



## Session 4

### Group Exercises

Supervisory Situation 7.1 and 7.2  
Giving Written Directions  
Worksheet 2.3 Whom Should We Hire  
Worksheet 2.4 What's Most Important?

### Individual Exercises

Team Building Skills Assessment  
Checking Your Progress  
Communicating

### Homework

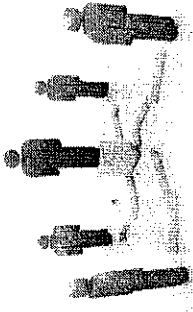
Read Chapters 10, 11, and 12 from the text  
Complete the Individual Exercises and read Articles and Materials from the thumb drive for Session 5  
Prepare a job description for a position in your organization and be prepared to present

### Articles and Materials

10 Leadership Lessons from Abraham Lincoln  
Articles on Mentoring  
Career Compass 79: Leading by Connecting  
How Governments are Recruiting Young Workers  
Career Compass 73: How Do I Get and Benefit from a Stretch Assignment  
Now That You Have Hired The Best Potential Talent What's Next?  
Articles/Info. on Communication  
Sample Interview Questions, additional material on Interviewing  
Sample Background Authorization Form  
Sample No Hire letter  
Sample Orientation Checklist  
Sample Job Description Writing Guide  
VAK Learning Styles

## Group Exercises

# SUPERVISORY SITUATIONS 7-1



Jack is a recent junior-college graduate and a newly hired buyer in the county's purchasing department. Brenda, the director of purchasing, has noticed that Jack keeps to himself and doesn't socialize with the other members of the staff. Jack is quiet at staff meetings and seems to be most comfortable working by himself. Jack's work is thoroughly researched and presented in a concise and detailed format; however, Brenda is uneasy about Jack's lack of sociability. She has overheard members of her staff referring to him as unfriendly and stuck up. Brenda believes that it is very important for her staff to share ideas cooperate closely so that the purchasing department can improve its service to the line departments. Brenda is now wondering whether she made a mistake in hiring Jack because she isn't sure he fits into her team.

1. What are the issues being raised by staff and by Brenda?
2. How would you suggest that Brenda deal with Jack and the rest of her staff?
3. What specific tools could Brenda use to help Jack become an accepted member of the work team?

# SUPERVISORY SITUATION 7-2

Traditionally, the storm-water drainage department has had the poorest safety record in the government and the highest incidence of citizen complaints about appearance, attitude, and performance. The new department head recently called the front-line supervisors together and laid down the following challenge: "We've got to do something about our department to improve both our safety record and our image with the citizens. I'll admit that we face a lot of challenges because of the nature of our work, but I believe we can do better. Now, I'll let you have first crack at coming up with recommended changes. If I don't think your recommendations will do the job, I'll be forced to take some further action." Over the next several weeks, the supervisors spent a lot of time on the problem and came up with the following recommendations:

- ⊙ New uniforms and safety equipment for the crews
- ⊙ Construction of a new washroom with showers and lockers
- ⊙ Air conditioning and a new paint job for all vehicles
- ⊙ Regular training in safety and public relations
- ⊙ Replacement of obsolete and damaged tools

1. How is the department head likely to react to the proposed changes?
2. What are some ways the department head could have encouraged the supervisors to include all the members of their department in resolving the problem?
3. Do you think the solutions offered by the supervisors will resolve the problem? Why or why not?
4. If you were one of the supervisors being asked to come up with solutions, what solutions would you offer, in order of importance?
5. Would you talk to the employees to get their ideas and suggestions? What might be the benefit of talking with the employees?
6. What further action do you think the department head could take that would promote team building and better results?



## Worksheet 2-3: Whom Should We Hire?

Your local government's parks and recreation department has an opening for a parks supervisor. Three criteria are being used to evaluate candidates: technical proficiency, supervisory ability, and performance record. The human resource director has asked you to work with several other supervisors to assist in the selection process. She has narrowed the candidates down to four people and has developed a paragraph briefly describing the supervisory style of each candidate. She has asked you to work as a team to focus on supervisory issues and rank the candidates from 1 to 4, with 1 representing the candidate you think would be suited for it. You have only your knowledge of your local government and the following descriptions to make your recommendations:

Ross Clayton stated that he thinks the major problem facing today's supervisors is that employees are asked to do too much. He complimented the current staff, but he thinks that the workload is likely to result in low morale and high turnover. He pointed out that today's employees are looking to balance their work responsibilities with more family time. He also indicated that the new parks supervisor should find ways to motivate and reward employees so that doing a good job is in their best interest. His major satisfaction is in building camaraderie with and among employees and making sure that their experiences motivate them to strive for excellence.

Debra Diego stated that she believes the major problem facing today's supervisors is that managers are often unwilling to delegate authority or allow supervisors leeway in how to get the work done. She likes autonomy and believes employees should be given as much control over their own work environment as possible. Most employees ask questions when needed, she says. Debra resents the paperwork that supervisors are required to complete and thinks there are better ways to keep management in touch with what is happening. She has informally mentored several younger employees, and her major satisfaction comes from feeling that she is helping employees to grow and develop on the job.

Felicia Otis stated that she believes the major problem facing today's supervisors is the pressure of their responsibilities. She emphasizes that delegation is key to any supervisor getting work done and believes that employees should be willing to "put in the extra mile" when needed. She is nervous about some of the changes that are occurring as a result of the new technology and thinks it is harder to keep track of what employees are doing. She emphasizes the importance of structure and routine, believing that holding regular week meetings with employees is the best way to deal with diversity, build teamwork, and monitor progress. Felicia's major satisfaction is in meeting the challenge of getting the work done.

Sam Swift stated that he thinks the major problem facing today's supervisors is that many employees lack a "Protestant work ethic." He believes that the answer lies in appropriate orientation and training so that employees have the skills they need to succeed. He also believes in strict discipline and following the rules. He likes to check in on work early and often; problems rarely slip by him. When there is a problem, he jumps right in to resolve it. His major satisfaction has been in the compliments he receives from management on running a "tight ship" with few disciplinary problems.

## Worksheet 2-4: What's Most Important?

As pointed out in the text, the values and attitudes of the workforce have changed over the past few decades. It is important to recognize the aspects of work that you value and to appreciate that the values of your employees may differ. Rank each of the following items from *most important* (1) to *least important* (15).

- \_\_\_\_\_ Authority in regard to how tasks are accomplished
- \_\_\_\_\_ Balance of work and family life
- \_\_\_\_\_ Feeling a sense of accomplishment
- \_\_\_\_\_ Feeling included; being part of a team
- \_\_\_\_\_ Flexible schedule
- \_\_\_\_\_ Good working conditions
- \_\_\_\_\_ Interesting, challenging, and meaningful work
- \_\_\_\_\_ Opportunity for advancement
- \_\_\_\_\_ Opportunity to be creative
- \_\_\_\_\_ Participation in setting performance goals
- \_\_\_\_\_ Participation in problem solving and decision making
- \_\_\_\_\_ Pay and benefits
- \_\_\_\_\_ Positive working relationships
- \_\_\_\_\_ Recognition of accomplishments (appreciation and praise)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Variety in tasks performed: flexibility in job duties

## Individual Exercises

## **Team Building Skills Assessment**

Use the following scores to assess your individual team participation skills and team building skills: 3 Always, 2 sometimes, and 1 rarely. After completing the exercise, review areas where you rate yourself high and where you rate yourself low and focus on enhancing your low scores.

### **Team Participation Skills**

- 1) Did I create a relaxed collegial atmosphere that supported and encouraged collaboration?
- 2) Did I participate actively in the discussions?
- 3) Did I keep the discussion on track?
- 4) Did I understand and accept the task or focus of the discussion and what the team was working on?
- 5) Did I listen to others?
- 6) Did I feel comfortable disagreeing with others?
- 7) Did I feel comfortable when others disagreed with me?
- 8) Did I seek consensus or help the group move toward a shared conclusion?
- 9) Did I use my knowledge and skills during the session to help the group get its work done and move forward?

### **Team Building Skills**

- 1) Team members know how they fit into the organizational system beyond their immediate boundaries.
- 2) The team meets regularly using established and understood ground rules.
- 3) Team members understand broad organizational goals/outcomes and how the work unit affects those outcomes.
- 4) Team members are comfortable offering solutions to problems and are confident that you want their input, feedback, and constructive criticism.
- 5) Team members know they can speak honestly, raise concerns, and share frustrations with you and other team members.
- 6) Team members have a say in setting standards for team performance.
- 7) Team members treat each other with respect, understand what your role is as the leader, and support and value different perspectives.

## Checking Your Progress

*I will improve my communication skills by*

- Recognizing my own perspectives and biases
- Using simple and direct language
- Repeating the most important points or ideas
- Communicating the same message in different ways
- Asking open-ended questions that will help me know whether employees truly understand what I am saying
- Using face-to-face communication whenever possible and appropriate
- Learning to use both the formal and informal channels of communication in the organization
- Giving and receiving feedback regularly
- Being nonjudgmental and sensitive to employees with cultural or gender perspectives that are different from mine.

*I will demonstrate active listening by*

- Maintaining eye contact
- Nodding occasionally or using facial expressions that show I am following what is being said
- Waiting patiently if the employee talks slowly or pauses to collect his or her thoughts
- Avoiding interrupting the speaker or finishing his or her sentences
- Ignoring outside interruptions
- Listening to and addressing feelings as well as words.

*I will improve my coaching and counseling skills by*

- Taking an interest in the lives of employees
- Using positive encouragement and praise
- Focusing criticism on the problem, not on the individual
- Developing a coaching plan
- Being honest about performance problems
- Listening carefully, giving the employee my undivided attention
- Trying to see a problem from the employee's point of view
- Helping the employee explore feelings, identify the problem, explore alternatives, and find a solution
- Referring an employee to an employee assistance program or to a professional counselor, when appropriate
- Keeping conversations with employees confidential.

## COMMUNICATING

1. I am open and honest with my workgroup.

NEVER 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 ALWAYS

2. I state things clearly.

NEVER 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 ALWAYS

3. I listen responsively to others.

NEVER 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 ALWAYS

4. I give and receive feedback.

NEVER 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 ALWAYS

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5. I am persuasive.

