

I. Telephone Pre-Screen

Is the salary range we have set for this position within your acceptable range?

Why are you currently searching for a new position?

What are the top three duties in the job you now have or in your most recent job?

1.

2.

3.

What are some typical decisions that you make and how do you make them?

Give me some examples.

What do you think you would do for this organization that someone else wouldn't?

Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

Describe for me your ideal company.

II. Behavioral

Describe what you would say if asked to talk about yourself in a group of 15 people.

If someone told you that you had made an error, describe how you would react and what you would say in your defense.

If someone asked you for assistance with a matter that is outside the parameters of your job description, what would you do?

You are a committee member and disagree with a point or decision. How will you respond?

Describe what you would classify as a crisis.

You are angry about an unfair decision. How do you react?

Suppose you are in a situation where deadlines and priorities change frequently and rapidly. How would you handle it?

How do you know when you are stressed? What do you do to de-stress?

Tell me about a time when you were a part of a great team. What was your part in making the team effective?

Give me an example of a time when you had to deal with a difficult co-worker. How did you handle the situation?

How do you think your co-workers would respond if you were absent from work?

Can you tell me about a time during your previous employment when you suggested a better way to perform a process?

Tell me about a personal or career goal that you have accomplished and why that was important to you.

Give an example of a time when you were trying to meet a deadline, you were interrupted, and did not make the deadline. How did you respond?

What strengths did you rely on in your last position to make you successful in your work?

What do you do when you know you are right and your boss disagrees with you? Give me an example of when this has happened in your career.

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?

Suppose your supervisor asked you to get information for them that you know is confidential and he/she should not have access to. What would you do?

Describe a time when you performed a task outside your perceived responsibilities. What was the task? Why did you perceive it to be outside your responsibilities? What was the outcome?

It's 4:30 on a Friday afternoon. Your supervisor gives you an assignment that needs to be finished by 8:00 Monday morning. You have already made plans to be away the entire weekend. What would you do?

If you observed a co-worker 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?

III. Interpersonal

What are your strengths?

What would your last boss say about you?

Describe how you like to be managed, and the best relationship you've had with a previous boss.

If I asked your previous/current co-workers about you what would they say?

Describe what you see as your strengths related to this job/position. Describe what you see as your weaknesses related to this job/position.

Explain the phrase "work ethic" and describe yours.

What kind of people do you find it most difficult to work with? For example, assume you are in a situation where you have to deal with a person very different from yourself and you are finding it difficult. What would you do?

What methods do you use to make decisions? When do you find it most difficult to make a decision?

Describe a difficult time you have had dealing with an employee, customer, or co-worker. Why was it difficult? How did you handle it? What was the outcome?

How would your co-workers describe your work style/habits?

What do you do when others resist or reject your ideas or actions?

What do you think are the best and worst parts of working in a team environment? How do you handle it?

Under what kinds of conditions do you learn best?

How would your past employers describe your response to hectic or stressful situations?

How would your co-workers describe your work style or work habits?

If I asked several of your co-workers about your greatest strength as a team member, what would they tell me?

To you, which is more desirable: A business that is run in an efficient business-like manner OR a business that is run in a personal and friendly way?

IV. Creative Thinking

What's the best book you've read in the last year? Please take a minute and tell us what you liked about it.

What was the most creative thing you did in your last job?

What is your interpretation of "success?"

Describe an ideal work environment or "the perfect job."

In what way(s) do you express your personality in the workplace?

V. General

Could you share with us a recent accomplishment of which you are most proud?

What would you have liked to do more of in your last position? What held you back?

Tell us a bit about your work background, and then give us a description of how you think it relates to our current opening.

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.

Why have you applied for this position?

What skill set do you think you would bring to this position?

Tell me about your present or last job. Why did you choose it? Why did you/do you want to leave?

What was your primary contribution/achievement? Biggest challenge?

What are your short-term and long-term goals?

In what areas would you like to develop further? What are your plans to do that?

What are some positive aspects of your last employment/employer? What are some negative aspects?

What do you think about SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures)?

What are your career path interests?

What do you know about our company?

Why should we hire YOU?

If the position required it, would you be willing to travel?

If the position required it, would you be willing to relocate?

If you were offered this position, when would you be available to start?

After learning about this opportunity, what made you take the next step and apply for the job?

