



# UNIT - 3

# INTERVIEWING BARRIERS

Staff Training Solutions

## Learning Outcomes

**By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:**

- ✓ Recognize the costs incurred by an organization when a wrong hiring decision is made.
- ✓ Develop a fair and consistent interviewing process for selecting employees.

## Unit 3

### Interviewing Barriers

#### Problems Recruiters Face

The sad truth is that a huge number of hiring managers don't know what it takes to hire the right candidate. They have very little knowledge of proper hiring techniques. This lack of knowledge isn't beneficial to the manager, and it isn't helpful for the candidate either. A hiring manager may decide someone isn't the right person for the job simply because that manager hasn't asked the right questions, asked ambiguous questions, or asked all the wrong questions. Many perfect candidates for jobs walk out the door, never to return, for no other reason than a recruiter's ineptness or inexperience.

The three biggest problems recruiters face are:

- ✓ The recruiter doesn't know applicant's qualifications or specifics of the job.
- ✓ The recruiter makes a poor impression that gets transferred to the company.
- ✓ The recruiter has no plan in place for a structured interview.

For employers, interviewing has made the transition from being an art to being a science. If you read the HR journals, you keep seeing a variety of interviewing techniques: stress interviews, situational interviews, and behavioral interviews. Each technique has its own nuances, but they have all been developed with one goal in mind: to measure more accurately and reliably how a candidate will perform on the job, if hired.

Like scientists, interviewers are now expected to gather similar types of information on all the candidates they interview; information that can be measured, quantified, and easily and accurately compared.

In fact, it may sometimes seem like quantification has replaced qualifications in the hiring process. However, this is based on the economics of the hiring process. The amount of money it takes to land a suitable candidate for a job has escalated enormously and it will continue to increase. As the area of human resources becomes more sophisticated, lawsuits against employers for wrongful dismissal and other employment related causes have increased dramatically as well.

#### Interviewing Barriers

There are a few other factors we should be aware of as well—human factors that we all can fall victim to, but which we can usually control if we are aware of them.

### **Leniency or Stringency**

This is a tendency to rate candidates too harshly (so that none of them meet your exacting criteria) or being too easy on them (so that all of them pass with flying colors).

### **Halo/Horn Effect**

This tendency has been researched extensively. Attractive candidates are viewed more favorably than unattractive candidates. Tall candidates are seen as more competent than short candidates. (Have you ever noticed how many presidents are tall, over 6 feet?) Candidates who have family or friends we approve of may rate higher than those who have family or friends we don't approve of.

### **Error of Central Tendency**

This is our tendency to give average marks to most candidates. Have you ever watched figure skating competitions, dance competitions, or vocal competitions? You have seen many of the judges cluster their marks toward the center or average. (Of course, you have also seen all the other tendencies as well from these judges.)

### **Stereotyping**

A male who applies for what is predominantly considered a female position has to be one sharp individual to stand a chance! Similarly, a female would have to be twice as good as most males to get a job in a male-oriented position.

## **Non-Verbal Communication**

We just discussed some of the barriers to objective interviewing. Can you think of others? Sometimes it's the words we use. I can think of a candidate, a very well-qualified individual, who, when the interviewers said at the end of the interview, "Do you have any final strengths for us to remember?" said, "I'm a very thoughtful man."

He didn't get the job! The interviewers thought he meant he was nice and opened doors for people or remembered their birthday. He meant he didn't make rash decisions, but gave them considerable thought before he made them. This demonstrates how miscommunication is another barrier.

Sometimes our non-verbal language can trip us up, or the candidate's language can trip us up. Our bodies, especially our faces, do a lot of the talking for us. When you are having conversations, it's important that you pay attention to what your body is saying and ensure that it is congruent with your words. When speaking with others, do you lean forward slightly to indicate that you are listening to them? Do you avoid the temptation to roll your eyes, even if you don't believe what you are hearing?

Communication expert Mark Bowden reminds us that we need to speak in a way that people will perceive as trustworthy. This includes keeping gestures close to the body, as opposed to wildly gesticulating, and to keep your gestures in line with what Bowden calls the “**truth plane.**” This means that gestures are symmetrical and kept in front of the abdomen, not up at the chest or blocking your face.

