

# Choosing a Great Crew

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What a pleasure it was to spend the day with MGCSA members at the 1997 Mini-Seminar. As those of you who attended recall, we spent the morning looking at employment interviewing. Although not the most inspiring topic in which to invest four hours, learning how to interview properly can make the difference between a well-run course or a run-down superintendent. If you know what you are looking for in potential employees and understand how to determine if candidates possess those skills and qualities, you'll be able to build a strong crew and ultimately reduce turnover.

Probably the most important point we covered was to **use a structured interview format**. A structured interview format uses the same set of questions for each candidate. The questions are prepared before the interview. These questions are designed to bring out examples of past behavior to determine if the candidate possesses the skills and/or character qualities you need in the position. For example, if you are looking for service skills, you could ask, *Give me an example of a time when you had to serve someone who was angry at you? What was the situation? How did you handle it? What were the results?* The answers to these questions will go a long way in seeing if the applicant has the skills for which you are looking. Consider the following list of skills, character qualities and corresponding questions when creating your structured interview format:

• **Communication Skills:** Tell me about a situation where you needed to communicate a suggestion or problem to your employer and/or co-workers. How did you present the information? How did you make sure they clearly understood your suggestion? What kind of feedback did you receive?

• **Continuous Improvement:** What has been the biggest change you've been asked to make to an existing process? How did this change help the process? What recommendations did you make for improvement?

• **Decision Making/Problem Solving:** What type of problems did you solve in your previous job? Give me a specific example of a problem and how you solved it.

• **Giving/Taking Responsibility:** Tell me about a time where you were given the main responsibility to get a specific job/project done. How did you organize your work? What barriers did you encounter? How did you work around those barriers?

• **Openness to Change:** What is the biggest work method change you have experienced? What did you do to make this a positive work experience? How did you help other employees make these changes?

• **Teamwork:** In past jobs when the work flow stopped or was interrupted, how did you respond? What did you do to help get the work moving again?

• **Dependability:** What was the biggest mistake/error you made at your last workplace? What did you do about it?

• **Workplace Organization:** Tell me about a time you brought to the attention of the people responsible for a situation/problem which was adversely affecting workplace organization. What role did you play in correcting this situation/problem?

• **Quality:** Could you affect the physical appearance of a product in a previous job? Tell me how this related to your job duties.

• **Safety:** Tell me about a time you've shared a safety tip with another employee that resulted in avoiding an accident. What safety recommendations have you made and with what results?

• **Productivity:** What was the most complicated piece of equipment, machine or process with which you've been involved? How did you learn to operate the equipment/work the process? What was the productivity expectation? What was your productivity?

• **Equipment Upkeep:** What charts, meters, dials or graphs have you had to read on past jobs? Tell me about your experience.

• **Customer Relations:** What was the most irate that you have ever seen a customer? What caused this dissatisfaction? How did you handle the situation?

When you create your structured interview format, be sure to:

• Write/use only job-related questions. To make sure your questions are legally defensible, you must be able to draw a direct link between the job responsibility and the question used to determine the candidate's qualification. If you are not sure, do not ask the question. For example, it is illegal to ask an applicant if he or she will be playing sports during the summer. The ideas behind the question might be to determine if the applicant will come to work on time or consistently. However, the question could be misunderstood as looking for information to discriminate for or against someone who is involved in sports. Instead, show the candidate a schedule and ask if he or she will work it.

• Focus on the candidate's past performance rather than hypothetical questions about the future. The principle here is that past behavior is the best indicator of future performance.

• Begin your questions with phrases that cause the candidate to give answers based on past experiences. Phrases such as, *Share an example of a time.... Tell me about a*

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time when....Think back to a time when.... How have you dealt with....? etc. These phrases require a real life example of what the candidate has done, not what the candidate thinks he/she can do.

- Consider getting a few sample questions from other managers/supervisors who have interviewed for this type of position.

- Review all your questions for any hint of discrimination.

Using the kind of questions described above to create a structured interview format will:

- Allow you to focus on the candidate's answers—rather than trying to think of your next question.

- Keep your questions legally defensible.

- Bring out the skills and character qualities you know the position requires.

- Help you compare candidates'

qualifications to make the final hiring decision.

- Give you a set of skills and character qualities you can post for others to suggest possible candidates.

- Reduce turnover by giving new hires an accurate picture of what you want in an employee.

- Make employment interviewing much easier by providing a consistent method of choosing great crew members.

I hope this information helps you prepare for your next interviews. If you have questions or need more information on employment interviewing or other training topics, please call me, Jack Mateffy, at 612/472-0820. I would be happy to answer your questions during a round of golf.

*(Editor's Note: Jack Mateffy is the president of Mateffy and Company, a training and consulting firm located in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Mateffy and Company designs and presents employee development and training programs for clients around the nation.)*



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