't make the numbers, what prevented you from getting there?