Positive Body Language Examples	Negative Body Language Examples

## Types of Questions

### Open and Closed Questions

We spend a lot of our lives asking and answering questions, but we aren’t always aware of how we ask questions. Open questions in particular often give us difficulty, which is unfortunate since they are the most important ones for us to become skilled at using.

**Closed questions** can be answered with a single word or two or a simple yes or no. They can begin the closing process in a conversation, or provide confirmation of a detail, but they don’t usually lead to gathering more information. Where most people need more practice is asking the **open question**, those where the listener is given a chance to explain, to tell how they feel about an issue, or offer suggestions.

Open questions give us more information because:

- ✓ They encourage other people to talk

- ✓ We get opinions and ideas from others
- ✓ They can help us determine if people have interpreted what we say correctly
- ✓ They can help us arrive at consensus much more readily

Open questions typically begin with a variation of the five W's (who, what, when, where, why) or ask how. Good open questions include:

- ✓ What is your opinion?
- ✓ How do you think we should solve the problem?
- ✓ What would you do in my shoes?
- ✓ Tell me more about...

Note: Be very careful about “**why**” questions. All too often these questions sound like accusations, and the listener immediately becomes defensive.

Good questions can include:

- ✓ What do you think we can do about this?
- ✓ What would you like me to stop doing?
- ✓ Would it be helpful if I...?
- ✓ Supposing we were to...?
- ✓ Help me understand where you're coming from?
- ✓ Let's set a time when we can talk about the changes we're both prepared to make.
- ✓ I'm prepared to... Would that be acceptable to you?

### Probing Techniques

Many people are better at presenting their own point of view than they are at drawing out information from others. **Probing techniques** can help you draw out information from the individual and help you understand their side of the difficult conversation.

One of the most common ways of probing is to ask an **open question**, such as:

- ✓ “Can you describe that more clearly?”
- ✓ “Would you give me a specific example of what you mean?”
- ✓ “What do you think we should do?”

The difficulty here is that if you ask too many of these probing questions, the other person begins to feel like they are under interrogation. Be thoughtful about what and how you ask. Consider how many probes you really need to offer.

A second, very effective way of probing is a **pause**. Stop talking. Let the other person fill the silence.

A third way is to ask a **reflective or mirroring question**. For example, let's say the person has just said, "What I really want is fairer vacation policies." You may respond by just reflecting back to them, "Fairer?" The reflective question usually provides you with an expanded answer without you needing to ask more questions. Of course, it is best used in conjunction with a pause.

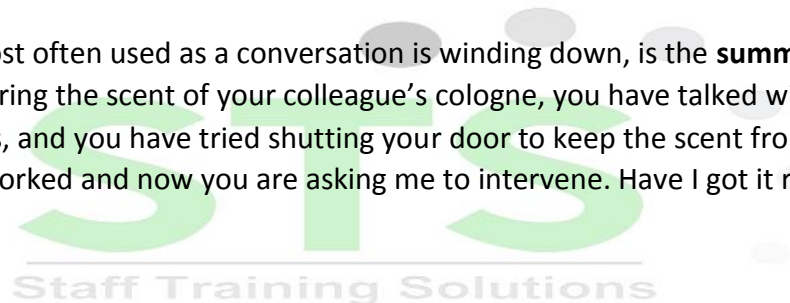
Reflective questions or statements focus on clarifying and summarizing without interrupting the flow of the conversation. They indicate your intent to understand the sender's thoughts and feelings.

A fourth method that is particularly useful to make certain you are clear about what the individual has said is **paraphrasing** what has just been said, in your own words. An example: "So if I understand you correctly, you..."

You can use this response to show that you want to increase the accuracy of your understanding of what has just been said. You may also want to use it to ensure the sender hears what he has just said. Finally, paraphrasing reassures the sender that you are trying to understand what he/she is saying.

The last method, most often used as a conversation is winding down, is the **summary question**. Example: "You have tried ignoring the scent of your colleague's cologne, you have talked with him about how it affects your allergies, and you have tried shutting your door to keep the scent from your workspace. None of these has worked and now you are asking me to intervene. Have I got it right?"

## Case Study



### Background

In January, Mitchel Hampton was promoted to manager for the sales team at Itlex Manufacturing. He had been on the sales team for five years and had been the top performer for most of that time. One of his first duties as manager was to find a sales representative to replace himself. Another sales representative passed on a resume for Frank Thompson, and after a short interview, Mitchel hired him.