NEVER 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 ALWAYS

6. I prefer to communicate face-to-face in difficult situations.

NEVER 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 ALWAYS

## Articles and Materials

# 10 Leadership Lessons from Abraham Lincoln

President Abraham Lincoln appointed the best and brightest to his Cabinet, even though these individuals were also some of his greatest political rivals. He demonstrated his leadership by pulling this group together into a unique team that represented the greatest minds of his time, according to historian Doris Kearns Goodwin.

Lincoln demonstrated an ability to withstand adversity and to move forward in the face of frustration, said Kearns Goodwin when she delivered the keynote at a Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) Annual Conference. She identified 10 qualities that made Lincoln a great leader, 10 qualities Kearns Goodwin believes we should look for in our present-day leaders.

## 1. Capacity to Listen to Different Points of View

While researching her Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, Kearns Goodwin learned that Lincoln had the capacity to listen to different points of view. He created a climate where Cabinet members were free to disagree without fear of retaliation. At the same time, he knew when to stop the discussion and, after listening to the various opinions, make a final decision.

## 2. Ability to Learn on the Job

Lincoln was able to acknowledge errors, learn from them, and then move on. In this way, he established a culture of learning in his administration, said Kearns Goodwin.

## 3. Ready Willingness to Share Credit for Success

In response to concerns expressed by friends about the actions of some of his Cabinet members, Lincoln stated that the “path to success and ambition is broad enough for two,” said Kearns Goodwin. When there was success, Lincoln shared the credit with all of those involved.

## 4. Ready Willingness to Share Blame for Failure

When mistakes were made by members of his Cabinet, Lincoln stood up for them, said Kearns Goodwin. When contracts related to the war effort raised serious questions about a member of his administration, Lincoln spoke up and indicated that he and his entire Cabinet were to blame.

## 5. Awareness of Own Weaknesses

Kearns Goodwin noted that one of the weaknesses acknowledged by Lincoln was his tendency to give people too many chances, and because he was aware, he was able to compensate for that weakness. As an example, she stated that George McClellan, commander in chief of the Union Army, refused to follow directives about the war effort. Lincoln eventually set a deadline and eventually removed McClellan from the position.



## **6. Ability to Control Emotions**

According to Kearns Goodwin, Lincoln treated those he worked with well. However, he did get angry and frustrated, so he found a way to channel those emotions. He was known to sit down and write what he referred to as a “hot letter” to the individual he was angry with, and then he would set the letter aside and not send it. If he did lose his temper, Lincoln would follow up with a kind gesture or letter to let the individual know he was not holding a grudge, said Kearns Goodwin. She noted that one of the letters was released as part of Lincoln’s presidential papers with a notation that it was never signed or sent.

## **7. Know How to Relax and Replenish**

Lincoln understood the importance of relaxation and humor to shake off the stress of the day and to replenish himself for the challenges of the next day. According to Kearns Goodwin, Lincoln had a wonderful sense of humor and loved to tell funny stories. He encouraged a healthy atmosphere of laughter and fun in his administration. He also enjoyed going to the theater and spending time with friends.

## **8. Commitment to Go Out Into the Field and Manage Directly**

During the Civil War, many soldiers died, and there were many ups and downs. Lincoln established lasting connections with the troops by visiting the battlefield and hospitals, which also helped bolster morale.

Lincoln also spent time talking with members of the public, taking “public opinion baths,” according to Kearns Goodwin. He held public receptions and made a point of shaking everyone’s hand and speaking to each individual.

## **9. Strength to Adhere to Fundamental Goals**

In the summer of 1864, said Kearns Goodwin, the war was not going well for the North. Members of his political party came to Lincoln and said that there was no way to win the war, and he might need to compromise on slavery. Lincoln held firm on the issue of slavery and turned away from this advice.

## **10. Ability to Communicate Goals and Vision**

Kearns Goodwin stated that Lincoln had a “remarkable ability to communicate his goals to his countrymen.” He made concepts simple and communicated with an understanding of the concerns of the citizens. When the war ended and he won reelection, Lincoln did not focus on his achievements, said Kearns Goodwin. Rather, in his second inaugural speech, Lincoln focused on bringing the country together as expressed in the following excerpt. “With malice toward none, with charity for all, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation’s wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.” Kearns Goodwin ended her keynote address with the following words from Leo Tolstoy about Abraham Lincoln: His greatness consisted of the “integrity of his character and moral fiber of his being.”

# Manage This

## How to Be an Amazing Mentor

By Robert (Bob) LaSala

**Make a positive impact** on others with these mentoring tips.

**1. Be an empathic and reflective listener.** Listen deeply to people's answers. Simple reflection or mirroring back to the mentee is a powerful process that supports you being fully present and listening with both your heart and your mind. Empathic listening doesn't mean agreement but does convey understanding. This is a prerequisite for the use of all coaching and mentoring skills.

In doing this successfully, you have a heightened sense of awareness. You then can articulate and describe what is going on with the mentee at this moment. This skill helps mentees connect the dots, so they can see the picture they are creating by their action or, sometimes, lack of action.

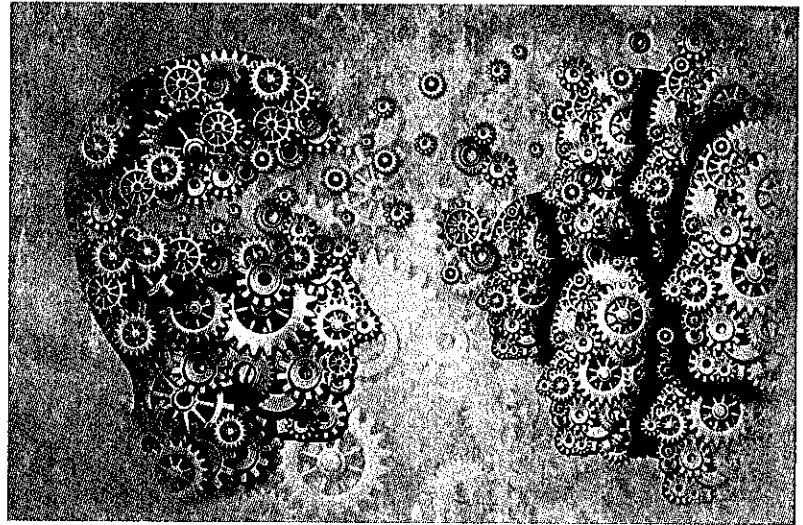
**2. Ask multiple open-ended questions.** Use the Socratic method. Ask "learning questions" to explore experiences and beliefs. Using this method fosters disciplined and thoughtful dialogue and explores ideas in depth. It promotes independent thinking and gives the mentee ownership of what she or he is learning.

Use open-ended questions, "why" questions, and viewpoint questions, as well as implication-and-consequence questions. All these types of questions promote original thinking for mentees and helps them learn the depth of their understanding-or lack of it. It can also uncover new and better ideas while the coach can gain the trust and support of mentees.

**3. Invest time to get to know people as people.** Coaching must be relationship-focused. Until the mentee knows that you care, she or he will be reluctant to be open, candid, and forthcoming. Share personal aspects of one another's lives that may be unknown, yet appropriate to know.

Your success as a coach is directly related to the quality of your relationship with the mentee. Rapport and trust are foundational in the coaching relationship.

Seek out communication techniques (e.g., make "acknowledging statements" and pose acknowledgment questions that tie to the client's and the coach's shared values. Use statements that make it clearly understood that you suspend judgment and that you give the benefit of the doubt. Clearly convey when you are making as-



sumptions and practice curiosity while you remain humble in doing so. Where and when appropriate use self-deprecating humor to create a level playing field). These can create a connection and mutual respect.

**4. Understand peoples' roles, goals, and challenges on the job to be helpful.** When you understand these factors, you develop an overview of mentees in the larger context of their organization. Without this frame of reference, the coach will not be as effective in shaping the discovery process for mentees.

**5. Set clear goals, roles, accountability, and time frame.** Then explain the "why." Explore shared accountability in co-creating the experience. Work to establish a shared vision for success based on a clear sense of direction, key objectives, and an explanation of the direction in which you are headed. Observe behavior and share feedback on the impact(s) of those behaviors. Reinforce forward progress that ties back to these goals, the vision, and direction.

Be clear about what you are responsible for and what the mentee owns so that accountability for results is understood. By setting time frames, additional boundaries are set to ensure forward progress can be achieved and measured.

As the final part of this, explaining the "why" makes intent clear and sets a context in which the work and progress can be better understood and appreciated. This sets a framework or a backdrop for action.

For more resources on how to make a positive impact on others, visit [icma.org/icma-coaching-program](http://icma.org/icma-coaching-program). **PM**



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# 9 Mentoring Tips for the Local Government Mentee

Finding and creating relationships with a mentor is easier than you think.

BLOG POST | Jan 26, 2018

If you're seeking feedback or advice or simply a listening ear from a trusted colleague or group of colleagues, then finding a coach or mentor might be the right fit for you. In a 2015 [Career Compass](#) article from Dr. Frank Benest, ICMA's liaison for Next Generation Initiatives, he notes that everyone can benefit from a coach.



"Coaches listen, ask questions, provide different perspectives, suggest additional options or choices for action, challenge our thinking or attitudes, and prompt action. They encourage and support us. They don't dole out answers. Instead, they help you find the answers that are right for you."

Here are nine key points that mentees should keep in mind when creating relationships with mentors:

1. **Set up a regular meeting.** The easiest approach to get some informal coaching is to invite on a regular basis a trusted local government manager to coffee or to lunch. During these sessions, swap stories and personal experiences.

2. **Focus on a "growth mindset."** With a growth mindset, we look at challenges and at experimenting and even at mistakes as opportunities to learn and grow. By doing this, we expand our portfolio of behaviors, skills, and relationships and ultimately become more effective in a disruptive environment.

3. **Be open to the conversation.** It is important to not only share your challenges and dilemmas with a coach, but to be open to the feedback and any suggestions on how to handle similar problems in the future.

4. **Use the coach to promote self-reflection.** Great leaders are self-reflective. Coaches can ask probing questions that promote reflection and self-critique and opportunities to make adjustments. After an informal or formal coaching conversation, reflect on what has been discussed and the implications for self-correction.

5. **Learn from the stories.** Chief executives love to tell war stories. Don't just enjoy the swapping of stories—probe for lessons that may be related to your dilemma or challenge.