If you are the successful applicant, how would you expect to be different after a year in this position?

Now that you have learned about our company and the position you are applying for, what hesitation or reluctance would you have in accepting this job if we offer it to you?

Tell me anything else you would like us to know about you that will aid us in making our decision.

What questions would you like to ask me?

VI. Managerial

Define professional behavior and/or conduct appropriate in the workplace.

Why do you think a team of people – sports team, work team, may not work well together?

Tell us about your management style - people, teamwork, direction?

Describe an ideal supervisor.

What is your own philosophy of management?

How have you participated in planning processes?

Is it more important to be a detail oriented person, or a big picture person? Explain.

What was the most challenging personnel issue you've had to deal with and how did you handle it?

Describe for me a time when you have come across questionable business practices; how did you handle the situation?

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?

Describe for me a decision you made which would normally have been made by your supervisor? What was the outcome?

Discuss and differentiate between remediation, corrective action, and discipline.

Explain, step by step, how you have handled an employee who had performance problems.

Why should employees seek to improve their knowledge and skill base?

How would you motivate them to do so?

What coaching or mentoring experience have you had? With groups or one-on-one? How did you determine the appropriate way to coach/mentor and what were the results?

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?

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?

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?

Managers need good information and managers need to make good decisions. Do you tend to gather information up to a deadline in order to make a better-informed decision OR gather just enough information to make a good decision quickly?

What is the largest number of employees you have supervised and what were their job functions?

Are you best at dealing with details and day-to-day operations OR with concepts, envisioning and future planning? Give me an example.

VII. Executive

Would you please describe your interest in becoming (title of position).

Tell me about your current position or most recent position and how you helped the organization accomplish its goals and mission.

What did you do for that company that made a difference and for which you believe you will be remembered?

Tell me about your experience in leading and managing an organization similar to ours.

Do you have a personal philosophy of management?

Tell me about your fiscal management experience: budgeting, reporting, cutting costs, building and maintaining reserves.

Have you ever had to champion an unpopular change? How did you handle it?

Have you ever faced a significant ethical problem at work? How did you handle it?

Tell me about your experience working with a board of directors. What approach and philosophy did you follow in working with boards?

What do you think is the role of the President/CEO in strategic planning for the organization?

Give me some example of how and when you were the spokesperson for your current or most recent company.

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?

Tell me about your experiences with staff development. How do you think your current or most recent staff would describe you?

How do you stay informed of current ideas on management and the (industry field for the company/organization)?

Based upon what you have read and heard, what ideas do you have about continuing and increasing the success of this company?

Are there any programs, policies, or actions of (name of company/organization) that you have heard of with which you have concerns or differences?

If you are hired for this position and are still with (name of company/organization) five years from now, how do you think the organization will be different?

VIII. Functional

The following questions are function-specific.

Accounting

Describe some recent projects you were involved in to improve Accounting's efficiency/effectiveness. What did you do?

Describe for me a time when you have come across questionable accounting practices. How did you handle the situation?

Have you completed month end/year end closing? How much experience do you have with this?

Describe your most challenging encounter with month end/year end closing. How did you resolve the problem?

Describe your PL (profit/loss) experience.

What type of inventory audits have you been involved in? Describe challenges you've faced.

Tell me about your knowledge of commissions accounting.

What experience have you had with tax accounting?

Customer Service

What do you like about being in Customer Service? What do you find is the most difficult part of being in Customer Service?

Tell me about a time when you went out of your way to give great service to a customer.

Describe a process or system that you improved so customers would be better served.

Tell me about a time when you asked for feedback on your customer service skills from your manager or co-worker and then used that response to improve your work.

Tell me about a time when you knew that your customer might not get what he or she needed on time. How did you handle this?

Tell me about a time when you had to say "No" to a customer because it was against company policy.

Tell me about a time when you had trouble working with a difficult or demanding customer. How did you handle this?

Tell me about a situation in which you "lost it" or did not do your best with a customer. What did you do about this?

Healthcare

How would you react if the following should occur: a person suddenly collapses on the floor. After a few minutes, a large crowd gathers around with loud voices and making demands.

If you had to read illegible handwriting, what would you do?

You have found patient belongings in the main hospital corridor. Describe how you would take care of the situation.

