



Why Am I Interviewing?

I think it is important to learn as much as you can about everything around you. I truly believe that knowledge is the key to being successful in life.

—Connie Chung

The first step in interviewing is to ask yourself the question that serves as title of this chapter—Why am I interviewing?

We interview to learn, to gain knowledge. We need to get information from another person. It's an interactive process that takes a certain skill. That's the purpose of this book, to help you develop that skill.

Behavioral Interviewing

The fastest, most accurate method to gain knowledge from another person and, incidentally, the easiest way for the other person to give it is a process called *behavioral interviewing*. All of the techniques we present in this book will use this process. (We argued over whether you'd want to learn slower,

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Interview A meeting at which one person obtains information from another.

A manager may need to interview candidates for employment or volunteer work, his or her direct employees, peers, current and potential customers, vendors, and managers in other organizations.

less accurate ways of interviewing and figured we'd skip those!)

In behavioral interviewing, we always ask questions relating to something the person has done or something that happened to him or her, as opposed to hypothetical examples.

So, for example, we'd ask, "Tell me what you did when you had a coworker who didn't get their part of the project done," as opposed to "If a coworker doesn't get their part of a project done, what will you do?"



Behavioral interviewing

A process that is based on the premise that the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in a similar situation. Behavioral interviewing focuses on examples of past behavior that can be used to predict future actions, attitudes, and/or needs. It is a systematic process that is structured and goal-oriented. Behavioral interviewing was born in the employment interview arena. It was originally developed in the 1970s by Development Dimensions International, Inc. (DDI) and called Targeted Selection.

Read the first of the two questions again: "Tell me what you did when you had a coworker who didn't get their part of the project done." As you're reading the question, you're thinking about a coworker who didn't get a project done. It's immediate. It's automatic. Our brain thinks in pictures and as the interviewer is saying the sentence your brain is painting the picture.

Now read the second of the two questions again: "If a coworker doesn't get their part of a project done, what will you do?" Nothing. No pictures. While the interviewer is saying the sentence, your mind is blank. After the interviewer finishes, you review the question in your mind. Then you think, "Hmmm, when has something like that happened?" Then you review what hap-

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pened. Then you start talking. By this time the interviewer is writing notes like “slow thinker.”

Or, after reviewing the question in your mind, you think, “Hmmm, I wonder what they mean. I wonder what they’re looking for. I wonder how I should answer this?” Then, assuming you’re cool in test situations, you think about what you’re going to say. Then you start saying what you think they want to hear.

If you’re not good in test situations, you’ll do one of two things: you’ll start talking without thinking and do a lot of umming and hmmm-ing and pausing because you’re thinking and talking at the same time or you’ll get so flustered you can’t answer—and then even more flustered because you can’t answer.

Does either of the responses to the second question suggest that the interview will go well and you’ll get the information you want? Not really!

The first question, in contrast, makes the other person feel comfortable. He or she is giving me details, providing the information I need fast—at least faster than the person who was asked the second question and who’s still thinking, fumbling, and rambling.

You can get the information faster and it’ll be more accurate, more detailed, and come from someone who’s feeling confident because you asked a question he or she can answer. It’s about the person. It’s about something that happened to the person. It’s not about something hypothetical, something that he or she

Avoid the “I Word”

The word “interview” may provoke a negative gut reaction. We usually think of our experiences trying to get jobs or of media folks such as Barbara Walters, Diane Sawyer, Connie Chung, or Sam Donaldson. Does the word “interview” make us feel comfortable? Probably not. So it’s generally best to avoid using the “I word” with people. Call it a “talk” or a “conversation” or even a “discussion.” As much as we may want to believe what Juliet told Romeo, “That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet,” when you use the “I word” you’re working against years of associations that may not all be pleasant.



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might do or that may happen to him or her.

Make the interview easy and enjoyable and it'll be easy for the person you're interviewing to give you the information you need. You'll save time and get more accurate information—and both of you will feel better about the experience.

You're sold. Behavioral interviewing—getting people to give you information about things they've done or that have happened to them—is the way to go. Now, let's look at the people with whom you would use behavioral interviewing, some typical situations, and examples that show how it works.

