

# **NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF PERSONNEL SERVICES**

## **Independent Study Course Number 18**

This independent study course is offered to certificate holders and members of the National Association of Personnel Services (NAPS). By completing this course, individuals can earn Continuing Education Units (CEUs) that can be applied toward the maintenance requirement that NAPS has instituted for individuals receiving the Certified Personnel Consultant (CPC) and Certified Temporary – Staffing Specialist (CTS) designations after January 1, 1995. All individuals will be required to complete the examination section of this independent study course to receive credit. Those achieving a passing score on the examination will receive the .2 CEUs associated with this particular course. In addition, .2 CEUs can be earned by completing the special assignment outlined on the last page of the course. Refer to the registration instructions on the last page of this study course for additional instructions.

---

### **THE INTERVIEW PROCESS**

*By Mary Beth Elmer, CPC, CTS*

The employment interview is conducted thousands of times daily within the personnel services industry. From screening interviews through hiring interviews, this process determines whether or not we will be successful in hiring a temp or completing a search assignment.

Because this process plays such a pivotal role, we should have more than a passing familiarity with the purpose of an interview, the types of interviews, the formats that can be used, and the impact of the interview process.

#### **The Purpose of an interview**

The purpose of an interview is to identify and hire candidates who will perform well and want to remain with their employer. To achieve this purpose, the interview process should assess the candidate's technical skills and abilities, personal preferences, and behavior patterns.

The purpose of an interview is basic – the interview needs to gather sufficient information in each area from a candidate in order to form a hiring decision. The difficulty comes in selecting the appropriate interview format.

#### **Interview Types**

There are two types of interviews: the screening interview and the hiring interview. The screening interview, conducted either by phone or in-person, pre-screens a candidate for general suitability for a position. This interview is normally done by an experienced interviewer using pre-determined questions. From the information gathered in the interview, a candidate is screened into or out of the hiring process.

The hiring interview is the process that will result in an offer of employment being made to a candidate. The interview format used in this process will determine whether or not the interviewer has sufficient information to make the right offer to the best candidate.

### **Interview Formats**

There are three basic interview formats: the structured or patterned interview, the unstructured interview, and the panel interview. With the exception of the panel interview, these interview formats can be used for either the screening or the hiring process.

The *structured* or patterned interview format has, as the name implies, a structure to it. There is a set of pre-determined questions that will be asked of each candidate for a position. Some interviewers will ask the questions in order; others will use a more random approach but will ask all the questions. This format, if used correctly, develops sufficient information to, first, screen the candidate into or out of the process and, second, to determine if an offer of employment should be made.

The traditional structured interview is an excellent format to gather information on the first two areas of assessment, the candidate's skills and abilities, and personal preferences. Asking the same questions of each candidate allows the interviewer to compare and contrast candidates' backgrounds against each other as well as against the position requirements.

Identifying behavior patterns, the third area of assessment in an interview, was not historically associated with a traditional structured interview. This area would have, in the past, been part of a psychological profile or personality test, if the company did one. However, today, with more and more corporate environments moving to teams and flatter structures, identifying behavior patterns has become an important part of the structured interview and is achieved by asking behavior-based questions.

Behavior-based questions probe for "soft skills" (also called success factors) that have been identified, through careful study, as necessary to succeed in a position. These soft skills include such factors as creativity, team building, goal setting, leadership, and decision-making.

Behavior-based interview questions follow the STAR pattern: Situation, Task, Action, and Result. An example of this is:

Situation: Think about when you \_\_\_\_\_. (Interviewer describes a specific situation which identifies soft skill.)

Task: What needed to be done about the situation?

Action: What did you do to resolve the situation?

Result: What was the result?

These questions are asked exactly the same of each candidate. Responses are then compared to benchmark responses gathered prior to the interview from individuals already in the position. The benchmark responses are examples of good, average, and bad answers to the

situations. If a candidate is to succeed in the position, his response to these situations needs to match, at least conceptually, with the good answers. (the good examples are responses from employees who have succeeded in the position.)

The *unstructured* interview is not pre-planned and the interviewer will ask a wide range of questions at random. This format is usually encountered in the hiring process with a manager who has not been trained in interview techniques. This interview format replaces a burden on candidates to ensure the interviewer has sufficient detail on their skills, abilities, and personal preferences to make a hiring decision. Because there is no planning in this format, it is unlikely that any behavior-based questions will be asked, making the hiring decision more difficult.

In a panel interview, more than one person is present to question the candidate. The interview can be structured or unstructured with the panel usually taking turns questioning the candidate. If the panel uses a structured format, the questions to be asked, by whom and in what order, will be pre-determined. This structure can include behavior-based questions.

Finally, there's everyone's least-favorite interview, the stress interview. The stress interview is not a true interview format but a method of questioning used within a format. The interviewer asks questions in an aggressive manner to test a candidate's ability to handle stress. This questioning style can be used in any of the interview formats.