>> *For more on how to get the maximum value from informal peer advice or more formal executive coaching, read [Career Compass No. 45: City Managers Need Coaches Too](#).*

6. **Listen and take action.** Listen to every piece of familiar advice like it is new advice. Instead of thinking "I know," ask yourself, "Have I mastered it? Have I seen the result?" If the answer is no, make a plan and take action.

7. **Don't rely on professional help as a crutch forever.** The goal of seeking professional help is to shorten your learning path, to become independent and competent faster.

8. **Seek advice from all career stages.** There's a tendency to determine the value of advice based on who it came from. When you receive guidance from someone that you regard as your superior—someone with an impressive title—you're more likely to give their advice more weight and take it more seriously. The most insightful advice, however, may come from



someone among your peers, an outsider, or even someone you might have considered less knowledgeable than you.


9. **Recognize when to seek out help.** Some skills can only be accumulated over time, while some are a matter of knowledge and experience. There is no need to reinvent every wheel. Human progress is made on the foundation laid by previous generations. You reach further by standing at a higher ground to start with, so it is important to recognize when to ask for help. Asking for help where it matters is a sign of strength, instead of weakness.

>> *For more on how to create—and maintain—the mentor-mentee relationship, read [Keys to Find \(and Make the Most of\) Your Professional Mentor](#).*

If you are actively seeking a mentor or coach for your career, learn more about ICMA's CoachConnect program, visit [icma.org/1-1-coaching](https://icma.org/1-1-coaching).

## Related Content

### CoachConnect: Find a Coach

 11-10-2017

### Mission-Critical Mentoring

 08-16-2016

Mentoring programs have become extremely popular primarily because so many organizations are facing the retirement of a significant number of their workforce.



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# Mission-Critical Mentoring

Mentoring programs have become extremely popular primarily because so many organizations are facing the retirement of a significant number of their workforce.

ARTICLE | Aug 16, 2016

One of the e-mails I received after the June *PM Career Track* article “How Fit Are You to Advance?” was published came from Heather, a mid-career professional who works in local government in Colorado.



Her questions were how could she participate in a more formal mentoring partnership with a colleague in her organization and be a mentor to a younger professional who is seeking guidance and insight.

Mentoring programs have become extremely popular primarily because so many organizations are facing the retirement of a significant number of their workforce. The need to ensure that replacements have been prepared to fill key vacancies on short notice is mission-critical.

## What's the Purpose?

The mentoring relationship has as its core purpose the professional development of the protege through the counsel and guidance of the mentor; he or she is usually a senior, experienced employee who serves as a role model and provides support, direction, and feedback to a younger employee. This increases the visibility of the protege to decisionmakers in the organization who may influence career opportunities.

A successful mentoring relationship provides positive outcomes for both the protege and mentor through the expansion of knowledge, skill, energy, and creativity.

The mentor provides career-advancing skills to guide the protege in positioning and presenting themselves in a manner that results in professional development.

By providing feedback in such areas as job performance, relationships, technical information and role expectations, the mentor passes on lessons learned throughout his or her career. As a result, mentors come to feel they have had an opportunity to make a difference.

Your entire organization benefits from a mentoring program in these ways:

- Develops high-potential employees.

- Improves employee productivity and performance

- Improves succession planning as mentoring helps identify high-potential employees.

- Increases communication across departments.

- Shares knowledge across the organization.

In my own previous experience working in local government management and from many individuals I know who are currently serving, most of us have participated in an informal mentoring arrangement. One of the beautiful aspects of the profession is how willing people are to help others.

## Types of Programs

There are four types of mentoring programs for you and your organization to consider:

- 1. One-to-One mentoring.** This is the traditional mentoring process where one person shares his or her expertise, knowledge, and experience to help guide another person.
- 2. Reverse mentoring.** A younger employee is matched to a senior executive to offer such skills and knowledge as effective use of social media to educate residents, or internal training through interactive Web-based learning.



3. **Group mentoring and mentoring circles.** This is an effective method to help multiple proteges when organizational mentors are lacking. Within the circle, one mentor offers advice and guidance to a group of proteges.

4. **Peer mentoring groups.** Peer mentoring groups offer knowledge and guidance to each other and can occur with participants from one department or from many departments.

## Mentoring Guidelines

I have consulted with a number of local government organizations helping establishing mentoring programs. Here are guidelines for organizations setting up programs, mentors working with proteges, and proteges seeking mentoring relationships.

### Organizations:

- Obtain top-management support of the program.

- Make the mentoring program part of succession planning.

- Minimize the dropout rate by making the program voluntary and by establishing clear expectations.

- Give mentors and proteges an orientation and training program clarifying their respective roles, helping them establish boundaries, and encouraging them to jointly set goals.

- Provide timely training and learning workshops in which both the mentor and protege would attend and then use the content and topic of the workshop for a discussion.

Often after the launch of a mentoring program, interest can wane, so organizing formal gatherings for the mentor and protege are extremely beneficial. Topics may include managing employee performance, leadership 101, working with elected officials, and others.

### Mentors:

- Expect to invest considerable time and effort.



Be prepared to initiate the relationship; proteges often are apprehensive about approaching senior leaders.

Have realistic expectations of the relationship.

### Proteges:

Look for a mentor among the ranks of middle and senior managers. Observe work and communication styles to select the kind of mentor who would be right for you.

Know what you want from the relationship. Think about your competencies, the skills you would like to develop, and your long-range career plans.

Know what is expected of you in the relationship.

Have realistic expectations.

My mission in this article is to help calm the instability of disruptive change and translate the headwinds of change into a tailwind, enabling individuals to accelerate their career progress and organizational leaders to build an even stronger workforce, all resulting in improved performance.

You are invited to e-mail your career-related questions to me at [patrick@gettingbetterallthetime.com](mailto:patrick@gettingbetterallthetime.com).

## Join Us

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# Mentoring

## A Mutually Beneficial Partnership



By the  
Mind Tools  
Editorial Team



**A Mutually  
Beneficial  
Partnership.**

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YinYang

Do you want to move your career forward? Would you like to develop your leadership skills as well as help others learn, grow, and improve their skills? Or would you like to find someone who can help you do these things? You can. Through a mentoring partnership.

More professionals these days are actively pursuing mentoring to advance their careers. And whether you're on the giving or receiving end, these types of partnerships can benefit your career.

A mentoring partnership can be rewarding to both people, personally and professionally. It's an opportunity to develop communication skills, expand your viewpoints, and consider new ways of approaching situations. And both partners can advance their careers in the process.

In this article, we'll look at what mentoring is, and discuss the reasons why you might enter into a mentoring partnership. Should you offer to help others, or ask for help from someone – or both? We'll also explain how mentoring differs from other types of professional career development relationships.

## What is Mentoring?

Mentoring is a relationship between two people with the goal of professional and personal development. The "mentor" is usually an experienced individual who shares knowledge, experience, and advice with a less experienced person, or "mentee."

Mentors become trusted advisers and role models – people who have "been there" and "done that." They support and encourage their mentees by offering suggestions and knowledge, both general and specific. The goal is help mentees improve their skills and, hopefully, advance their careers.

A mentoring partnership may be between two people within the same company, same industry, or same networking organization. However the partners come together, the relationship should be based on mutual trust and respect, and it typically offers personal and professional advantages for both parties.

## Mentoring and Other Professional Relationships

Coaches, trainers, and consultants can all help you learn and grow professionally. Mentoring is a unique combination of all of these. Let's explore some of the similarities and differences between mentoring and these other professions.

- **Coaches** help you to explore where you are in your career, where you want to go, and how you might get there. A coach will also support you in taking action to move toward your goal.

Coaches and mentors differ in three main ways. First, a coach is generally paid, whereas your mentor will usually be making a voluntary commitment. This means that you can start working with a coach straight away, and that you can rely them not to cancel sessions because "Something urgent's come up". Finding a mentor can take longer, and even when you do, your mentor may find it harder to keep space in their day for your mentoring appointment.

Second, while coaches tend to guide you in mapping out your future, mentors actually suggest several paths you might take, although the choice of where to go next remains yours.

Beyond that, of course, good coaches are professionally trained and qualified, so you can rely on getting a high-quality service from them. They also bring their experience of helping other people with career and life issues similar to those that you're facing.

- **Trainers** help you learn and develop specific skills and knowledge. They typically set the topic, the pace, the goals, and the learning method. While you will obviously choose courses that match your requirements as closely as possible, training courses, by their nature, start with their own agendas rather than with your situation.

Mentoring, however, can be tailored to your needs. While training is often best suited for gaining knowledge and skills, mentoring can also help you develop personal qualities and competencies.

- **Career Consultants or Career Counsellors** mostly work with people in transition between jobs, rather than helping you develop your skills when in a particular role. And, again, your relationship will often be a commercial one.

## Benefits to the Mentor

Becoming a mentor can enrich your life on a personal and professional level by helping you do the following:

- **Build your leadership skills** – It helps you develop your ability to motivate and encourage others. This can help you become a better manager, employee, and team member.
- **Improve your communication skills** – Because your mentee may come from a different background or environment, the two of you may not "speak the same language." This may force you to find a way to communicate more effectively as you navigate your way through the mentoring relationship.
- **Learn new perspectives** – By working with someone less experienced and from a different background, you can gain a fresh perspective on things and learn a new way of thinking – which can help in your work life as well as your personal life.

- **Advance your career** – Refining your leadership skills can strengthen your on-the-job performance, perhaps helping you get that promotion to higher management – or into management in the first place. Showing that you've helped others learn and grow is becoming more and more essential to advancement in today's business world.
- **Gain personal satisfaction** – It can be very personally fulfilling to know that you've directly contributed to someone's growth and development. Seeing your mentee succeed as result of your input is a reward in itself.

## Benefits to the Mentee

A trusted mentor can help you do the following:

- **Gain valuable advice** – Mentors can offer valuable insight into what it takes to get ahead. They can be your guide and "sounding board" for ideas, helping you decide on the best course of action in difficult situations. You may learn shortcuts that help you work more effectively and avoid "reinventing the wheel."
- **Develop your knowledge and skills** – They can help you identify the skills and expertise you need to succeed. They may teach you what you need to know, or advise you on where to go for the information you need.
- **Improve your communication skills** – Just like your mentor, you may also learn to communicate more effectively, which can further help you at work.
- **Learn new perspectives** – Again, you can learn new ways of thinking from your mentor, just as your mentor can learn from you.
- **Build your network** – Your mentor can offer an opportunity to expand your existing network of personal and professional contacts.
- **Advance your career** – A mentor helps you stay focused and on track in your career through advice, skills development, networking, and so on.