This will be just a brief introduction to behavioral interviewing, to show how you can use it to get information from people for various purposes, in various situations. In the chapters to follow, we'll get to all the steps of planning and preparing, conducting, and documenting interviews and then using the results.

Candidates for Employment or Volunteer Work

Situation: When you're assessing a person for the right fit with your organization, the tasks, and the method by which the tasks need to be done.

How It Works. You've just listened to a voice mail from a candidate for the telephone sales position. The process you planned for finding the right employee starts with candidates telling you in voice mail why their skills would meet your needs (which they read on your Web site). This person said all the things you were looking for, but he paused many times and the quality of his voice was high-pitched. Was the person nervous because it's part of his job interview or is that his normal pace and pitch? Pauses and a high pitch quality will make prospects for your company's services feel less than confident about the salesperson, a feeling that translates to the company and your services. You'll need to find out whether he can speak without so many pauses and in a lower-pitched voice. So, when you call, you'll be attentive to his pace and pitch.

Here's what you say:

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Describe a time when you felt nervous during a phone call with a prospective customer—and tell me the ways you think you exhibited the nervousness.

(He gives an example.)

I notice you pause frequently within and between sentences. Are you pausing for emphasis, to prepare your next thought so it'll come out like you meant it, or for another reason?

Your Direct Employees

Situation: When you're conducting the annual performance appraisal, in day-to-day coaching, and in career development and planning.

You need to gain information from your employee in order to know about his or her goals, plans, and needs. In these situations, you'll look at examples of past behavior and use them to predict and plan the future actions, attitudes, and needs that will allow them to succeed.

How It Works. One of your employees has asked you about her potential for a promotion in the company. She's been with you for a year and a half and from day one she's clearly communicated her expectation of moving up to manage projects or people. Though her next performance appraisal isn't due for a few months, you agree to meet with her and discuss her situation. She is really capable in her current job, when she focuses her attention, and you feel she has the ambition to succeed as a manager. The thing that's holding you back from recommending her for promotion is that she hurries through most tasks. Maybe she feels some of the tasks aren't challenging enough, so she hurries through them to get to others. Whatever the reason, she makes more mistakes when she's hurrying than others in the department who aren't as capable. You'll need to find out why she hurries and what's causing her to make mistakes on certain types of work, so you can help her figure out what to do to be promotable.

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Here's what you say:

Name all your favorite tasks.

(After she does, if she names any tasks in which she's made mistakes, do the following for each one.)

You like ... and last week you *(describe the specific mistake)*. What was happening that day when you were working on?

Peers

Situation: When you're involved in annual strategic planning for the organization or department, planning a project, or ongoing problem solving.

By using a systematic process that is structured and goal-oriented, you get information faster and you make it easier to set the plans together and discover problems and then take action on those problems.

How It Works. You and two members of your work group are meeting to develop the rationale part of a plan for purchasing a new piece of equipment. You start by stating the objective for the meeting—to determine and write the rationale for purchasing the equipment so it can be presented to management. You have only 10 minutes, so you need to be succinct but cover all the bases. Your job is to get as much information from the work group members as possible so you can produce the most compelling rationale. To start, you'll need to know how the equipment will be used, how much it'll be used, and how long it will be usable.

Here's what you say:

List every use of this piece of equipment you've read about, discussed with the manufacturer, or planned yourself.

What did the manufacturer tell us that other companies using the equipment in the ways we've just listed have found to be their maximum and minimum number of hours of use each day?

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Name the areas we have to take into account to determine length of usability. What did the manufacturer say that other companies had experienced in each of these areas?

Current and Potential Customers

Situation: When you're working with a potential customer in the one-on-one sales process or structured focus groups to discover their needs or with current customers to discover needs and solve problems.

You'll benefit here from the steps of the behavioral interviewing process:

- planning and preparing
- beginning the interview (conversation)
- asking and answering questions
- listening
- documenting
- ending to gain commitment
- analysis of their information in order to make the sale or take care of a problem to the satisfaction of your customer

How It Works. A new customer has placed his first order. You were eager to get his business, so you OK'd a shorter deadline than usual for the order. The customer had to have it by Friday. Now it's Friday and the customer calls and asks for you. He tells you that he received only part of the order. He explains that he told the person who took his order that he had to have it by Friday and the person assured him that, even though it was short notice, he would receive it on time. He's angry.

