

HIRING GEEKS THAT FIT



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is past behavior/performance *in similar circumstances*.” JAN86
Two corollaries are helpful in evaluating behavior consistency:

1. The more recent the past behavior, the greater its predictive power.
2. The more long-standing the behavior, the greater its predictive power. JAN86

Although people do learn new technical skills as well as how to apply those skills, they rarely change behavior. When managers give me reasons for why they have fired someone, they typically say things such as the following:

- Sam didn’t have enough drive.
- Sally wasn’t adaptable enough.
- Steve didn’t come to work on time.

Each person’s behavior was a key factor in why he or she was fired. When a manager says, “Sam didn’t have enough drive,” the manager is speaking about initiative. A candidate will indirectly tell you about his or her initiative in answering an open-ended, behavior-description question. You can ask, “Did you ever notice problems at your company that you would have liked to see fixed?” If the candidate answers “Not really,” then probe further to see whether things really did run smoothly, or whether the candidate is too polite to answer the question with a yes. If the candidate answers “Yes,” then continue the dialogue: “Tell me about what you would like to have seen changed.” Follow up that discussion with, “Were you able to effect any changes, and if so, what were they?”

You can detect initiative, adaptability, punctuality, or any of the candidate's personal preferences, qualities, and skills if you ask behavior-description questions and compare the circumstances of the behavior to your environment. By weighing the candidate's behavior along with his or her technical expertise, you can fairly confidently predict his or her probability of success in your organization.

I generally start an interview by asking the candidate to tell me what he or she is currently working on, or, if the candidate is unemployed, I ask for a description of the most recent project. I tailor my question to elicit information relevant to the functional area for which I'm interviewing. For example, for a developer, I'll say, "Tell me what you're developing now." For a tester, I'll say, "Tell me about your test choices and activities now."

If that's too open-ended an approach for you or the candidate, other questions, which can be tailored to the type of candidate you're interviewing, are given below, in [Start here with questions to ask or tailor](#). When you ask a series of questions, or ask questions that have multiple parts, pause and wait for the answer between each question or part. If you're asking questions on the phone, you will want to take notes, and your silence as you take notes may prompt some people to add detail to their answers to you—a very positive benefit.

If you find it difficult to draw out a candidate enough to learn anything of substance, you are not asking the questions correctly. Practice interviewing in groups of three people: interviewer, candidate, and observer. Have the observer watch and listen and take notes. We have no idea what kinds of questions we use until we hear ourselves.

7.2 Start here with questions to ask or tailor

Sometimes, you may have trouble developing your questions. Here are some questions for you, organized by role and what you might like to learn about the candidate. Start here and tailor these questions for your open positions.

Developer: if you want to learn how the developer approaches design or implementation:

- Tell me about the piece of the project you're working on now.
- Tell me how you came up with that design.
- What issues did you run into during implementation?
- Tell me about a time when you had trouble.
- Tell me about a time when you had fun.
- What design techniques do you use, and what makes you choose those techniques?

Tester: if you want to learn about the tester's functional test skills, and possibly about how the tester plans

- How do you decide what to test in your project?
- What test techniques are you using for which pieces of the project? If you hear an answer like, "My boss told me what to do," then follow up with any of these questions:
- How are you testing the product?
- How do you track which tests pass and fail?

- How do you know when you've found a problem?
- Tell me more about how you report problems.
- Tell me about a great defect you found.
- How do you advocate for defects you think need to be fixed?
- Tell me about a time when you had trouble.
- Tell me about a time when you had fun.

Support: To learn how the rep manages daily work

- Tell me how you record an incident.
- What are the first, second, and third things you do after receiving an incident report?
- Tell me how you've handled a difficult customer.
- Tell me about a time when you were particularly proud of something you did for a customer.
- Tell me about a time when you had trouble.
- Tell me about a time when you had fun.

Writer: To learn how the writer determines writing requirements and how he or she elicits information to know what to write about

- Tell me about your current writing assignment. How did you determine the requirements for the writing part of the project?
- How did you know what to write?
- Tell me about a time when you had trouble.
- Tell me about a time when you had fun.

Project Manager: To learn how the project manager approaches projects, and about previous project management experiences

- Tell me about how you're managing your current project. What's similar about this project?
- What's different about this project from others you've managed?
- How do you start projects? (Give me an example.)
- How do you end projects? (Give me an example.)
- How do you know a project is done? (Give me an example.)
- Tell me about a time when you had trouble.
- Tell me about a time when you had fun.

Technical Lead: To learn how the candidate provides technical leadership

- When things are proceeding well on the project, what do you do?
- How do you recognize when the work is proceeding well?
- How do you know when things aren't proceeding smoothly, and what do you do?
- Do you coach or mentor? If so, how?
- Tell me about a time when you had trouble.
- Tell me about a time when you had fun.

Manager: To learn about how the manager performs daily management assignments

- Give me an example of how you manage difficult people.