What would you say or do if upon entering a patient's room the patient screamed, "Get out of my room"?

What would you do if a patient had used his/her call light, but upon entering the room, the curtain was drawn around the bed?

What would you do if you encountered a patient's family member alone and crying in the hallway?

How would you react if upon entering a patient's room, you were told that the family was upset over the care the patient was receiving?

What do you think makes a "good" hospital or why would a hospital be described as "one of the best" by a community?

How will your work performance enhance (name of company/organization) in the healthcare arena as it is today?

Human Resources/General

Tell me why you chose Human Resource Management as your profession.

Do you have a personal philosophy about HR management?

What do you like most about HR? What do you like least, and what do you find the most challenging?

During your HR career, which positions have you reported to and which reporting structure do you prefer?

How do you stay current with changes in employment laws, practices and other HR issues?

An employee tells you about a sexual harassment allegation but then tells you they don't want to do anything about it; they just thought you should know. How do you respond?

Describe the most difficult employee relations situation you have had to handle, how it was resolved or not, and why.

What have you done to help your human resources department to become a strategic partner?

As HR professionals, we often deal with legal and ethical situations. Tell me about an ethical situation you have encountered and what part you took in resolving it. Tell me about any illegal discrimination charges you have handled and how these were resolved.

What experience do you have in multi-state HR management?

Tell me about your policy development experiences. What employment policies have you developed or revised? What is your experience in compiling or revising an Employee Handbook?

Describe your knowledge of/involvement with progressive discipline.

Describe your knowledge of/involvement with Performance Evaluation processes.

Tell me about programs that you have implemented.

Tell me about your experience in training and developing your employees or managers.

Tell me about training and development programs you have developed.

Have you ever worked in a Union Environment? What were the positives/negatives?

Tell me about a time when a manager wanted you to terminate an employee in contrast to your company's termination policy. How was it resolved?

Describe to me in a few sentences the purpose of the following basic Federal regulations: (select one or more, as applicable)

Title VII/Civil Rights Act

FLSA

WC

FMLA

ADA

Human Resources/Recruiting

How much recruiting experience do you have? What type of positions have you recruited for in the past?

Discuss why you feel that Human Resources/Recruiting is the right profession for you.

List your experience with and/or knowledge of Affirmative Action Planning and Applicant Flow reporting.

What recruiting tool do you consider to be most valuable to you? Explain.

What do you consider to be your greatest talent as it relates to recruiting?

What do you consider to be the most challenging aspect of corporate recruiting?

Can you work extended hours when needed?

What is the most unique or non-traditional recruiting approach you have tried? Was it successful? Why or why not?

Are you familiar with full cycle recruiting?

How do you develop relationships with line managers?

Have you ever developed a staffing plan?

Tell me about your experience with International Recruiting.

What type of volume are you used to handling? What is your typical open requisition load?

Job posting experience in compliance with OFCCP regulations?

Tell me about your internal posting process.

Tell me about your previous staffing efforts to fulfill diversity initiatives. How did you accomplish this?

Are you familiar with e-recruiting? Tell me about your success utilizing this method.

Human Resources/Compensation/Benefits

Provide me with an overview of your employee benefit enrollment process. What duties are you responsible for within this process?

How do you communicate benefit updates to employees?

How many employees are you processing benefits for?

Are you responsible for benefit implementation?

Are your benefit programs outsourced to a third-party administrator or self administered?

What is your Benefit and Compensation Service Delivery Model?

Tell me about a time when you had to present a benefit program to a group of employees to win their buy-in. What was the outcome?

What is your organization's compensation philosophy?

Describe your organization's salary administration process. In what ways is it effective? Ineffective?

What is your knowledge of/experience with variable compensation?

Tell me what you know about the following programs:

Cafeteria Plans

FSA's

Tell me about the most complex FMLA situation you handled.

Tell me about any HR functions you have managed the outsourcing of (benefits, payroll, retirement plan administration, EAP's, FSA's).

Information Technology

In your experience, what are the essential elements of an IT disaster recovery plan?

Describe the types of network security features you have implemented or maintained in the past.

When you have several users experiencing computer problems, how do you determine which users get help first?

Describe your decision-making process when selecting which IT certifications to pursue.

Of your certifications, which one(s) have you found most helpful when you encounter technical problems on the job?