When you receive the call, you aren't aware of any delay or back orders. You'll have to find out how this problem happened and see what can be done to get the customer his order and save the new account. But first you need some information from the customer.

Here's what you say:

I'm really sorry that we were unable to get your entire order to you as we'd promised. Now, I'll be able to help

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you do what you need to get done if I know what day, what time, and where you'll need to be using the

(If you can't get him something that will work for him, based on your new knowledge, and you want offer him an incentive to try you again, say the following.)

I'm very sorry. We really want to prove to you that we can meet your needs the next time. Please tell me what other companies have done in this situation that caused you to try them the next time.

Vendors and Managers in Other Organizations

Situation: When you're assessing vendors' products and services or benchmarking the practices of your colleagues' organizations.

Use behavioral interviewing to make it easy for them to give you the information you need to decide whose products to buy, whose services to use, or what changes to make to your organization's practices.

How It Works. You need to hire a training company to help your staff learn the new software that they're scheduled to start using in a month. The original plan was to learn from the manuals, but during beta testing it was obvious that your staff needed an expert. You call a few colleagues and one recommends a company that she brought in to help her staff. She was very pleased with the company's ability to put together and facilitate training that created an easy and relatively unobtrusive way for her employees to learn their new software.

You just can't imagine how the trainers could learn your massive software package fast enough to make this happen. Obviously you'll need to find out, among other things, how they'll be able to help your people learn the software within the month, what method of training will be the best for your situation, and how much it'll cost.

Here's what you say:

My colleague tells me you helped her in the middle of an implementation. What steps did you follow to learn her

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software so you could help her staff learn it?

Tell me what you need to know from us so you can create the best method of learning for our situation.

What did you charge my colleague and in what ways is our situation similar to hers?

Interviewing: It's Not Just Asking Questions

Most of us are used to gaining information from others by using questions. However, few interview objectives will be met solely by questions, since some of the things you need to know are more accurately learned through other methods, for any of several reasons:

- The people you'll be interviewing may not want to give you accurate information and they're good at answering questions in ways that will put the best spin on their information.
- The people you'll be interviewing are poor communicators.
- The information you need can only be seen (their writing style, their speed on a particular task, a product that's broken, how they use the product, how something works for other organizations).

You want to make it easy for the person to give you the information you need. Here are some methods that allow you to gain more accurate information and get it faster in various situations:

1. You send the person questions in writing in advance of the interview and ask him or her to read them and maybe also write answers to the questions. In that case, the person then brings the answers to the interview and the two of you discuss them. This method is incredibly helpful for people who need to think ahead to feel sure about what they're telling you. Have someone read your written questions first, to make sure the person will understand them.
2. You bring to the interview some document (e.g., a direct employee's Friday report, a candidate's file on a diskette,

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a vendor's schematic of an installation) and the two of you discuss it. If you're sharing a single document (no copies), there's more interaction.

3. Ask the person to read information about the organization, job, service, or product and/or to watch a video, visit a Web site, use a CD, or listen to audio. Then, during the interview, ask for any questions, impressions, or ideas. This method works great for situations like problem solving, where people feel more comfortable having time to think before meeting to discuss. Never use this approach solely as a way to provide information; you'd be missing the opportunity to gain information from the reactions of the person to that information.
4. Have the person experience something—perform a task or use a product/service in front of you, watch others do it in person, watch a video of it being done, participate in a role-play or simulation, read or listen to a case study about it being done, and so forth. Then discuss what the person learned, what ideas he or she now has, or what he or she needs to change. The more real the experience, the more accurate the information you'll get, so use actual tasks, products, or services when possible. (Before you use this method, read the "Legal Issues" section of Chapter 5.)
5. Have the person take paper or computer tests of aptitude, interests, and/or needs. Use commercial, normed tests for the greatest validity and least expense. Creating your own that will be valid is much more expensive; creating your own that aren't validated will not only give you less accurate information but also possibly expose you to claims of discrimination. (Read Chapter 5, "Legal Issues.")
6. Take the person on a tour of a location or to meet other employees or customers to experience specific things and then discuss reactions and any ideas or questions. Prepare staff for this, either in general—"This could happen at any time in your employment with us and this is why we include this type of thing in interviews here"—or specific to this interview. When it's specific, tell them when, who, and why

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you're interviewing, what their role is, and what you'll want to know from them later.