### **The Impact of the Interview Process**

The interview process has a significant impact on the personnel services industry because nothing happens until someone is interviewed. While it may be easy to do a five-minute screening interview for an industrial temp, you wouldn't hire the temp without progressing to the hiring interview. Although most search assignments require multiple interviews, an offer won't be made until the interview process is completed. Ultimately, we cannot succeed in our positions until someone interviews somebody!

We may view the interview process as a necessary evil but our clients view it as part of their cost per hire. The client's goal is, ultimately, to hire the right people at the lowest cost. Their expectation is that we will assist them in achieving this goal.

To assist a client in managing his cost per hire, you will need to know what interview format he uses. Questioning your client on this topic will require him to focus on the purpose of the interview and whether the format he uses achieves this purpose.

If your client uses an unstructured format, the likelihood of a correct hiring decision being made is slim. This format does not develop sufficient information to make a decision and drives up the cost of hiring. If your client uses a structured format but still isn't making correct hiring decisions perhaps he needs to add behavior-based questions to his interview process.

If your client has gone through a restructuring and hasn't adjusted his interview process to reflect the new structure, he probably isn't making good hiring decisions. This becomes apparent when you have repeat orders for the same position and it is not open due to a

promotion. If “ideal” candidates are failing in the interview process, has someone in the process changed their format, making candidate comparisons difficult at best?

These are only a few examples of the impact the interview process has on our clients and the cost per hire when the client is not using the appropriate interview format. What happens when we don't use the appropriate interview format?

How many times have you had to re-interview a candidate because you didn't know the answer to a client's question and should have? Or you couldn't present the candidate because you failed to gather sufficient information in your initial interview?

Having to re-interview candidates because your client needs additional information you should have anticipated reflects on your credibility. Extending the time it takes to move a candidate into or out of the hiring process because of re-interviewing increases your client's cost per hire.

The best interview format for our industry is the structured interview format. Taking the time to pre-plan interview questions will guide your interview process and guarantee that you have developed the information needed. Some of the questions should be “generic” in that you ask these questions of every candidate that holds this type of position. Some of the questions should be specific to the assignment you are working and reflect the client's particular needs. All of the questions should focus on the interview purpose, in order to identify candidates that will perform well and stay with a client.

It is apparent that the interview process has a tremendous impact on our industry. Meeting the client's expectation of hiring the best for the lowest cost per hire takes appropriate planning, preparation, and execution by everyone involved in the process. Understanding the various formats and the results you can expect from each allows you to advise your clients on the best format to achieve their expectations.

## CONTINUING EDUCATION UNIT (CEU) REGISTRATION

Complete the registration information below and forward this page, containing the independent study examination and your answers, plus payment to: NAPS, 3133 Mount Vernon Avenue, Alexandria, VA 22305. The processing fee for the continuing education units for each NAPS independent study course is \$10 for members and \$20 for non-members. Feel free to reproduce the registration and examination page to allow additional individuals to apply for CEUs.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: (    ) \_\_\_\_\_  
Firm Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Current NAPS member \$10  Non-member \$20

### EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

Multiple choice, true/false, and matching questions. Circle the response you believe to be correct and fill in the blanks. Be certain to answer all of the questions.

1. The purpose of the interview is to:
  - a. Hire someone quickly before the boss gets nervous about turnover
  - b. Hire someone who will perform well and stay with the company
  - c. Appear to be fair before hiring the boss's kid
  - d. Hire someone before the position is eliminated from the budget
2. The screening interview:
  - a. Develops information to make an offer of employment
  - b. Is always conducted by a panel
  - c. Provides enough information to move a candidate into the hiring process
  - d. All of the above
3. Behavior-based questions probe for
  - a. Anti-social behavior
  - b. Soft skills
  - c. How a candidate reacts to criticism
  - d. All of the above
4. Clients consider the interview process to be
  - a. Time-consuming and inaccurate
  - b. A necessary evil
  - c. Part of the cost per hire
  - d. Expensive and a drag on productivity
5. The best interview format for the personnel services industry is:
  - a. The structured interview
  - b. The unstructured interview

- c. The panel interview
6. The three areas of assessment in an interview are:
    - a. Salary, experience, education
    - b. Experience, personal preferences, location
    - c. Skills and abilities, personal preferences, behavior patterns
    - d. Skills and abilities, salary, general suitability
  7. Behavior-based questions are asked exactly the same of each candidate
    - True
    - False
  8. Using the wrong interview format will drive up the cost per hire
    - True
    - False
  9. Behavior-based questions are founded in what the hiring manager believes is good employee behavior
    - True
    - False
  10. Match the interview format with its description
    - \_\_\_\_ structured interview
    - \_\_\_\_ unstructured interview
    - \_\_\_\_ panel interview
    - \_\_\_\_ stress interview
    - a. Involves several people questioning the candidate at the same time
    - b. A questioning technique, not an interview format
    - c. Uses pre-planned questions
    - d. Uses random questions

**Extra Credit Assignment (worth .2 CEUs)**

Develop a structured interview format for your position (recruiter, account executive, etc.). Explain why the questions developed are important. Develop at least one behavior-based question, identify the soft skill probed, and what the good benchmark response to the question is.