# Mutual Mentoring

It's often the case that, within an organization or a network, there are more people looking for a mentor than there are those offering to be one. A practical solution to this is "mutual mentoring".

Although it is probably useful to have a mentor who has "been there, and done that", you might have to wait a long time for such a person to come along. Instead, why not try working with a less-experienced but willing person, who will still be able to encourage you to think about what you want from your career, challenge you to commit to goals, and help you to review your progress towards them?

If you do the same for them, you have the basis for a strong and mutually-beneficial relationship.

## Key Points

Mentoring partnerships can be mutually beneficial and rewarding – on both professional and personal levels. Mentors can develop leadership skills and gain a personal sense of satisfaction from knowing that they've helped someone.

Mentees can expand their knowledge and skills, gain valuable advice from a more experienced person, and build their professional networks. And both partners can improve their communication skills, learn new ways of thinking, and, ultimately, advance their careers.

Mentoring relationships can be mutual, or two-way, with each person being both the mentor of and mentee of the other person. Alternatively, they can be one way only, although an individual may have his or her own mentor while also acting as mentor for others at the same time.

To explore mentoring in more depth, and read our article on [\*\*Mentoring Skills\*\*](#) .

This site teaches you the skills you need for a happy and successful career; and this is just one of many tools and resources that you'll find here at Mind Tools. Subscribe to our [\*\*free newsletter\*\*](#), or [\*\*join the Mind Tools Club\*\*](#) and really supercharge your career!





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# Supporting an Aging Government Workforce with Mentoring and Offboarding

As the workforce grows older, local governments need to think of how best to handle the transition to the next generation.

BLOG POST | Aug 22, 2018

*Editor's note: This content is Powered by [NEOGOV](#). For more content like this, check out the [human resources topic page](#).*

by Lauren Girardin, marketing and communications consultant, [laurengirardin.com](#)



Americans [are getting older](#) and retirements are rising throughout the U.S. workforce. About [10,000 people turn age 65](#) each day, bringing a flood of change to local governments.

Because public sector employees are older on average, this could have an outsized impact on localities. Neil Reichenberg of the International Public Management Association for Human Resources [reported](#) Bureau of Labor Statistics data showing that 37 percent of employees in local government are at least 50 years of age, compared to just 28 percent in the private sector.

Government organizations must prepare for the increasing age of its workforce and get ready for more employees to become eligible for retirement. According to the Center for State and Local Government Excellence's (SLGE) [workforce survey](#), 44 percent of

organizations saw more people retire in 2018 than in 2017; a mere 10 percent of organizations said retirements were lower during the same time period.

While more Americans are putting off retirement and [working past age 60](#), people who work in government aren't necessarily following the delayed retirement trend. In the past year, SLGE reported only 21 percent of eligible state and local government employees postponed their retirement, down from 44 percent in 2009.

As a local government leader, what leading practices for mentoring and offboarding can keep your organization afloat during this inevitable change?

## Promote Knowledge Transfer

When employees retire, years of specialized institutional memory, knowledge, relationships, leadership, processes, and skills can vanish. Rather than letting this crucial resource get lost, lead your organization through thoughtful change management that places employees who are eligible to retire at the center of the process.

The city of Los Angeles, California, is an example of a local government bracing for a workforce shift. More than 40 percent of its 45,000 employees are eligible for retirement as of 2018. [KPCC Southern California Public Radio reported](#) leaders of each city department have "created a succession plan to prepare for potential holes in the office." The city has also launched [on-the-job, comprehensive training programs](#) to "pass on institutional knowledge and expose employees to the breadth of system functions."

Offer employees who are eligible to retire the opportunity to suggest the knowledge that needs to be passed along, as well as the best way to transfer that knowledge. Don't cherry-pick who to offer this opportunity to based on their age or other personal quality. Instead, let people self-identify to avoid discrimination. Frame this opportunity as recognition to avoid making people think they're being replaced.

Set up a formal mentorship program for employees to share their skills and perspectives with entry-level staff. Ask employees to use their subject matter expertise to design and implement [effective training programs](#) that will spread knowledge to many people at your organization in the future. Whenever people are preparing to leave your organization, have



human resources conduct exit interviews and talk to them about useful knowledge they can hand off.

## Create Organizational Ambassadors

Longer-term employees can help your organization identify and connect with qualified new hires. People eligible to retire will have the requisite depth of knowledge about the organization's mission, culture, and processes. Many will also be willing and able to speak passionately about how working at the organization changed their career path and life for the better.

There are several ways you can leverage these people as organizational ambassadors who identify talent and build your employee recruitment pipeline. Invite ambassadors to tell their professional success story in a video testimonial for your [career website](#). Encourage them to share job opportunities with their alumni and professional networks.

Increase your organization's recruitment capacity by instructing human resources to have ambassadors attend career fairs and community events. There, the ambassadors can let people know what your organization does, which skills are valued, what the hiring process entails, and the attraction of working for local government. Ask ambassadors to host informational interviews to impart their insider knowledge and vet individual job seekers.

People nearing retirement can also serve as compassionate ambassadors for your newest hires through a mentoring program. Expand your mentoring program to include longer-term employees who can help new staff adjust to generational and cultural differences inherent at government organizations.

## Cultivate a Productive Workforce

Whether you're facing an employee shortage, an aging workforce, a surge of retirements, a number of staffing budget cuts, or all of these, you will need to lead a potentially leaner workforce in the years to come. For your organization to continue to serve residents as effectively as ever, look for ways to keep your workforce productive.

Don't overlook the training needs of employees, no matter their generation or age. As Jeff Douglas, California's chief of workforce development [told The Pew Charitable Trust's Stateline](#), leaders need to create a work environment "where you can stay longer and work

longer.” Use [performance management software](#) to identify competency and skill gaps, and set individual development plans. Then, identify mentors with the right experience who can help fill these gaps.

Lead your organization to adapt training programs for an aging workforce, and you will improve productivity for all generations.

*NEOGOV is an ICMA Strategic Partner that provides a high-quality and easy-to-use talent management system to service the public sector market.*

## Related Resources

[How to Be an Amazing Mentor: 5 Resources to Make a Positive Impact on Others.](#) If you haven't been a coach or mentor in the past, or if you are someone who just wants to become an even better one, here are five resources that can help you make a positive impact on others.

[Uberizing the Government Workforce.](#) This article from 2015 looks at how local governments are turning to part-time and contractor employees to help augment their workforce.

[Career Stage Guide for Encore Professionals.](#) This page details what ICMA has to offer its members who are in the encore stage of their careers.

[Workforce of the Future: Preparing Future Leaders through Job Shadowing.](#) This article from 2016 looks at the value of job shadowing for students that will help prepare them for their future careers in local government.

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# Career Compass No. 79: Leading by Connecting

What can I do to become a better leader who people follow?

By Frank Benest | Jan 10, 2020 | ARTICLE



*I'm a new supervisor of an economic development team in a large city. Because I have technical expertise and push to achieve results, my team members seem to follow me on technical matters. However, even though I'm the formal supervisor, my influence with the team is uneven.*

*I tend to be an introvert, so I'm not terribly social. I focus on getting the job done. What can I do to become a better leader who people follow?*

---

You are correct to assume that people want to see that their supervisor has technical expertise and knowledge about the work. Technical knowledge and experience lead to some, but not a lot, of influence.

You cannot force people to follow you because of your positional authority as a manager or supervisor. People on a team *choose* to follow or not. Leadership is all about exerting positive influence with others, regardless of your position. People tend to follow leaders that they connect with on an interpersonal level.

Therefore, the critical task in enhancing your leadership capability is to promote relationship and connection with others.

## What does “connection” mean?

“Connecting” with someone may seem like a squishy concept, so what does it mean?

As a supervisor, you give something (information, resources, time, permission) and the employee gives you something (results, performance, commitment, energy, focus). In our professional roles, we certainly undertake many transactions with people.



Connecting is not “transactional.” In authentically connecting with someone, we attempt to understand them (their history, hopes, values, and concerns) and appreciate their uniqueness.

Establishing a human connection with someone is not cerebral, it is emotional. It is more than finding commonality or similar interests; rather, it is a way of relating and forming an emotional bond. I understand who you are and you understand who I am. Even if there are many differences, we care about each other.

Connecting with others requires sharing yourself with others. Connection is all about accepting other people, showing genuine interest in them, and wanting what is best for them. You can connect with someone even if you don’t agree with their perspectives and ideas.

We are a relational species—we connect for the sake of connecting.

## The Value of Connection

We spend most of our waking hours at work or working. Therefore, establishing connections with people helps enhance and enrich our lives.

In addition, when we connect with others on our team or elsewhere, all the positives tend to increase, including:

- Employee or stakeholder engagement.
- Discretionary effort.
- Collaboration.
- Adaptability.
- Trust.

### Results vs. Relationships

Throughout most of my career as a local government manager, I was focused on achieving results as opposed to promoting relationships. Most leaders fall somewhere along the continuum of results vs. relationships.

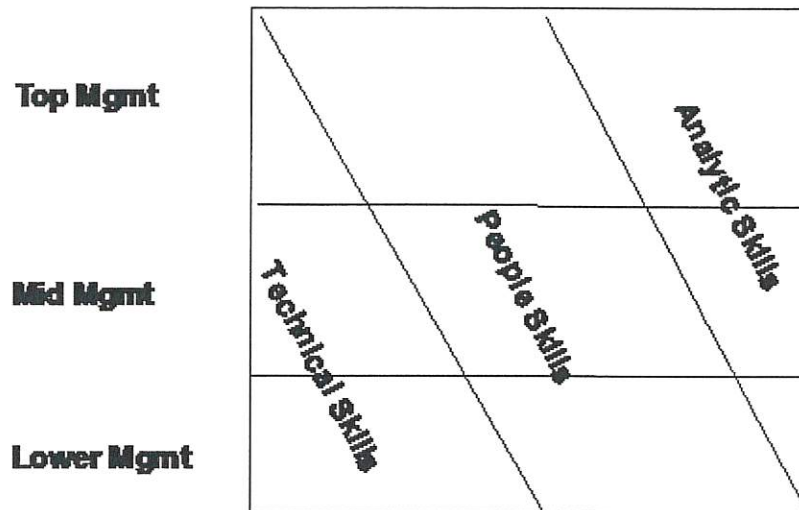
Late in my career, I finally figured it out. *A leader achieves results through relationships. Demanding or Supportive?*

A results-oriented leader tends to be demanding of others. A relationship-oriented leader tends to be supportive of others. If one is just demanding, one is perceived as a “jerk.” If one is just supportive, one is perceived as a “pushover.”