Skills for Successful Interviews

Listed in the box starting on the next page are the skills needed to be successful with the behavioral interviewing process. You may already excel in some areas; in that case, you can use the ideas in this book so you can really excel. In other areas, you'll need to build up your skills. Always work on both excelling and improving—many times excellence in one skill can compensate for deficiencies in another.

Use this checklist now to plan how you'll use this book to excel in gaining information from others and creating a positive feeling about the experience.

I excel	I could improve	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Using active listening skills (<i>Chapter 7</i>)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Thinking on your feet (<i>Chapters 2, 6, 8</i>)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Flexibility (<i>Chapters 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10</i>)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ability to plan for the interview quickly and thoroughly (<i>Chapters 4, 5</i>)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ability to organize, compare, and analyze information (<i>Chapters 2, 4, 5, 7, 10</i>)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Knowledge of your organization, service, or product (<i>Chapter 6</i>)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Belief in your organization, service, or product (<i>Chapters 6, 10</i>)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ability to provide a win-win outcome (<i>Chapters 8, 10</i>)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Scheduling and doing follow-up carefully and accurately (<i>Chapter 10</i>)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Love of interacting with people (<i>Chapters 2, 8</i>)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Persistence (<i>Chapters 3, 7, 8, 9</i>)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Thorough documentation (<i>Chapters 4, 5, 7</i>)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ability to create a good impression for yourself and your organization (<i>Chapter 6</i>)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ability to help the person you're interviewing understand the benefits for him or her (<i>Chapter 6</i>)

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I excel	I could improve	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ability to help the person you're interviewing understand what you need from him or her (<i>Chapter 6</i>)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ability to research quickly and thoroughly (<i>Chapters 4, 5</i>)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Being able to feel positive very quickly after rejection or an error (<i>Chapter 8</i>)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Using a voice that the person you're interviewing interprets as enthusiastic (<i>Chapters 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9</i>)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Knowing the way the person you're interviewing likes to be communicated with (<i>Chapter 2</i>)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Understanding the time limits of the person you're interviewing (<i>Chapters 2, 4, 5, 6</i>)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ability to speak and write effectively (<i>Chapters 3, 6, 7, 8, 10</i>)

Steps in Any Interview

There are five steps common to any behavioral interview you undertake. They are

- Plan and prepare for the interview
- Begin the interview with objectives
- Gather information and document it (talking, listening, writing)
- End the interview in a way that gains commitment
- Use the information gained to make decisions/take action

An interview will be most successful if you follow all the



So, What's the Point?

Set your objective(s) for the interview. Be specific and focus on the action you want to be able to take as a result of the interview. Your objective is to get the information you need to do something specific. When you can specify how you want to use the information, you make it easier to get the information you need. Or, as baseball great Yogi Berra put it, "You've got to be very careful if you don't know where you're going, because you might not get there."

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steps. If, however, you miss a part of the interview process, you can still gain information by compensating for the part missing, but it takes lots of hard work and practice. It just makes more sense, then, to execute all of the steps of the interview process, so that everything goes as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Objective A specific end toward which we direct some specific effort.



Without planning and preparing, for example, it's difficult to begin the interview with objectives, to gather information, or end in a way that gains commitment, because we don't have an objective clear enough to state, we don't have the questions determined in advance, we don't have a way to record the information (no form), and we don't have an ending planned. We compensate for the lack of planning by spending more time in the interview, figuring out what we're doing as we go. After a while, we develop an ability to "think on our feet" so that we may not seem to be unprepared and we may muddle through better, but it still takes longer and therefore we won't receive some of the benefits of planning.

The same is true for the other steps. If we don't start by stating the objectives, we lose time because the interview is less focused. If we don't use our interview information-gathering tool to record information, we'll have a hard time making a decision and/or using the information later. If we don't end the interview in a way that gains commitment, we don't achieve the maximum results for our efforts. Finally, if we don't use the information we've gained to make decisions and/or take action, then why did we even do the interview?

