

Toolkit for Interviewing Roadmap

1. *Preparing interview questions:*

One of the strongest Bias Interrupters in hiring is to pre-commit to what qualifications are important — and require accountability. Prior to conducting interviews, determine the Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs)¹ that are essential for success in the role:

Knowledge: the understanding of concepts, theories or subject matters that can be applied to the job (i.e. federal regulations, statistics)

Skills: the capabilities or proficiencies developed through training or hands-on experience (i.e. project management, public speaking, writing)

Abilities: talents or expertise that a person brings to a task or situation (i.e. political savvy)

Once you've determined the KSAs, develop interview questions that will yield information about the candidates' capabilities in those categories. Behavior-based interview questions, which require candidates to explain how they've dealt with previous work situations (i.e. "tell me about a time when you had a conflict with a manager and how you handled it") more accurately predict future performance of a candidate than unstructured interviews.² Then, develop a rubric that clearly defines what excellence in each category looks like. Use these [sample interview questions, rubrics, and notes pages](#) created by Ice Miller as a template. After the interview, give candidates a separate rating for each factor.

2. *Preparing for the interview:*

- a. **Read the [Identifying Bias in Hiring Guide](#).** Before conducting interviews, read this 2-page document that summarizes the common forms of bias that can impact the hiring process.
- b. **Be prepared to 'WOO' (Win Others Over).** In today's competitive job market, it is becoming increasingly difficult to attract top talent. Candidates can afford to be more selective because more opportunities exist for them. The interview stage is an opportunity to showcase why your organization is a great place to work. Before conducting interviews, arm yourself with the selling points about your org. If your org. offers excellent parental leave policies, diversity initiatives, ERGs, wellness benefits, etc. let it be known. Refer to this [memo](#) created by Ice Miller as an example.
- c. **Familiarize yourself with the ["Innocent interview questions to avoid"](#) document.** Be aware of the ways that your curiosity may be inappropriate, fuel bias or even be illegal during an interview. If a candidate offers personal information voluntarily that would have answered an illegal interview question, take care not to follow up on it.

3. **Send a memo to candidates prior to their interview detailing expectations.** Develop an interview protocol sheet that explains to candidates what is expected from them during an interview. This can level the playing field for first-generation professionals, Asian Americans, women, and introverts — groups that are more likely to feel pressure to be modest or self-effacing. Setting expectations clearly allows them to make the best case for themselves. Use this [memo](#) created by Ice Miller as a model.

¹ Reh, J.F. (2019). KSA: Using the Knowledge, Skills and Abilities Model. *The Balance Careers*. Available at: <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/understanding-knowledge-skills-and-abilities-ksa-2275329>.

² Boring, J. (2016). How to Create Behavioral Interview Questions That Don't Give Away The Answer. ERE. <https://www.ere.com/ere/how-to-create-behavioral-interview-questions-that-dont-give-away-the-answer/>

**Tools for Interviewing
Sample Interview Questions, Rubric, and Notes Template**

Self-Directed/Motivated

Defined as someone who:

- Historically seeks out challenging opportunities
- Demonstrates a desire to learn more and improve skillsets, even at the risk of failure
- Thinks about the greater context of a problem or project and how to advance them
- Consistently goes beyond what is asked of them

Sample Questions:

1. Tell me about a time when you identified a problem with a process. What steps did you take to improve the situation?
2. Tell me about a time you went “above and beyond” on a project?
3. Give me an example of a new idea you suggested to a supervisor or team in the past year. What steps did you take to implement your idea?

Rubric:

Excellent	Average	Poor
Candidate drives towards increasingly difficult and challenging tasks; thrives while challenged by difficult, complex tasks	Candidate’s drive towards increasingly difficult and challenging tasks is average; expresses interest in complex and difficult work, but enthusiasm is average	Candidate’s drive towards increasingly difficult and challenging tasks is poor; does not demonstrate the perseverance for complex and difficult tasks
Demonstrates a strong interest in and ability to advance projects to the highest level	May have a desire to advance projects to the next level, but does not demonstrate a knowledge of how to	Does not have a history of interest in advancing projects to the next level
Has strong ability to think about the greater context of a problem or project	Has modest ability to think about the greater context of a problem or project	Does not think about the greater context of a problem or project

