

## INTERVIEWING/SELECTION

### 4. Listen

**Active and attentive listening is absolutely fundamental to successful interview technique.** As a result, if an interviewer is not committed to developing their skills, they should probably avoid interviewing at all—it is *that important*. Keeping good eye contact, nodding, and re-phrasing applicant responses to confirm your understanding are a few of the techniques that should be applied.

Of course, many interviewers have no idea that they are poor listeners, and actually judge the quality of the interview by reflecting on how articulate *they* have been (or how much they have enjoyed the sound of their own voice). **It is highly recommended that every interviewer record by audio or video (with an applicant's permission) at least one interview they conduct,** and use it to look at their bad habits and their performance as a whole (and actively make corrections).

Interviewers should be on the look-out for these 10 bad listening habits (and correct them immediately):

- 1. Rehearsing** The interviewer is distracted; he or she looks away a lot and fails to concentrate because they are framing or rehearsing the next question.
- 2. Point-scoring** The interviewer spends time “one-upping” the replies of the applicant with stories from their own experience, or else denigrates the applicant’s answer by suggesting that it is not up to the usual standard.
- 3. Mind-reading** The interviewer wears a “scrutinizing” expression, looking straight at the applicant and trying to guess what is going to be said next—even completing a sentence or jumping in.
- 4. Cherry-picking** The interviewer listens for the piece of information in an answer that they want and then switches off, or checks off a box on their notepad and tries to hurry up or move on.
- 5. Day-dreaming** The interviewer uses **all** their spare mental capacity to idly daydream about subjects other than the interview or the applicant’s responses, and loses focus and concentration.
- 6. Dueling** The interviewer engages in debate or spars with the applicant about the validity of their view, or answers in general and continues to argue the point.
- 7. Interrupting** The interviewer jumps into any silence or half-way through the applicant’s response in order to change the subject or ask the next question.
- 8. Counseling** The interviewer can’t help himself, freely offering guidance or advice about what an interviewee might have done differently, and moves into irrelevant territory.
- 9. Labeling** The interviewer puts one or more category labels on the applicant based on the way they look or a few things that are said, and stops listening to information that doesn’t fit the label.

**10. Switching** The interviewer switches the conversation quickly or asks another question without considering the last answer, or even interjects a comment before it is complete.

The key to getting to the heart of an applicant's suitability for a position is probing or encouraging elaboration. Like listening, good probing (without it becoming like a highly uncomfortable inquisition) is a difficult art to master. It needs a lot of practice. There are five probing techniques you can choose from.

Let's look briefly at each of these:

**CLARIFYING** ("What do you mean by...?")

Clarifying usually means picking up one or two words in an applicant's response that might have a different meaning or need more information. For example, "I never belonged to the in-crowd" can be clarified by following up with: "What do you mean by the 'in-crowd'?"

**EXPANDING** ("Can you tell me more about...?")

Expanding usually means asking the applicant to add to their answer or build on a statement. For example, "I was going to start a degree last year, but changed my mind" can be expanded on by asking "What sort of course were you looking at, and why?"

**REPEATING** ("Can you tell me again, specifically why...?")

Repeating doesn't mean repeating what the applicant says, but rather asking them to repeat their answer by responding to the question more closely and giving more specifics. For example, to "I'm quite happy to stay at the same level for the next few years" you can ask, "Could you tell me again about the highest level you see yourself attaining in the next 8 to 10 years?"

**REFLECTING** ("Would you say that you felt...?")

Reflecting usually means that the interviewer tries to reflect the interviewee's feelings by putting them explicitly into words and checking that their understanding is correct with the applicant. For example, "I didn't wait around to be made redundant" might be met with the response, "So, would you say that you felt pretty upset by the way you were treated?"

**SUMMARIZING** ("So, you are saying....")

Summarizing is a good way to pull a few replies to questions together to build a simple statement and elicit confirmation from the applicant. For example, "I built the budget and led the team to that goal" might be met with "So, are you saying that you pretty much ran everything from beginning to end?" Be careful when using the summarizing probe. You do not want to lead the applicant to make the obvious yes and no response.

There is one other effective interviewing technique that acts as a very useful probe: silence. Don't be afraid to use it as often as necessary.