The secret is to be demanding *and* supportive at the same time. It is not an “or;” it is an “and.”

### The Importance of People Skills

At lower levels of management, one needs a chunk of technical skills, people skills, and a sliver of analytic skills. At mid-level management, one requires all three skill sets. At senior levels of management, leaders need a chunk of analytic skills, people skills, and a sliver of technical skills. See chart below.



**80 percent of management failure is related to poor people skills**

The common skill set is people skills. One is promoted into management because of technical skills (what a bad idea!). One fails in management because of poor people skills. In a Harvard Business School study, 80% of management failure was related to poor people skills.

As one advances into management, the “soft” skills produce the hard results.

**Frank’s Personal Experience in Connecting**

Because I had suffered a number of personal losses in my life, I started as the city manager of Palo Alto, California, writing personal, handwritten notes to any employee who was experiencing the loss of a family member, friend, pet, or some other trauma. I expressed my experience of grieving the recent loss of my wife Pam and told them that we as an organizational family would support them as they struggled with their grief.

Employees were incredibly grateful that their leader cared about them. As a result of the feedback that I received, we also contracted with an employee assistance program (EAP) to provide grief counseling and other support services.

Not only were employees grateful but I connected with them through the human experience of loss. To this day, 10 years after I retired as city manager, employees stop

me in the downtown, expressing gratitude for my efforts to recognize their struggle with grief.

In reflecting upon this experience, I now realize that our common experience of loss and my efforts to connect with grieving employees created connection. Because of this emotional bond, the employees tended to trust me and follow me.

## Whose Responsibility Is It?

It is your responsibility as a leader to take proactive measures to build relationships with team members and others. While it is important for all team members to connect with each other, you have the primary responsibility if you want to exert positive influence.

## Practices to Promote Connection

Here are 12 practices to build relationship and connection.

### 1. Be intentional

To be effective in connecting with others, you must consciously focus on the task of building relationships. It's like any other goal—you must be intentional and focus on it.

### 2. Get personal

Get to know your team members and other employees and stakeholders with whom you must collaborate. An easy way to get personal is to walk around at the beginning of the day and the end of the day, and ask about the employee. For instance, ask . . .

- How was your weekend?
- How did your daughter do in her soccer game?
- How is your partner progressing in starting a new business?
- What was good about your day?
- What are you learning?

Of course, the best way to promote relationship is to share yourself—your interests, your goals, your family news. You need to model the way so people feel comfortable sharing themselves.

A simple practice is to “take five” at staff meetings. At the beginning of each team meeting, team members can take up to five minutes to share something happening in their lives.

### 3. Give people space to be themselves

I like sports, traveling, and telling stories. My basic work approach is “ready, fire, aim.” Other people may have completely different interests and ways of working and being. If people are going to accept the “authentic me,” I must accept them in all their uniqueness. For instance, if the other person is more deliberate or analytical than me, I must make the space to let them express their way of working and doing things.



A team shares a common work enterprise and must achieve certain goals and results together. However, there are many ways of achieving those results.

#### 4. Get away from your office

As supervisors and managers, we often spend too much time in our offices and require people to come to us. So, it is a good idea to go to the work space of a team member for an impromptu meeting, schedule a walking meeting, or meet at a café. Even though we do serious work together, some informality generates relationship.

#### 5. Ask questions to generate conversation

Authentic conversations create relationship and connection. To engage in such conversations, you can ask questions, such as:

- Why is this project important to you (or the organization or community)?
- What does “success” look like to you?
- What are you learning?
- How can I better support you?
- How are you going to proceed?

(See Career Compass #61 titled [Leadership Is the Art of Conversation](#))

Great conversationalists listen twice as much as they talk. They are also curious and ask the other person to “tell me more.”

Being present, asking questions, listening, and seeking to understand all increase your influence (see [Dan Rockwell, Leadership Freak blog, Aug 4, 2017.](#))

#### 6. Support people when they are struggling

As indicated by my personal experience, leaders need to find ways to support people when they are struggling. By being forward-looking, we can ask people what they have learned from a mistake instead of dwelling on a failure. If someone is caring for a family member or even would like to attend their child’s daytime school performance, we can offer some scheduling flexibility or telework so the employee can attend to his or her family. We can also offer support services to struggling teammates through the agency’s EAP.

#### 7. Promote gratitude

According to the Gallup research, recognizing a team member at least once every seven days promotes engagement. It also reinforces good performance. More importantly, expressing gratitude for the efforts and contributions of others is a key way to connect with them.

At staff meetings in Palo Alto, we started all-staff meetings with an agenda item called “Team Accomplishments.” This was an opportunity for team members to give a “shout out” recognizing the contributions of others.

In addition, we can celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, and professional or work achievements by sending a card or note or by providing coffee and bagels at the weekly staff meeting. By expressing gratitude for people, we show we are interested in others and we care about them.

#### 8. Conduct "stay interviews"

While we often lavish attention to get a talented professional to join our team, we often forget about them until they leave and then we do an exit interview. By then, of course, it's too late and we have lost the talent.

To build relationship and retain talent, a good practice is to conduct a "stay interview." The purpose of the stay interview is to get to know your direct report better and to retain the person. I know a department director who does a "walking interview" with each of the employees in her department on the staff person's anniversary date.

Some stay interview questions include:

- What do you like most about your work?
- What keeps you here?
- What would entice you away?
- What do you want to learn this year?
- What makes for a great day at work?
- What brings you down on the job?
- Is there anything you'd like to change about your job?
- What would make your job more satisfying and rewarding?
- Do you feel recognized for your accomplishments?
- What strengths or talents do you have that aren't being used?
- What is your greatest challenge or roadblock?
- What part of working here strikes you as ridiculous?
- How can I or the organization help you reach your career goals?
- What support do you need to be more effective?
- What is the most satisfying part about your job right now?
- What is least satisfying about your job?
- If you could wave a magic wand, what changes would you make in the work environment?
- What can we do to ensure we keep you with us?

(See Marnie Green, *Painless Performance Conversations: A Practical Approach to Critical Day-to-Day Workplace Discussions*, 2013.)

Not only do you learn key information through these stay interviews but you also demonstrate that you care. Caring for the other person creates connection.

#### 9. Show vulnerability



Connection and trust all increase with vulnerability. As a leader, you can demonstrate vulnerability at work by saying:

“I made a mistake.”

“I screwed up.”

“I don’t know.”

“I need help.”

By sharing a loss of a loved one, you also show vulnerability.

Remember, only strong leaders can show vulnerability. (See Career Compass # 32 [“The Power of Vulnerability.”](#))

#### 10. Promote learning and growth

One way to show caring is to offer opportunities for team members to learn and grow. As you discover through conversation what team members want to learn, you can provide opportunities for:

- Stretch assignments.
- Team leadership.
- Interim or acting assignments.
- Formal education or certification.

Learning and development is the new “social glue.” As long as talented people are learning and growing, they will tend to stay with you. Such development opportunities also demonstrate that you care.

#### 11. Share stories

From ancient times, human beings have told stories. Tribes, communities, and families have used stories to enchant, entertain, instruct, perpetuate core values, and preserve wisdom.

In contemporary societies and organizations, we still use stories to pass on experience and knowledge. Most importantly, sharing personal experiences or stories help us connect with others.

(See Career Compass #50 [“Story-Telling—A Powerful Way to Communicate and Lead.”](#))

#### 12. Don’t fake it

You can’t fake it. You must understand the value of human connection. You try to connect with others because you see the value in it for yourself and others. You make the effort to form a human bond with others because it enriches you and others.

## What If You Are an Introvert?

It is a myth that great organizational leaders are all extroverts and “charismatic.” Jim Collins in his books *Built To Last* and *Good To Great* demonstrated that great leaders are often introverts. The key to their success was that they were humble men and women who were committed to the vision, values, and success of the enterprise. (See Career Compass #76 “[Humble Leaders Get Results.](#)”

Extroverts get energy through interacting with others. It is easier for them to socialize and form relationships with larger numbers of employees and other stakeholders.

Introverts get energy through quiet time with themselves, reflection, and looking inward. Therefore, introverts must be even more intentional about building relationships and human bonds. Introverts must block off time and regularly schedule time for walking around. They must also be conscious of getting out of their office to personally connect with staff in their offices or in the field. They should also occasionally switch from email to conversing in-person with people. They could arrive at a staff meeting early to welcome people and ask how they are doing before the formal meeting begins.

### **Relationship-Building Takes Time and Effort**

Relationship-building requires focus and leveraging small, daily interactions. Connecting with others happens over time, one intentional behavior after another. As a leader, you go slow to go fast.

Leadership is all about sharing yourself. As Frances Hesselbein stated, “Leadership is a matter of how to be, not how to do.”



Sponsored by the ICMA Coaching Program, *Career Compass* is a monthly column from ICMA focused on career issues for local government professional staff. Dr. Frank Benest is ICMA's liaison for Next Generation Initiatives and resides in Palo Alto, California. If you have a career question you would like addressed in a future Career Compass, e-mail [careers@icma.org](mailto:careers@icma.org) or contact Frank directly at [frank@frankbenest.com](mailto:frank@frankbenest.com). Read past columns at [icma.org/careercompass](http://icma.org/careercompass).



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SEARCH

Connecting state and local government leaders

## How Governments Are Recruiting Young Workers



SHUTTERSTOCK

By [Katherine Barrett & Richard Greene](#) | JANUARY 14, 2020

**COMMENTARY | From initiatives that allow new parents to bring their babies to work to upgraded facilities, state and local government leaders are aiming to compete with the private sector.**

WORKFORCE



About twenty years ago, a budget director explained to us why the dilapidated government office buildings in his large Northeastern city would not be refurbished. "Taxpayers don't want to see us spending money on our workers," he said.

