

Interviewing Techniques

Introduction

An interview is a personal interaction to obtain information. It is a conversation with a defined purpose in mind. Effective interviewers listen closely while developing and maintaining a rapport.

Interviewers should document an interview, by taking detailed notes, getting signed statements, or tape recording the interview.

Planning for the Interview

An interviewer should properly prepare him or herself prior to conducting an interview. Start by defining the interview objective(s). Determine what is known and what information is needed. Next, identify potential interviewees who could provide the information that is needed. Think about a person's background to identify the specific information that could be obtained from that particular person.

Five Steps of an Interview

1. Identification
2. Rapport
3. Questions
4. Summary
5. Close

Step 1: Identification

An interviewer's attitude and behavior will set the stage for the interview. Always be professional when interviewing someone.

An interviewer should:

- Properly identify him or herself by name, without using acronyms.
- Identify interviewee. Name, title, role
- Eliminate noise and physical communication barriers
- Watch for non-verbal clues

Step 2: Rapport

Developing a rapport (a harmonious or sympathetic relation or connection) with an interviewee will help him or her feel comfortable when talking to the interviewer. Seven useful words to help defuse an emotionally volatile situation "that must be very hard for you". Making eye contact and speaking to the person will also help in building a connection.

Step 3: Questions

An interviewer should move from asking general to specific questions. Start with open-ended questions that will elicit a narrative response. Clarify with structured questions requiring short responses.

Basic interviewing questions:

- What happened?
- When did it happen?
- Where did it happen?
- Why did it happen?
- How did it happen?
- Who was involved?

Ask the interviewee to explain his or her responsibilities as they relate to the topics being investigated or inspected. Remember to listen attentively, pay attention to the facts. Never interrupt.

It is important to document statements regarding both compliance and non-compliance.

Step 4: Summary

Summarize the interview to get agreement on the facts. Allow the interviewee to correct any mistakes.

Step 5: Close

Thank the person. It is always beneficial to ask, "Is there anything I didn't ask you that you think will help me with this investigation?" Tell them how to reach you with information they remember later.

Beyond the Basics

Improve interviews by:

Being an Active Listener

- Remain neutral and professional
- Maintain appropriate eye contact
- Ask about their statements
- Clarify “slang” or acronyms
- Restate their main points
- Obtain agreement on the facts
- Help in estimating quantities more accurately by using well-known reference points, relating commonly observed quantities, or comparing similar items or distances at the interview site.

Asking Good Questions

Ask questions that require narrative responses rather than “yes” or “no” answers. Yes/No questions should be used when summarizing or verifying information that has already been given.

Ask questions that determine what was done before asking questions that explore how it was done.

Avoiding Certain Questions

Avoid leading or suggestive questions which might bias the interviewee’s answers and detract from their objectivity.

Avoid questions that ask for two separate pieces of information.

Avoid negative questions

Avoid complex questions

Utilizing the Three-Phase Interview

The three-phase interview can be effective in several situations.

1. Listen without recording
2. Listen and record
3. Replay with feedback

Understanding Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication

Verbal communication (words) accounts for approximately 7% of a person’s message. Non-verbal communication accounts for approximately 93% of a person’s message.

Pay attention to the person’s pace, pitch, modulation, volume, and tone of their voice.

Look at a person’s body movement, eye movement, facial expressions, position of the person’s arms and legs, changes in breathing, distance, and touch for non-verbal communication. Communication is influenced by a person’s feelings, experiences, and culture.

Remembering

- Good interviews take time
- Good interviewing takes practice