By May, it was obvious that Mitchel made a mistake. Frank couldn't deliver and it was apparent that he wasn't a good fit for the company. Mitchel was forced to fire the first employee he had ever hired. To make matters worse, the sales team was far below their goals for the first half of the year.

**Can you help Mitchel figure out what he did wrong? We've included the hiring information on the following pages, as well as some discussion questions at the end.**

### Position Description

Itlex Manufacturing requires an experienced sales representative. The successful candidate must have at least five years of experience as a sales representative, with at least three years of that in the manufacturing industry.

The successful candidate will be responsible for managing their own leads and sales cycle using SoleNix, and therefore must have strong computer skills. We are looking for someone who is positive, outgoing, highly motivated, able to work independently, and willing to work flexible hours.

## Sample Resume

**Frank Thompson**  
1627 Main Street  
Somewhere, USA 55555  
(916) 222-9212

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**Objective**

To apply my excellent customer service and people skills to an entry-level role that can lead to growth within the sales industry.

**Education**

- Grade 12 Diploma
- Fluent in English and French (spoken and written)
- Basic Computer Skills

**Work Experience**

*Sales Clerk, SunKix Manufacturing, 2007-Present*

- Engaged customers in a positive sales experience by offering support in finding the right purchase for their needs
- Prepared attractive merchandise displays
- Completed accurate sales transactions

*Inventory Clerk, Pets Now, 2004-2007*

- Processed stock through receiving system
- Coordinated transition between daytime and evening staff
- Assumed senior staff responsibilities when senior staff were absent

**Volunteer Experience**

- Managed annual fundraiser for local pet rescue group.
- Involved in the Acmeville Chess Club since 2005

**References Available Upon Request**

## Interview Transcript

**Mitchel:** Hello, Frank. How are you today?

**Frank:** Not bad, I guess.

**Mitchel:** So today we're interviewing for an experienced sales representative. We want someone who can get out there and really represent Itlex. Does that sound like something you can do?

**Frank:** Sure.

**Mitchel:** I see you have experience with the manufacturing industry?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Mitchel:** How are your computer skills?

**Frank:** Not bad. I've never used a sales management-type application, though.

**Mitchel:** So you're not familiar with SoleNix?

**Frank:** No.

**Mitchel:** What kind of hours are you willing to work?

**Frank:** My last job had all kinds of crazy hours, so I'm really hoping for a Monday to Friday, 9 to 4, kind of gig.

**Mitchel:** OK, well, this position does require some nights and weekends.

**Frank:** Oh.

**Mitchel:** Um, Sally Berg recommended you for this position. How do you know her?

**Frank:** We used to date in high school.

**Mitchel:** OK, do you have a list of references with you?

**Frank:** I have a list at home but it's out of date.

**Mitchel:** Oh. Well, I suppose since Sally knows you, that's OK. When can you start?

**Frank:** How about two weeks from now? I'm not working but I was looking at taking a tropical vacation next week.

**Mitchel:** OK, I'll introduce you to the HR team and they can get your paperwork started. Welcome to Itlex!

**Frank:** Thanks Mitchel.

**Discussion Questions**

**Do you think Frank's resume showed that he was a good match for the position description?**

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**Why or why not?**

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**What good questions did Mitchel ask?**

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**What poor questions did Mitchel ask? How could they be improved?**

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**What other mistakes did Mitchel make?**

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**Would you have hired Frank Thompson?**

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## Traditional vs. Behavioral Interviews

### **Behavioral Interviewing**

Traditional interviews are often arranged as a “first” interview, and are also common for non-management jobs. They allow the interviewer to get to know the candidate through the resume, without a lot of consideration to the potential job. Examples of traditional questions are:

- ✓ Where do you want to be in five years?
- ✓ What made you pick your field of study in college or university?
- ✓ What kind of supervisor do you like?
- ✓ What are your strengths? Weaknesses?
- ✓ What made you choose this career?

Behavioral interviewing was researched and developed in the 1980’s by Tom Janz, Lowell Hellervik, and David Gilmore. (Their book *Behavior Description Interviewing* was published in 1986 by Allyn and Bacon Publishers.) The approach uses behavioral questions as a way to understand how a candidate will actually perform on the job, working with the principle that the best indication of future behavior is past behavior.