In recent years, managers have needed to move away from these kinds of fears. With extremely low unemployment, intense competition from the private sector, and the difficulty of attracting and holding on to young workers, governments are now upping their hiring game in dramatic

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ways, including making their work environments pleasant places to be. We delved into many of the challenges of recruiting new employees, particularly younger ones, in our [December 23<sup>rd</sup> commentary](#). This time around, we dig into a bevy of solutions.

Public sector leaders are increasingly providing some of the workplace amenities that attract young workers to the private sector. In Texas, where the unemployment rate was a [low 3.4%](#) at the end of 2019, the comptroller's office has been upgrading its facilities with new restrooms, break rooms and huddle spaces, as well as looking at landscaping upgrades. "We've refreshed our break room and added fresh food options," says deputy comptroller Lisa Craven.

There's even more: The comptroller's office recently installed an employee art gallery, "with art by employees for all employees to enjoy," says Craven.

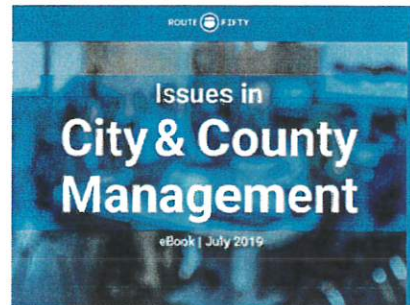
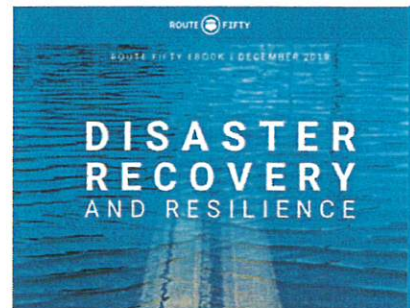
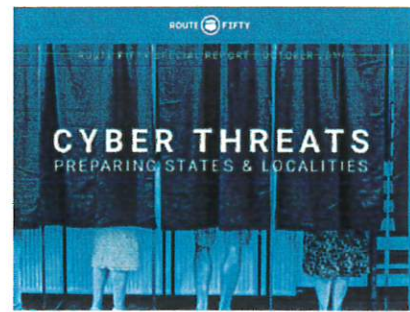
Texas also consults its employees on workforce improvements, as does Colorado. There, HR officials held a 45-session listening tour across the state to hear what employees would like to see in new benefits and workforce policies. "We're thinking of what can be done to be more employee friendly so we're spending time with our employees and asking them," says Kara Veitch, executive director of the department of personnel and administration.

Two frequent requests in Colorado are more flexibility and greater work-life balance. Colorado has rolled out new flextime policies that put decisions for workplace schedules and telecommuting in the hands of managers. That includes training to communicate the idea that work product matters more than seeing an employee sitting at a computer in an office setting.

"Nine to five isn't going to work for a younger generation," says Christine Scarlett, chief human resource officer for the Washington State Department of Enterprise Services. "We have to be a lot more flexible in how we set people's work schedules." She and others recognize the need to fight the image of government work as routine, and government offices as bleak or sterile. "If you're an uptight, button-up kind of place, they're not interested," says Scarlett.

"We're really focusing in on our selling points," says Reid Walsh, Deputy Secretary for Human Resources and Management for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. "How do we modernize the workplace?"

The drive to create work-life balance, build attractive work environments, and beef-up non-retirement benefits has become increasingly ubiquitous over the last three years, but the variety of efforts being used will give



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cities, counties and states lots of options to explore. In Maine, Gov. Janet Mills recently increased accrual rates for state employee vacation time from eight hours for each month worked to ten hours. “That’s three weeks of paid vacation a year. They want their time and we get that,” says Breena Bissell, director of Maine’s Bureau of Human Resources.

In 2016, the city of Memphis began providing employees in good standing with five hours of paid volunteer time for each two-week pay period—a boon for all employees, but particularly appealing for young workers who yearn for a hands-on way to help their communities. The volunteer hours, which need to be approved and scheduled by management, are used to mentor or volunteer in one of the city’s partner programs. Volunteer hours substitute for work at an employee’s regular job. In 2017, Memphis also instituted a student loan program that offers a \$50 monthly match to employees who have been employed for at least a year. The city’s money does not diminish the amount employees pay each month but goes directly to paying down principle on the loan.

Nebraska has put a laser-like focus on the needs of new mothers. “We’re attempting to make Nebraska the best employer for new moms in the state,” says Jason Jackson, director of the Nebraska Department of Administrative Services. Its offerings include a maternity leave donation program, facility renovations that create rooms for new mothers who are breastfeeding to pump and a new wellness benefit that will be launched in 2020, which limits the total expense of pregnancy and delivery to a \$500 copay.

Jackson, who is the father of four children under the age of twelve, says the state is also beginning to pilot programs that allow parents to bring babies to work with them during their first six months. [Other states have established similar policies](#), including Arizona, Washington, Kansas, Vermont and New Hampshire. The objective: To create a workplace “in which young people who are on the cusp of family formation will have a supportive employer and work life balance,” says Jackson.

As governments increasingly listen to what younger employees want, the list of dramatic changes grows and grows, including flattening hierarchical structures and enlivening the first years of employment with more opportunity for growth. Special project work can tap the greater technical skills of a younger generation and bring an entrepreneurial zest to government. As Jackson says, “We’re not just changing the image, but actually changing state government.” 

Katherine Barrett and Richard Greene of [Barrett and Greene, Inc.](#) are columnists and senior advisers to *Route Fifty*.

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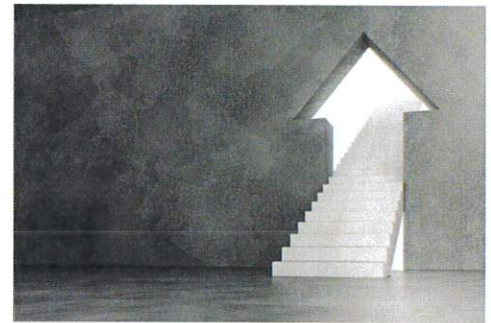


# ICMA Career Compass No. 73: How Do I Get and Benefit from a Stretch Assignment?

Stretching job assignments help people see you in a new light

## ICMA | coaching program

*I'm a well-regarded planning technician in the Community Development Department of a mid-sized city. I've been in my current position for three years and have mastered most of the technical aspects of my job. I want to move up in my department but need exposure to other elements of planning, building, and development services, plus the opportunity to develop new knowledge and skills.*



*I believe that I have good potential, but I worry that others don't see what I have to offer beyond my current position.*

*So, how do I start? Should I take some courses and workshops? What do you suggest?*

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The fundamental question is, how do you accelerate your development. The best way to accelerate your growth and development is through a series of stretching job assignments coupled with helpful and candid feedback or coaching.

## What is a “stretch” assignment?

A University of Michigan School of Medicine paper provided the following definition:

*“A stretch assignment is a project or task given to an employee which is beyond their current knowledge or skills level in order to ‘stretch’ the employee developmentally. The stretch assignment challenges employees by placing them into uncomfortable situations in order that they learn and grow.”*

## What are the benefits of stretch assignments?

For employees, a successful stretch experience can

- Help you develop new technical and/or “soft” leadership skills.
- Provide new knowledge.
- Expose you to other areas of the department or other city services.
- Develop new relationships with internal and external stakeholders.
- Reshape other people’s perceptions of your capabilities.

For the organization, stretch assignments offer many benefits as well. They provide

- Low-cost employee development.  
Stretch assignments cost little.
- Leadership “try-outs.”  
Special projects or team assignments can try out emerging leaders as formal or informal leaders.
- Succession development.  
Since a wave of baby-boomer professionals and managers are retiring from local government, organizations can’t wait for people to develop. We need to accelerate development now and identify possible successors.

## What are some examples of stretch projects?

As a plan checker in the Community Development Department, a stretch assignment for you could be any of the following

- Participating in a department budget team.
- Researching new “green” development practices.
- Serving on a multidepartment team to develop a specific plan for a new growth area in the city.
- Evaluating with other staff members potential vendors of new software that tracks development applications and activities.
- Leading a small workgroup to identify best practices and make recommendations for a telework program or alternative work schedules for department staff.

## What do I need to know about stretch opportunities?

Learn through doing.

Both managers and their direct reports often believe that the best way to learn is to attend a workshop or class. A seminar or class is an excellent way to develop a conceptual framework about new behavior, but it doesn't create new behavior. Only if you apply the material to your work does new behavior or authentic learning emerge.

### **Adults (as well as children) learn best through doing.**

A stretching job assignment immediately exposes you to new areas of knowledge and produces opportunities to learn new skills. These kinds of special projects or team assignments accelerate your development if they are paired with feedback and coaching. Constructive feedback helps you acknowledge mistakes or missteps and learn from them.

### **Seek the "sweet spot" of learning.**

When discussing a potential stretch assignment with your boss or others, seek the "sweet spot" of learning and development. The sweet spot is when you have a 50-70% chance of success. If your chance of success is only 40%, the project will tend to overwhelm you, and it will be too stressful. With a 90% chance of success, the stretch project will be too easy, and you won't learn anything new.

If a stretch assignment is in your sweet spot, you will be uncomfortable but not too uncomfortable. Learning happens when you are uncomfortable but not overwhelmed or distressed.

### **Understand the ideal mix of development.**

The ideal mix of development is 70/20/10: 70% of your development activities should be learning through doing; 20% of your development should be getting coaching; and 10% should be classroom training or education.

### **Ensure adequate support.**

Before accepting a stretch assignment, you must ensure you have adequate support. Adequate support comes in many varieties:

- Management support, such as the community development director communicating to department staff the importance of the project.
- Sufficient time for work on the project (this is a critical area of support).
- Any budget monies needed for the project.
- A good mix of people on your team if the project involves a workgroup.
- Someone in management who can help you overcome any obstacles that arise or otherwise provide guidance and feedback.
- Adequate decision-making authority within certain "guide-rails."



Assuming you are offered a special project, you should negotiate adequate support *before* embarking on the project.

**Ask key questions!** In her article "[15 Questions To Ask Before Accepting A Stretch Assignment](#)" (Forbes, March 14, 2019) Jo Miller identified several themes, which include

**Support from the top:** Always ensure that expectations are agreed on, and you have support from leadership.

**Work-life balance:** Work-life balance is important, especially in a career like local government that often requires after-hours investment of time.

