

[How to Dig Beneath the Surface in Your Candidate Interviews](#)

Is your interview style providing a clear sense of the candidate's qualifications? If not, try this easy technique.

By: Eric Herrenkohl

What are the most important questions to ask in your interviews? Good follow-up questions ensure that the candidate, not the interviewer, is talking. They take the pressure off of you to create 100 insightful interview questions – a handful will do. They help the interviewer uncover the real story of a candidate's experience and accomplishments. After every question that you ask in an interview, follow up with questions such as:

- Why so?
- Interesting. Please tell me more.
- What made that important to you?
- How did you go about accomplishing that?
- What were the most important steps you took to make that happen?

Here are three examples of how your interviewing will improve with better follow-up programs.

1. A job candidate's response is his or her programmed response. The second response is the real answer. As Dr. Kurt Einstein, the noted psychologist and expert on interviewing pointed out, the first response that a job candidate gives to your interview question is rehearsed. Rehearsed answers do not give you much insight into the candidate. The follow-up question digs beneath the surface. As a result, candidates tell you their real story.

2. Typically, details indicate truth telling. Most people can tell you the details about things that they really did or accomplished. They talk in vague generalities about accomplishments that they are embellishing or making up. By asking follow-up questions that require more detailed explanations, you get better information about how much a candidate has really accomplished.

3. Find out if the candidate can reproduce her accomplishments for your company. Assume a sales person tells you that she took the worst territory of her former employer and turned it into the best territory in the company in 18 months. What is the most important question to ask her?

"Can you please tell me, step by step and in as much detail as possible, exactly how you did that?"

In order to accomplish the same kind of turn-around for your company, this salesperson must know the steps she took to turn this sales territory around. She will be able to tell you the specific steps she took and why those steps were important. Asking the right follow-up questions unearths this information.

Hiring Takeaway: Get better at asking follow-up questions. It will improve your recruitment process and increase your effectiveness as an interviewer. Many interviewers talk too much too early in the interview process. Particularly in a first interview, you should talk as little as possible. The only way for you to assess a candidate's strengths or weaknesses is by hearing their responses to your questions. When you are talking, it is the candidate who is assessing you!

The best way to ensure that the candidate, not you, does most of the talking is to ask at least one and likely two or three follow up questions for every initial question that you ask. This means asking:

- “What did you like most about your last job?”... followed by
- “Interesting, tell me more about that?” and then...
- “You say you didn’t like project management. Why so?”

If you follow this approach, you make sure that the candidate speaks, not you. You get great information to help inform your hiring decision.

Interviewing is hard work. Make sure to ask good follow up questions during an interview. You will immediately increase the amount of valuable information that you get out of the process. As a result, there will be less stress for you, a more effective interview process, and better hiring decision.