Behavioral interviewing is based on this model:



To facilitate a behavioral interview, the interviewer must have a thorough understanding of the skills needed for successful job performance in a particular job. Those competencies are then broken down into the knowledge, skills, and abilities which must be assessed during the interview process. While this type of question development and the interview itself will take longer than a traditional interview, the depth of answers gives a much better prediction of how the candidate has reacted to certain situations. While people certainly learn from their mistakes and success, and make adjustments to their behavior accordingly, this type of question does tell us what they will likely do in similar circumstances.

One of the reasons that interviewers like behavioral questions is that the candidate must give thought to the answers, and draw their responses from actual examples. This leads us to think that behavioral interviews are probably more honest than traditional interviews, and that candidates are not able to rehearse their answers. However, there is so much material available for candidates today that it is very reasonable to expect that they have given some time and attention to preparing answers for behavioral questions. Many career counselors encourage candidates to approach an interview like any other meeting, and to bring a copy of their resume and notes that they can refer to during the interview, too.

### **Purpose of Behavioral Interviewing**

The behavioral interviewing tools will ensure that the selection process is:

- ✓ Objective
- ✓ Consistent and transparent
- ✓ Based on the competencies and proficiency level of the job
- ✓ A good predictor of performance

When asking questions about past behaviors, we also get to know a candidate's personal preferences, attitudes, and behaviors. This helps us to make decisions about job suitability, since people may have the skills and knowledge to do a job, but not have the inclination to do it.



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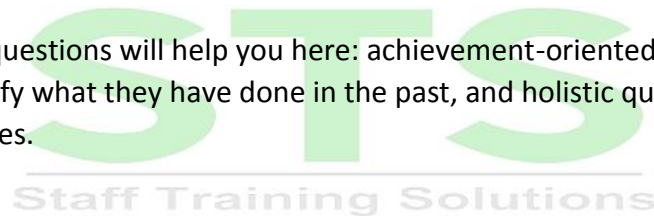
## Other Types of Questions

### Achievement-Oriented and Holistic Questions

Behavioral questions are very good for checking out performance skills. However, we must not forget to check out technical skills too. How do you ask those questions?

In the long run, you are looking for people who **can** do the job (technical skills or competencies), **will** do the job (performance skills or competencies), and the **fit**.

Two other types of questions will help you here: achievement-oriented questions that ask your candidates to quantify what they have done in the past, and holistic questions that reach beyond performance to values.



### Achievement-Oriented Questions

Achievement-oriented questions are all about what the candidate has accomplished and how they accomplished it. These questions are usually framed in one of the following ways:

- ✓ Give an example of...
- ✓ Tell me about a time when...
- ✓ How do you...
- ✓ Describe...

These questions must be related to the outcomes of the person's job; there's no point asking them how they improved the appearance of the company's website if that wasn't an area of responsibility. As you can see, they address both the "can" and "will" aspects of the candidate search.

When the candidate answers, you are looking for objective, clear answers. If you ask, "How do you plan your time to be most efficient," you want an answer that involves the tools and techniques that they would use. An answer like, "It depends on the tasks involved," just doesn't cut it.

### Holistic Questions

The word “holistic” means an interconnected approach that involves all the parts of a particular system. Holistic interview questions look at the person as a whole and address the “fit” aspect of the candidate search.

Some common holistic questions include:

- ✓ What does <job title> mean to you?
- ✓ What parts of <job title> are the most important? Why?
- ✓ How does this position fit in the bigger picture of the company?
- ✓ What are your professional goals for the next year? Five years? Ten years?

When the candidate answers, you are looking for a well-considered response that is also genuine. Their answers should help you determine if this person would be a good match for the company.

### Pairs Exercise

Develop two achievement-oriented questions.

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Develop two holistic questions.

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## The Critical Incident Technique

As interviewers, we need to make sure that a potential candidate will be a good fit with the organization. A good way to give someone a glimpse of the company is through a critical incident, which can be framed into a situational interview question. This type of questions is more complex than a traditional “What if” question we have all asked candidates at one time or another.

Critical incidents describe real events which can include effective or ineffective job behavior. They are valuable for several reasons.

- ✓ A critical incident includes data, not opinions
- ✓ The information can be gathered from different sources such as supervisors, colleagues, and even customers to provide different perspectives about the event
- ✓ They lead directly to behavior description questions for candidates with related job experience, and can still be used for material to create other situations to draw on general situations candidates have experienced.