**Is this something new?** When you take a stretch assignment, it's important that you stretch! If you're just adding more work of a similar level to your task list, that's only making more work. Make sure you're using new or different skills, or skills you want to brush up on, are meeting different people, or advancing the organization's goals beyond your usual scope.

**Keep one eye on the way forward:** If you set yourself up for success by answering all the questions in Jo's article, these assignments will be career-building. But, always ask if the investment if time will deliver a return, or otherwise "open more doors" in the paths ahead.

## How do I secure a stretch assignment?

While your manager or another manager may approach you with a stretch project, don't wait for someone to offer you the opportunity. You must take charge of your own learning and career development.

### Be on the lookout for opportunities

To seek out a stretch project, you must first ensure that you continue to handle your current job responsibilities successfully. You won't get new opportunities unless you are seen as a good performer in your current position.

Second, you must be on the lookout for new projects (and ask your colleagues to also be on the lookout for you). Know the kinds of new challenges facing the city council, city manager, and the community development director, and keep your ears open for opportunities to participate as new initiatives begin to emerge.

Third, make it known that you'd like a stretch opportunity. Have a development conversation with your supervisor and/or manager or other key managers inside and outside your department. In a

development conversation, you can discuss your career aspirations, new areas of knowledge or skills that you desire, new stretch assignments that may accelerate your development, and any support you may need.

Through these formal or informal development conversations, you want to “hook” the supervisor or manager on your development as an active supporter. As part of the discussion, you should ask the manager to let you know of any new project opportunities.

Depending on your relationship, ask for the manager to “sponsor” or recommend you for the new team or project.

### **Ensure 2 + 1**

To provide feedback as well as help in securing stretch opportunities, you must have support, especially from a formal or informal coach.

You should go beyond your immediate supervisor or manager who may serve as a coach. The minimum number of coaches is 2 + 1.

For adequate coaching support, you need a formal or informal coach in your department who knows your work or the workings of the department. You also need a coach in another city department who has a bigger picture view and a good feel for the organization and knows how things work. These are the “2.”

In addition, you must have a coach outside the city organization who can provide advice and generally guide you. That’s the “1.”

The coach outside your organization can suggest some involvements in professional associations in order to enhance your knowledge, skills, and network (see [Career Compass #48 entitled “How Do I Benefit From a Coach?”](#)).

## **How do I maximize the stretch opportunity?**

Here are some tips to leverage your stretch assignment:

### **1. Be an agile learner**

Since you won’t be a subject-matter expert in your new assignment, be curious, ask questions, seek advice, and learn as you go. For example, ask:

- Why is this special project important?

- What's the "why" behind the effort?
- What do we all need to learn?
- What am I missing?
- What else should I consider?
- What would be a completely different approach for addressing the challenge?

## 2. Engage people in many conversations

Go out of your way to engage diverse people inside and outside the organization in conversation about the issue and the effort. Listen and be open to the conversation. By doing so, you will expand your perspectives and your network.

## 3. Try out new roles

As you engage in the project, try out some new roles. For instance, if you are good at analysis, try out public speaking about the challenge and project (start in a safe environment). Again, learning and skills-building happen when you get uncomfortable.

## 4. Leverage the assignment

Over-deliver if possible. Over-delivering will get you future stretch projects and additional opportunities to learn and grow.

(For other suggestions on how to maximize the stretch experience, see Jo Miller, "[4 Ways To Execute a Stretch Assignment Like a Rock Star](#)," *forbes.com*, Dec 16, 2017.)

## A Catalyst for Growth

Stretch experiences coupled with helpful and candid feedback are catalysts for rapid career growth. In addition to new learning, relationships and skills-building, stretching job assignments help people see you in a new light (see also [Career Compass #52](#) entitled "Recasting My Rep").

These experiences shape other people's perceptions of you that are more aligned with your potential and career aspirations.



Sponsored by the ICMA Coaching Program, *Career Compass* is a monthly column focused on leadership and career development issues for local government professional staff. Dr. Frank Benest is ICMA's Liaison for Next Generation Initiatives and resides in Palo Alto,



# Now That You Have Hired the Highest Potential Talent, What's Next?

BY: [Cisco](#) | November 20, 2020

Whilst most companies deem onboarding to be a top component of the new hire experience, many are failing to build a strategy and a structure that enables their new employees to navigate successfully through the initial steps. As a result, attrition increases, the ramp-up or productivity curve flattens, and managers and employees alike are left disappointed at the new hire experience. On average, companies lose between 50% of their new hires in the first 12 months; one-third don't even make it to 90 days.

In a recent [Gallup poll](#), only 12% of employees strongly agreed that their organisation did a good job of onboarding. The general feedback suggests that to many managers, onboarding was about providing the employee with the basic set-up; i.e. a workspace, tools for the job, as well as basic training and orientation. The best new employee experiences cited a longer-term process, with high engagement and check-in from their manager, structured training and development, plus a well thought out mentoring program.

Right now, the onboarding process has become even more critical, with many new employees hired directly into a virtual or remote working environment. This poses new challenges to organisations, who in turn need to adapt their processes and programs to support the initial experience of an employee who has no face to face contact with their manager and co-workers, and who in turn can feel very isolated and under-supported.

As such a critical component in achieving high employee productivity and engagement, what are the practical considerations a company should consider in their onboarding strategy?

**1. Start the onboarding experience during the hiring process:** It sounds counter-intuitive, but highly motivated applicants will learn as much as possible about the company before interviewing. By providing quality information through the hiring process, this can in turn accelerate the onboarding of successful candidates.

**2. Onboarding is not an induction course:** In Cisco, our experience indicates that new employees often go through different "waves" of productivity and engagement during their first 18 months with the company. The best onboarding programs focus on activities and levels of support to capture these waves. For example, the first 30 days obviously require high levels of learning and support. However, many employees hit a lull after 6-9 months, when they 'know enough' but are still far from their productivity peak. This is a key inflection point for companies to capture the next level of development and mentoring. Without this, many employees start to feel abandoned, lose motivation and seek alternative opportunities.

**3. Onboarding is not just the manager's responsibility:** Whilst the Gallup panel survey showed that employees were 3 times more likely to feel the success of their onboarding program when their manager was heavily engaged, the best onboarding programs also include senior leaders, supervisors and various team members. In fact, employees who are involved in onboarding new hires often feedback that it is rewarding and motivating. Additionally, this also helps the new hire build a wide support network, gain diverse perspectives and knowledge, as well as feeling that the broader company is invested in their success.

**4. Consider the learning styles of your new hires:** Often overlooked, companies will build out an onboarding program based on an intensive orientation program and vast libraries of articles and slideware. The most effective learning comes from shorter bursts of interactive and visually engaging content. Consider short on-demand video learning, Q&A (Ask The Expert) sessions and gamification, together with routine one on one check-ins. These can all be achieved successfully in a virtual or remote working environment.

**5. Have a launch and a close for your onboarding experience:** Whilst the beginning of an onboarding program usually involves a flurry of activity, it's easy for it to tail off after a few weeks, leaving the new hire confused as to where they are at and the progress they have made. Spend time on a closure to the program too, with either a graduation or small celebration. New hires also feel camaraderie with peers and colleagues who went through the program at the same time. By creating a new hire community, lasting peer relationships can be formed that can also accelerate the onboarding ramp-up experience.

Successful onboarding of new hires plays a critical role both in employee productivity ramp-up and retention. However, many companies still fail to focus enough attention on getting a robust onboarding strategy and execution plan. In a world of increased virtualisation of teams, it is more essential than ever to get this piece of the new hire experience right; those that do will see higher employee engagement, lower rates of attrition and a faster leap to productivity.

This article was printed from: <https://www.govtech.com/workforce/Now-That-You-Have-Hired-the-Highest-Potential-Talent-Whats-Next.html>



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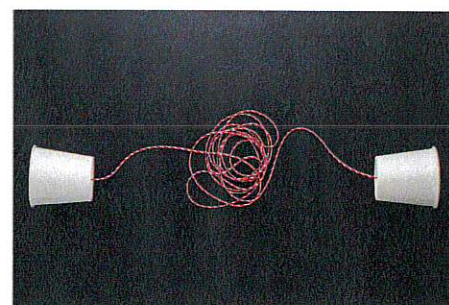
# The Major Impact Communication Has on Creating a Great Place to Work

What employees are asking for is consistent, timely communication that is meaningful, and that inspires them personally and professionally.

BLOG POST | Jul 26, 2019

by Valorie Waldon, SPHR, SHRM-SCP, human resource consultant, Employers Council

*This post is part two of a three-part blog series titled 'A Great Workplace Is Great for Your Local Government'.*



In part one of this series, we discussed how [creating a great workplace](#) is important to organizational success. There are three components of creating a workplace where people want to do their best work: the people, the communication, and the leadership within the organization. Today, we will look at communication.

## It's about Great Communication!

Organizations routinely conduct pulse or opinion surveys of their employees to gather information on a variety of workplace-related topics. Invariably, one of the topics surveyed is communication. Questions tend to be some variation of "Do our communications keep you informed?" "Do you have suggestions for how we can communicate better?" and similar items. It is rare that an organization receives feedback that says, "We are getting all the communication that we need! Thank you!" Quite the contrary, surveys almost always

indicate that employees feel there is not enough information shared, the right information isn't shared when it should be shared, and communication does not happen with an acceptable degree of frequency. Often, what employees are asking for is consistent, timely communication that is meaningful, and that inspires them personally and professionally.

## Communicate Purpose

Employees in today's workforce prefer to spend their time and energy on the job doing work that matters. The next generation of workers, in particular, are reputed to be driven not by money, but by a sense of purpose. It is important that they are connected to something bigger than themselves in order to feel fulfilled by their work. While the next generation make up 38 percent of the workforce, they do not corner the market in terms of a desire for fulfillment. The Gallup Organization identified 12 factors that correlate significantly to employee engagement, commonly referred to as the "Q12." One of those items is that the mission or purpose of the organization makes the employee feel his or her job is important. Great workplaces provide communication that helps employees feel connected to the organization's mission and goals by keeping these things in the front of the mind. These organizations also focus on ensuring that employees have a line-of-sight from their role to organizational objectives and that their work is aligned with the organization's purpose.