Notes:

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Client Service Orientation/Communication and Relationship Skills

Defined as someone who:

- Listens to others and tries to understand their perspectives; handle disagreement and difficulty well
- Confronts issues and problems with tact in an effort to successfully resolve them
- Delivers answers to questions in clear and concise manner and with appropriate speed and volume

Sample Questions:

1. Tell me about a time when communication was very important to completing a task or project. How did you choose to communicate? What steps did you take to make sure all parties were kept well-informed?
2. Tell me about a time when something went wrong on a project or at work. How did you communicate about the issue and resolve it?
3. Tell me about a time when you were proud of the level of assistance or service you provided someone?

Rubric:

Excellent	Average	Poor
Excellent interpersonal skills; others respect and seek them out	Average interpersonal skills; usually friendly, but others do not necessarily seek them out for guidance	Poor interpersonal skills; others do not rely on them for guidance or support
Strongly values the ability to help others	Somewhat values the ability to help others	Does not value the ability to help others
Answers questions clearly and concisely	Answers questions fairly effectively; may tend to provide excessive explanations or extraneous details	Answers questions ineffectively; provides little to no detail or is too long-winded

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Identifying Bias in Hiring Guide

The five patterns below describe *tendencies not absolutes*. Here's what to watch out for:

Prove-It-Again! ("PIA") — Groups stereotyped as less competent often have to prove themselves over and over. "PIA groups" include women, people of color, individuals with disabilities, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, older employees, and first-generation professionals.

1. **Higher standards.** Despite having identical resume qualifications, "Jamal" needed eight additional years of experience to be considered as qualified as "Greg", and "Jennifer" was offered \$4,000 less in starting salary than "John." A queer woman received 30% fewer callbacks than a straight woman and a gay men had to apply to 5 more jobs than a straight man in order to receive a positive response.
2. **"He'll go far;" "She's not ready."** Majority men tend to be judged on their potential, whereas PIA groups tend to be judged on what they have already accomplished.
3. **Casuietry: education vs. experience.** When hiring for a job that required both education and experience, participants justified selecting the man over the woman by weighing the man's qualifications more. When the man had more experience, participants ranked experience as essential. When the woman had more experience, participants still chose the man — saying that education was key.
4. **Elite school bias.** Over-reliance on elite educational credentials hurts first-generation professionals and candidates of color, who are more likely to attend schools close to home with more modest reputations. Education shouldn't be used as a proxy for intelligence: top students from lower ranked schools are often as successful as students from elite schools.
5. **PIA groups get horns; others a halo.** Horns=one weakness generalized into an overall negative rating. Halo=one strength generalized into a global positive rating.
6. **"We applied the rule—until we didn't."** Objective requirements often are applied rigorously to PIA groups—but leniently (or waived entirely) for majority men. This means that some groups are left out: for example, desk jobs that require applicants to be able to lift 25 pounds may weed out employees with disabilities.
7. **Do only the superstars survive?** Superstars may escape PIA problems that affect others.

Tightrope — A narrower range of workplace behavior often is accepted from women, people of color, and members of the LGBTQIA+ community ("TR groups"). First-generation professionals and modest or introverted men can face Tightrope problems, too.

1. **Leader or worker bee?** TR groups face pressure to be "worker bees" who work hard and are undemanding...but if they comply, they lack "leadership potential."
2. **Modest, helpful, nice; dutiful daughter, office mom?** Prescriptive stereotypes create pressures on women to be mild-mannered team players. "Ambitious" is not a compliment for women and "niceness" may be optional for men but required of women.
3. **Direct and assertive—or angry and abrasive?** Behavior seen as admirably direct, competitive, and assertive in majority men may be seen as inappropriate in TR groups — "tactless," "selfish," "difficult." Assertiveness that's accepted in majority men may be seen as inappropriate in TR groups.
4. **"She's a prima donna"; "He knows his own worth."** The kind of self-promotion that works for majority men may be seen as off-putting in TR groups. Modest men may encounter bias that reflects assumptions about how "real men" should behave. Also, strong modesty norms can make first-generation professionals, people of Asian descent, and women uncomfortable with self-promotion.
5. **LGBTQIA+ employees may be stereotyped as "too feminine," "too masculine," or just "too gay."** These kinds of judgement signal illegal discrimination under federal and state law.