All the parts of the behavioral interviewing process are important. They work together to help you achieve your objectives.

Plan and Prepare for the Interview

Abraham Lincoln said, "If I had eight hours to chop down a tree, I'd spend six sharpening my ax." "Plan" is a four-letter word for most of us. But planning for an interview can often save time

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and it almost always results in a better interview.

We'll need to plan our objectives for the interview and how we'll prepare the environment to minimize distractions and make the other person feel comfortable. We'll need to choose the steps for deciding who we'll interview, how we'll notify them, and how much time we'll need for the interview. We'll also need to gather as much information as possible in advance, so we're aware of what we don't know and can prepare our questions. Planning is never complete until you know what you'll do with the information—how you'll assess it to make decisions and/or take action to meet your objectives. We'll get into planning and preparing in Chapter 4 and, to some extent, in Chapters 2 and 3.

Begin the Interview with Objectives

This part of the interview is relatively easy—and we can really undermine our efforts if we neglect it.

We always have two kinds of objectives for any interview: to get information and to leave the other person feeling a certain way after the interview. (When we discuss planning, we'll get more specific about both objectives.)



Read the Reaction

Begin working toward your *feeling* objective from the first moments of the interview. When you state your *information* objective, pay close attention to the reaction of the other person. That reaction (verbal and/or nonverbal) will reveal how well or poorly his or her objective aligns with yours—and suggest ways to bring the person to feeling a certain way by the end of the interview.

It's crucial to state the *information* objective in every interview. It focuses all the participants on a similar picture of the outcome/end of the interview: a meeting is just a gathering of bodies if there's no meeting of the minds. We'll discuss this part of the interview in Chapter 6.

The *feeling* objective, on the other hand, is usually not stated. But it's important to monitor it throughout the interview and make adjustments as necessary.

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Gather Information and Document It

This is the heart of the interview. This is where you benefit from planning and preparing and from establishing the objectives. But there's a lot going on and the interaction takes many skills, as we'll outline and explain in Chapter 7. If you've planned and prepared properly, you can make almost any interview seem as comfortable as a casual conversation.

End the Interview in a Way That Gains Commitment


Once you've achieved the objectives, it's time to end the interview. It's not just a matter of picking up your things and walking away from the table. You use the ending that you planned in Chapter 4 for the most effective conclusion, a conclusion that achieves your unstated objective, to leave the other person feeling a certain way after the interview and gain some commitment from the person.

Commitment is essential: without it, you're left unsure about using the information you gained—what decisions do you need to make and what actions do you need to take if the other person isn't committed? We'll discuss ending the interview in Chapter 6.

Use the Information Gained to Make Decisions and/or Take Action

Finally, we make decisions and/or take action based on the information we documented with the interview information-gathering tool. We have our objectives, we have information, and we can now weigh all the information against the objectives and prioritize possible decisions and/or actions.

The follow-up after the interview is where all our efforts pay off: we offer the



Succeed Through Skills and Structure
Smart Managing

There are two fundamentals for interviewing effectively and efficiently:

- Assess your interviewing skill areas and work to excel or improve in all areas.
- Know and use all the parts of the behavioral interviewing process.

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position, we fix the problem, we get the service or product, we achieve the plan, the employee improves, and so forth. In the process we may need to answer a few more clarifying questions or to restate what we agreed on in order to finalize the commitment. We will keep the positive feeling going if we've been meeting that objective all along—or we will kill it if we don't follow up. These final matters are the focus of Chapter 10.

Manager's Checklist for Chapter 1

- The fastest, most accurate method to gain knowledge from another person and, incidentally, the easiest way for the other person to give it is a process called *behavioral interviewing*.
- Use the behavioral interviewing process for candidates for employment or volunteer work, your direct employees, your peers, current and potential customers, vendors, and managers in other organizations.
- Consider methods other than asking questions in situations where alternative approaches would allow you to get more accurate information more efficiently.
- Always work on the skills you're great at so you can excel while building up the skills you're not quite great at. Many times excellence in one area compensates for deficiencies in another area.