In your opinion, how does managing a staff of technical workers differ from managing other kinds of workers?

What brands of hardware do you feel most comfortable dealing with?

What software have you had the most success supporting?

What characteristics do you feel are necessary for success as a technical support worker?

Describe a past situation in which you provided excellent customer service to a user.

Example Questions and Possible Answers for Interviews

By Julie Burwell, SPHR, Gundars Kaupins, SPHR, and Rachel Prine, SPHR

Example Questions to ask any employee

Q: If you saw a coworker doing something dishonest, what would you do?

A: According to the employee handbook, contract, or past practice, inform the most relevant authority(ies) about specific behaviors witnessed.

Follow handbook, contract, or past practice concerning handling the potential dishonest behavior.

Don't immediately assume that the coworker is guilty of dishonest behavior. Use appropriate compliance hotlines if available.

Contact human resources for compliance help.

Don't spread the potential dishonest activity news to employees or others who do not have responsibility over the matter.

Blount, E. C. (2003). Occupational Crime: Deterrence, Investigation, and Reporting in Compliance with Federal Guidelines. New York: CRC Press.

Johnson, R. A. (2003). Whistleblowing: When It Works and Why. Boulder, Col.: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Q: What would you do if someone in management asked you to do something unethical?

A: Determine how the candidate defines ethics.

Determine how the candidate views their role in cases of ethics.

Determine how the candidate views power.

Blount, E. C. (2003). Occupational Crime: Deterrence, Investigation, and Reporting in Compliance with Federal Guidelines. New York: CRC Press.

Q: Tell me about a time that you have experienced a loss for doing what is right.

A: Determine how the candidate defines “what is right.”

Determine how the candidate defines “a loss.” Is there a loss in terms of fundamentalism, social institutions, moral agency or virtuous organizations as a whole?

Fundamentalism: Financial and legal responsibility only “Business of business is profit.”

Social Institutions: Social contract exists beyond economics and legalities. Need to accommodate stakeholders’ interests.

Moral Agency: Moral obligations similar to people. Morality and ethics are part of culture: The ‘right thing to do.’

Virtuous Organizations: Organizations that foster the good society. Obligation to build a better world.

Hatcher, T. (2002). Ethics and HRD: A New Approach to Leading Responsible Organizations. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing.

Sims, R. R. (2003). Ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility: Why Giants Fall. Westport, Conn.: Praeger.

Ulrich, D. (2003). Why the Bottom Line Isn’t: How to Build Value Through People and Organization. Hoboken, N. J.: John Wiley.

Q: In what business situations do you feel honesty is inappropriate?

A: In the Movie “Liar, Liar,” the actor Carey portrayed a lawyer who shared his honest feelings to all around him. Sharing honest feelings, especially ones of anger, frustration, and hate, may be inappropriate and also based on inadequate information about another person or situation.

Q: If you knew that your supervisor was doing something unethical, what would you do?

A: Follow handbook, contract, or past practice concerning handling the potential dishonest behavior.

Don’t immediately assume that the supervisor is guilty of dishonest behavior.

Use appropriate compliance hotlines if available.

Contact human resources for compliance help.

Don’t spread the potential dishonest activity news to employees or others who do not have responsibility over the matter.

Blount, E. C. (2003). Occupational Crime: Deterrence, Investigation, and Reporting in Compliance with Federal Guidelines. New York: CRC Press.

Fischman, W., Solomon, B., Greenspan, D., & Gardner, H. (2004). Making Good: How Young People Cope with Moral Dilemmas At Work. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Q: Describe from an ethical standpoint, what should the relationship between a supervisor and their employee consist of?

A: The relationship should be an honest, open, and trusting one where questions can be asked and opinions can be expressed without concern of retaliation.

Watkins, M. (2003). The First 90 Days: Critical Success Strategies for New Leaders at All Levels. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Business School Press.

Example Questions typically asked of management personnel

Q: You have recently been promoted to a manager position. You are aware of another employee who is using the computer in an unethical way. This other employee used to be your co-worker. How would you handle this?

A: Follow handbook, contract, or past practice concerning handling the potential dishonest behavior.

Don't immediately assume that the supervisor is guilty of dishonest behavior.

Use appropriate compliance hotlines if available.