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The Parental Wall can affect parents of all genders—as well as employees without children.

1. **“He has a family to support.”** Fathers face expectations that they will not—or should not—take time off for caregiving, or that they should get jobs because they are breadwinners.
2. **“Gaps in her resume.”** People take time off for many reasons. Be consistent. If you don’t penalize for military service, don’t do so for taking time off for children either.
3. **“Her priorities lie elsewhere” (or should!).** Mothers are stereotyped as less competent and committed. In one matched-resume study, a mother was 79% less likely to be hired than an identical candidate without children.
4. **“I worry about her children.”** Mothers who work long hours tend to be disliked and held to higher performance standards. Taxing jobs may be withheld on the assumption that mothers will not—or should not—want them.

Tug of War — Sometimes bias creates conflict within historically excluded groups.

1. **Tokenism.** It’s important to make sure there is more than just one “token” historically excluded group member in the applicant pool.
2. **Strategic distancing and the loyalty tax.** People from historically excluded groups on a hiring committee may feel they need to distance themselves from applicants of their group, or align with the majority against their own group, in order to get ahead.
3. **Passthroughs. PIA:** People from historically excluded groups may hold members of their own groups to higher standards because, “That’s what it takes to succeed here.” **Tightrope:** Women or LGBTQIA+ employees may fault each other for being too masculine—or too feminine. People of color may fault each other for being “too white”—or not “white” enough. **Parental wall:** Parents may fault each other for handling parenthood wrong—taking too much time off or too little.

Racial Stereotypes — People of Asian descent are often stereotyped as passive and lacking in social skills; Black people as angry or too aggressive; Latino/a people as hotheaded or emotional.

Be mindful of your assumptions and ask yourself:

- ✓ Would I say that about this person if she were a man or he were a woman? If the candidate were a person of color or white? If the person had a different social identity from me?
- ✓ Am I making judgements about someone based on their personality type or am I focused on their work results?
- ✓ Am I gravitating toward a candidate because they are more like me and share similar interests and background?
- ✓ Am I focused on observable behaviors and the facts?

Individual Bias Interrupters:

- Make sure to give everyone — or no one the benefit of the doubt.
- Don’t insist on likeability, modesty, or deference from some, but not from others.
- If you waive objective requirements, do so consistently — and require an explanation.
- Don’t make assumptions about what mothers or fathers want or are able to do, and don’t count “gaps in a resume” as an automatic negative.
- If you comment on “culture fit,” “executive presence,” or other vague concepts, start with a clear definition and keep track to ensure such concepts are applied consistently.

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Win Others Over “WOO” Examples

In today’s competitive market, it has become extremely challenging to attract top talent. Candidates can be more selective because more job opportunities exist for them. Everyone has an important role to play to ensure a positive candidate experience so whether we make them a job offer and they choose to join us or we don’t, they will have a good feeling about us. Remember to be prepared, make the candidate feel comfortable and provide information as to why they should choose to join our team.

Know the Basic Facts

- How many people work there? Where is everyone located?
- What are your main practice areas?
- What kinds of clients do you work with?
- What are you known for?
- What is your history? When and how were you founded?

What are your firm’s/company’s values?

- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion efforts – what specific plans and programs are in place? What are the firm’s diversity statistics? What affinity groups are there? What efforts are there to attract and retain diverse team members?
- Commitment to Communities – what are some ways you give back to your communities? How do you support your team members in giving back? Provide sample community engagement information
- Pro Bono – what is the firm’s pro bono program? How many people participate? What kinds of pro bono are done? How do you get involved?

How do you support your team members?