This method relies on goal-setting theory, which in simple terms, suggests that a person’s future behaviors are strongly influenced by their behavioral intentions or goals. Situational or critical incident interview questions can also help communicate job expectations.

Interviewers can present candidates with a series of incidents which might take place on the job, followed by questions such as: “What would you do in this situation?”

Clearly a critical feature of situational interview questions is their focus on tapping meaningful samples of behavior. In other words, situational questions will be valid to the extent that they parallel events which actually occur on the job. The closer they reflect real-life situations, the more likely these questions will predict future job performance.

Good critical incidents describe the situation as exactly and objectively as possible. They are not evaluative. They should not reveal the names of the people involved.

Here is an example of an effective critical incident interview question for selecting a bookkeeper in a busy residential care facility: “You are trying to do a cost analysis from all the various sections of the facility, but people are very busy and don’t see the importance of this information, so they aren’t cooperating. What would you do?”

Another example: “One of your employees has misunderstood your instructions and incorrectly completed a task which you assigned to him. This has caused a severe problem in your section. What would you do?”

## Listening for Answers

### Listen Well

The ability to really listen is an important skill for any interviewer to have. Listening allows you to understand where the other person is coming from, and shows you're interested in what they have to say.

Unfortunately, we all experience common listening problems.

- ✓ We let our attention wander.
- ✓ We miss the real point of what is being said.
- ✓ We let our emotions interfere with our judgment.
- ✓ We interrupt the candidates being interviewed.
- ✓ We think ahead to what we want to say next and miss what's being said right now.

Active listening means that we try to understand things from the speaker's point of view. It includes an element of letting the speaker know that we are listening, and that we have understood what was said. This is not the same as hearing, which is a physical process, where sound enters the eardrum and messages are passed to the brain. Active listening can be described as an attitude that leads to listening for shared understanding.

When we make a decision to listen for total meaning, we listen for the content of what is being said as well as the attitude behind what is being said (is the speaker happy, angry, excited, sad, etc.)

### Responding to Feelings

The content (the words spoken) is one thing, but the way that people feel really gives full value to the message. Responding to the speaker's feelings adds an extra dimension of listening; are they disgusted, angry or in love and excited, perhaps ambivalent; all feelings that you can reply to you in your part of the conversation.

### Reading Cues

Really listening means that we are also very conscious of the non-verbal aspects to the conversation. What are the speaker's facial expressions, hand gestures, and posture telling us? Is their voice loud, shaky, stressing certain points, are they mumbling, or having difficulty finding the words they want to say?

### Demonstration Cues

When you are listening to someone, these techniques will show a speaker that you are paying attention, providing you are not overdoing it.

Physical indicators: make eye contact, nod your head from time to time, and lean into the conversation. Give verbal cues or use phrases such as “uh-huh,” “go on,” “really!,” and, “then what?” Use questions for clarification or summarizing statements, such as “Do you mean they were charging \$4.00 for just a cup of coffee?” or, “So after you got a cab, got to the store and found the right sales clerk, what happened then?”

### Tips for Becoming a Better Listener

- ✓ Make a decision to listen. Close your mind to clutter and noise and look at the person speaking with you. Give them your undivided attention.
- ✓ Don't interrupt people. Make it a habit to let them finish what they are saying. Respect that they have thoughts they are processing and speaking about, and wait to ask questions or make comments when they have finished.
- ✓ Keep your eyes focused on the speaker, and your ears tuned to their voice. Don't let your eyes wander around the room, just in case your attention does too.
- ✓ Carry a notebook or start a conversation file on your computer. Write down all the discussions that you have in a day. Capture the subject, who spoke more (were you listening or doing a lot of the talking?), what you learned in the discussion, as well as the who, what, when, where, why and how aspects of it. Once you have conducted this exercise eight to ten times, you will be able to see what level your listening skills are at currently.
- ✓ Ask a few questions throughout the conversation. When you ask, people will know that you are listening to them, and that you are interested in what they have to say. Your ability to summarize and paraphrase will also demonstrate that you heard them.
- ✓ When you demonstrate good listening skills, they tend to be infectious. If you want people to communicate well at work, you have to set a high example.

### Committing to Change

**Make three commitments to yourself that will help you listen better in interviews.**

#### Commitment One

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**Commitment Two**

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**Commitment Three**

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**Further Reading:**