Contact human resources for compliance help.

Don't spread the potential dishonest activity news to employees or others who do not have responsibility over the matter.

Blount, E. C. (2003). Occupational Crime: Deterrence, Investigation, and Reporting in Compliance with Federal Guidelines. New York: CRC Press.

Fischman, W., Solomon, B., Greenspan, D., & Gardner, H. (2004). Making Good: How Young People Cope with Moral Dilemmas At Work. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Q: How far is too far for monitoring employee movement, within and outside the confines of the company?

A: There should be a balance between the need to know information about the whereabouts of employees and the need for privacy. Keep up with employee handbook policies and laws concerning this matter.

Persson, A. J. & Hansson, S. O. (2003). Privacy at work: ethical criteria. Journal of Business Ethics, 42, 59-70.

Teicher, S. (2003, December 22). It's 2 a.m. Do you know where your workers are? Christian Science Monitor, 14.

Q: You feel that you are a very good employee and others, including your boss, are telling you that you don't measure up – what would you do in this case?

A: Find out what specific behaviors are inadequate. Even if the impressions are wrong about you, do not retaliate.

Baumeister, R. F. (1999). Evil: Inside Human Violence and Cruelty. New York: W. H. Freeman.

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Baumeister, R. F. (1999). Evil: Inside Human Violence and Cruelty. New York: W. H. Freeman.

Example Questions typically asked of Human Resources personnel

Q: How do you deal with employee handbook policies that have contradictory values? (or are ambiguous)

A: If the handbook is inadequate, there are several other ways to deal with contradictions such as

1. Consider past practice.
2. Consider joint recollection of what the parties intended to mean when the handbook was written.
3. Consider letters of understanding that help explain the handbook policies.
4. Consider what other arbitrators, companies, or court cases have done in that, or similar, situations.
5. Consider costs (financial, social, ethical, etc.) of doing things in different ways.

Consult with management and human resource management concerning potential contradictory policies.

Zack, A. M. (1989). Grievance Arbitration: Issues on the Merits in Discipline, Discharge, and Contract Interpretation. New York: American Arbitration Association.

Q: There is a former employee of your company who wants to come back to work for you. You have an opening for which the former employee is qualified. Should you post the position? Why or Why not?

A: Find employee handbook, contract, and legal constraints to not posting jobs first.

Q: If a company has a diversity policy, including sexual orientation, and there were employees who complained about this facet of the policy, what would you do?

A: According to the Hewlett Packard Case, a company has a right to enforce such diversity policy.

Clark, M. M. (2004, August). Religion vs. Sexual Orientation. HR Magazine, 49, 54-59.

Q: A Company provided beeper includes several different tones, including the song, “Dixie,” and an employee is offended by the fact that a beeper holder chose this option. What would you do?

A: Follow handbook, contract, or past practice concerning handling potentially offensive behavior.

Don’t immediately assume that the employee is guilty of offensive behavior.

Contact human resources for policy help and interpretation.

Q: If you were new to a company that did not have an ethics or compliance program, where would you start for information?

A: Check the SHRM website for reports specifically on this subject

Type “Ethics Programs” or “Compliance Programs” on a search engine.

Find existing ethics compliance programs published through the Bureau of National Affairs, Commerce Clearing House, etc.

Check your local library for ethics books and texts.

Check the Journal of Business Ethics.

Find model ethics programs such as the Office of Government Ethics (http://www.usoge.gov/pages/about_oge/ethics_program.html) and

Corporate Ethics Programs: Inspiring the Workforce by Bruce A. Hamm (<http://www.refresher.com/!bahinspiring.html>)

Q: Your boss has a principle that he/she strongly believes in and the program has decayed. The program is hurting the organization and the boss wants you to still push this program with the employees, what will you do?

A: The buck stops at the top. Contact the boss to discuss specific concerns about the program. Discuss alternatives.

Baumeister, R. F. (1999). Evil: Inside Human Violence and Cruelty. New York: W. H. Freeman.

These questions are used and were submitted by SHRM members and SHRM panel members. If you have additional questions that you would like to contribute to the database, please send them to infocen@shrm.org with the words “Sample Interview Questions” in the subject line. We are particularly interested in expanding our offering of function-specific questions in areas such as Information Technology, Sales/Marketing, Administrative, etc.