- Outline the professional development and training opportunities
- Overview of mentoring
- Parental leave policies
- Vacation policies
- Elder and child care support
- Wellness activities
- Commitment to transgender and non-binary team members

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Don't Let Your Curiosity Kill You: Innocent Interview Questions to Avoid

1. ***"What a beautiful name. What's the origin of it?" or "What country are you from?"***
 - The EEOC forbids interview questions about US Residency, cultural, racial, or ethnic backgrounds.
2. ***"I love your ring. When is the big day?"***
 - If someone mentions recently getting married or engaged, you can congratulate them, but then move on.
 - Don't ask what their spouse or fiancée does or discuss whether the candidate plans to keep or change their name.
- 2a. ***"Do you plan to have children?" or "What are your childcare plans?"***
 - NEVER ask if someone is pregnant/expecting/when they're due/plans for children/childcare.
3. ***"What did you (or will you) do for the holidays?"***
 - Avoid making assumptions about what holidays someone observes.
4. ***"When did you graduate high school?"***
 - Especially if you find out you're from the same hometown as someone, you may try to play the "name game." You can do this without inadvertently asking someone's age.
5. ***"What do your parents do for a living?"***
 - You may wonder if you know the candidate's parents or believe that information will reveal a lot about the candidate, but asking about them is not directly related to the position. Candidates may feel they are being judged not for their own merits but based on what their parents do. Not everyone is proud to share information about their parents.
6. ***"Do you drink?" "Do you work out?"***
 - While many social and business development opportunities involve drinking, it is not a requirement of the position and may be taken by the candidate as one.
 - A candidate with a disability may also interpret these kinds of questions as requiring information relating to their disability which we may not ask.
7. ***"Law school is so expensive now. Do you have a lot of debt?"***
 - Your effort to bond with them over the pain of student debt is actually illegal.³
8. ***"I'm so sorry to hear about your battle with cancer, how long have you been in remission?"***
 - This kind of a response often comes up if you ask about gaps in someone's resume. Simply say "I'm sorry to hear that" to acknowledge them, and then move on. Do not ask any questions.
 - If they continue to provide in-depth information about their medical history, politely stop them and continue the interview.
 - Although you may not have asked the question, disclosing this information in an interview can be used in a lawsuit accusing the Firm of discriminatory refusal to hire.

Don't be afraid to say: *"Oops. I asked a question and immediately thought better of it."*

³ Giang, V. 11 Common Interview Questions That Are Actually Illegal. *Business Insider*. Available at: <https://www.businessinsider.com/11-illegal-interview-questions-2013-7#do-you-have-any-outstanding-debt-7>

Tools for Interviewing

Memo to Send to Candidates to Prepare for their Interview

{Company name} is committed to recruiting, developing, and retaining the most talented team of professionals from all backgrounds. We take great pride in our culture of inclusion where everyone feels respected, is treated fairly, and has the opportunity to perform at their highest potential. We are committed to building a welcoming and inclusive workplace where everyone feels empowered to be their authentic selves and feels a sense of belonging.

This commitment extends to everyone we interview as well. We want you to feel comfortable and be your authentic self when we meet you. We believe you are better able to do that and therefore we will get to know you better if we remove some of the anxiety and mystery from our interviewing process.

So in advance of your interview with us, we want to share with you what you can expect and help you prepare. You will meet with **{number}** of staff each for **[duration of interviews]**.

We also think it's helpful to provide you information about what characteristics, skills, and experiences our company seeks in team members. We are looking for someone who **{Match this to the KSAs you've predetermined for the role}**:

- Has a demonstrated commitment to continuous learning
- Is self-directed, motivated, and curious
- Has a client service orientation with strong communication and relationship skills
- Is an excellent team members who is prepared to work with people from backgrounds different from their own
- Has experience managing people and processes
- Who can solve problems creatively
- Is flexible and adaptable to manage working in a dynamic, fast-paced environment

This interview is your opportunity to share with us why you'd make a great addition to our team. Present yourself with quiet confidence. Bluster doesn't work well here, nor does excessive modesty.

You may be asked behavioral-based questions that are designed to elicit information about you in reference to these categories, and we advise that the best responses will almost always include specific examples and stories from your past, but need not always derive from a professional experience or setting, unless specified. You may consider employing the STAR method in structuring your responses by discussing a specific **S**ituation, **T**ask, or **A**ction, and the **R**esult of what you are describing.

In addition, you can expect questions about your past work history, your education and credentials, and any other knowledge that is specifically required for the position. Finally, each interviewer will give you the opportunity to ask your own questions to help you better understand the position, the office, and the company.

We look forward to speaking with you.

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