When communicating purpose, it is important to make sure that employees see the mission ahead as challenging, but achievable. It should be presented in such a way as to motivate and excite rather than alarm and defeat employees. A clearly communicated purpose will provide employees with direction and inspiration, while allowing them flexibility and freedom in its pursuit. It provides employees with enough information to be clear about the basis for decision-making when confronted with new situations.

## Communicate Openly and Consistently

In determining "what" and "how" to communicate important information to employees, management typically starts with the question, "What do we want employees to know?" This question may be based on a traditional or paternalistic view of the employer-employee relationship. This view reflects a culture where management is dominant and seeks to exercise control. It is represented by the axiom, "We just need employees to do their jobs, management will do the thinking." An alternative question could be, "What information will



help employees understand the big picture and make the best decisions for the organization?”

So, how much information should management share with employees? In addition to providing information about vision, mission, and goals, share as much as you can. With the exception of human resources and legal issues, most other things can probably be shared with workers. Great workplaces share feedback from customers, information from management meetings, staffing projections, and hiring plans. Even detailed information regarding the organization’s financial performance might be shared. This level of transparency works to build trust between employees and management, while helping management create a team that truly understands how the business works. It provides opportunities for everyone to face the organization’s challenges and enjoy its successes together.

## Feedback Is a Two-Way Street

Feedback is usually thought of as comments provided after the fact wherein management tells employees how they are doing, which is actually only one component of feedback. The other is managers collecting information from employees regarding how they, and the organization, are doing in meeting employee needs.

Employees in organizations with honest and open communication feel that they have a stake in the success of the organization and feel empowered to provide their insights. Even when managers have an open door policy, it is more beneficial to be proactive in seeking honest feedback from employees in informal ways. Regular check-ins, informal lunches, and “stay interviews” are just a few ways to elicit feedback. Take this time to ask simple open-ended questions that allow the employees to elaborate on their thoughts. For example, “What are you hearing our clients say about our business?” “What part of your job do you find most meaningful?” “What is holding you back from doing your absolute best work?”

Finally, it’s not enough to just solicit the feedback. Be prepared to do something with it. Asking employees for input and insight and then ignoring what they have shared undermines morale. Follow up with employees to let them know what has happened with their suggestions, concerns, and complaints. Even if you can’t do what they’ve asked, it means a lot to employees to know that you made an effort to address their concerns and questions.



Those organizations that are able to create a climate of open communication across all levels see higher levels of employee engagement.

**In part three, we will look at the role leadership plays in employee engagement and the success of an organization.**

Established in 1939, [Employers Council](#) provides professional services to over 4,000 employers, helping them develop and maintain effective, successful organizations.


#### *About the author*



Valorie Waldon has been an HR consultant with Employers Council since 2007. In her role she consults with and advises members regarding the full spectrum of employee issues and trains on a variety of topics such as HR metrics and analytics, effective performance management, recruitment and selection, employee development and employee relations. Prior to coming to the council, Waldon had over 20 years of human resource management experience. In addition to owning and operating an HR firm, she has served as the top HR executive, providing strategic direction and advising executive leadership, for organizations in both the public and private sectors. Her passion has always been to help organizations fully engage their workforce by making the most of the skills, talents, and gifts that their employees bring to the table. She is a graduate of the University of Colorado at Boulder and holds SPHR and SHRM-SCP certifications.

## Related Content

### Three Critical Ingredients for Making a Great Workplace

 07-19-2019

A precise definition of engagement will vary from organization to organization, but three factors are critical to creating and maintaining a workplace where people want to be.

# COMMUNICATION PHRASES

## IGNITER PHRASES

I like that!  
 Keep talking, you're on the right track  
 Go ahead...try it.  
 Keep going!  
 We can do a lot with that idea.  
 That's neat, what else do we need?  
 How can we get support for it!  
 What else do we need to consider?  
 I think it will fly!  
 Gee, why not!  
 Wow, Let's try it!  
 Where would we be without you?  
 Hey, that's a great idea!  
 How can we build on that idea?

Let's get right on it.  
 I know it will work!

Why not!  
 That's the way to go!  
 How can we help you?  
 This is going to be fun!  
 I love challenges like this!  
 That's like you!!  
 I agree!  
 Let's go!  
 That would be interesting to try!

That's good!

That's a great ideal  
 I'm glad you brought that up!  
 That's an interesting idea.  
 It's sure nice to have you with us!  
 Look out world, here we come!

## KILLER PHRASES

The problem with that idea is...  
 No way it will work here.  
 Impossible under our current system.  
 We just can't get support for it!  
 It's not a bad idea, but...  
 You haven't considered...  
 We have too many projects now!  
 A swell idea, but...  
 It won't work!  
 We haven't the time!  
 It's not in the budget!  
 We've tried that before!  
 Not ready for it yet!  
 All right in theory, but can you  
     put it into practice!  
 It needs more study.  
 Somebody would have suggested it  
     before if it were any good!  
 Let's discuss it some other time.  
 You don't understand our problem!  
 Why start anything now?  
 You know, I think you're really dumb!  
 Has anyone else ever tried it?  
 I just know it won't work!  
 Let's be practical!  
 Let's form a committee.  
 It's been the same for ten years, why  
     change now?  
 Why can't you come up with something  
     good?  
 What's the use of trying it?

# Written any gobbledygook lately?

By Dr. Henry T. Price

So far, it's been a good year for states and their revenues. It's a good thing, too, because a lot of states are finding out that the declining writing skills of many of their employees are costing them money.

The National Commission on Writing for America's Families, Schools, and Colleges released a report, "Writing: A Powerful Message from State Government," based on data provided by human resources offices in 49 of the 50 states.

Even though writing is a hugely important and costly job requirement for private sector employees studied in an earlier survey, the report revealed that it is even more so for the nearly 2.7 million people who work for state governments. Training programs in writing skills for these state employees are estimated to cost taxpayers more than \$220 million a year.

Almost two years ago, the State of Washington, according to an Associated Press report, became concerned with the bureaucratic gobbledygook it saw in its agency communications.

To help address the problem, the governor ordered all state agencies to use "plain talk," and more than 2,000 state employees attended classes to receive instruction on how to write in everyday language.

Has it paid off? According to the AP, just one letter from the state's Department of Revenue that used plain talk resulted in the collection of an extra \$800,000 over two years in "use tax," the generally ignored equivalent of sales tax on items bought out of state. That one letter caused the number of businesses complying with use tax regulations to triple.

Thom Haller, executive director of the Center for Plain Language in Washington, DC, has said plain-language initiatives are spreading to other states.

"We're seeing them embrace it because they're recognizing that clarity in structure and language is important," he said. "It enables people to get their jobs done more efficiently."

Here are a couple of examples the AP used to illustrate simplifications Washington state is using in its official documents:

- **The Department of Labor and Industries:**

**Before:** We have been notified that you did not receive the State of Washington warrant listed on the attached Affidavit of Lost or Destroyed Warrant Request for Replacement, form F242.

**After:** Have you cashed your L&I check yet? The state Treasurer's Office has informed us that a check we sent you has not been cashed.

- **The Department of Ecology:**

**Before:** Specific to the CO2 mitigation program, Ecology recommends that the reviewing authority assure compliance with the approved mitigation plan on an annual basis, unless project circumstances indicate that a more or less frequent compliance review is appropriate.

**After:** Reviewing authorities conduct annual reviews to assure compliance with the mitigation plan.

The same kinds of gobbledygook problems can infect communications that businesses depend on to sell their products. One of the points I stress with students in my "Good Writing Is Good Business" seminars is that, in many cases, you have never met the person you are trying to persuade, to impress, or to sell when you send them a written communication — and that includes e-mail.

The only means those people have of forming an image of you and your business is through the words they see in front of them. It's up to writers to see that the image they create is the best it can possibly be.

Bob Kerry, the former U.S. senator and governor from Nebraska who is chairman of the National Commission on Writing, has said he shudders to think how the Declaration of Independence would read if it had been written in today's bureaucratic gobbledygook.

We all know the adage that "time is money." Apparently, words are money, too.

*Dr. Price, a consultant with Sam McCuen and Associates, taught copy editing and writing for more than 30 years at the University of South Carolina.*

*Article reprinted with permission from South Carolina Business, SC Chamber of Commerce, July 2007.*



# Organizational Miscommunication? There's a Good Way to Avoid It.

*It's all too easy for team members to misunderstand something. Effective leaders know the value of the "pre-brief."*

BY: [Russ Linden](#) | February 13, 2019

In a 1993 survey of 531 companies that had undergone major restructuring, the study's authors asked the firms' CEOs this question: If you could go back and change one thing, what would it be? The CEOs' most frequent response? "The way I communicated with my employees."

Having worked with senior executives not only in the private and nonprofit sectors but also across all levels of government, I've been struck by the number of public-sector leaders who are just as frustrated as those CEOs were because their messages don't seem to stick. Here's a stunning example:

On Jan. 13, 1975, the University of Virginia men's basketball team played Davidson. Terry Holland was in his first season as Virginia's coach. He had been Davidson's coach until the year before, so he knew the opponent well. With one minute to play and the score tied, Virginia had the ball and Holland called time out. He outlined the play: UVa would hold on to the ball until the last 10 seconds (there was no shot clock then), and the point guard would pass the ball to Dan Bonner, the team's captain.

But when 10 seconds remained, the point guard took a shot! He missed. Bonner got the rebound and scored as time ran out. But rather than celebrate, Bonner was furious. He grabbed the guard and yelled, "What the hell were you thinking?" The guard replied, "I was supposed to take the last shot!"

The play that Holland had given the team wasn't complicated. Everyone else knew Bonner was supposed to shoot. But that's not what the point guard heard (or, perhaps, wanted to hear).

There are multiple explanations for why the point guard didn't follow the plan. Players were excited, running on adrenalin; the crowd was screaming; the point guard had been called on to take the last shot in some previous games. What could Coach Holland have done to prevent the mistake? What if, during the time out, he had asked each player to briefly state what he was supposed to do during the final minute of the game? Would that have seemed childish? A good idea? Waste of time? In fact, some of the most effective managers do just that in their own organizations.

Here's an example. In some law-enforcement agencies before a major activity -- say, a raid on a drug den -- the team meets to conduct what I call a "pre-brief" (some call this a "brief-back") to review the plan just before executing it. Each team member states where they'll be, at what time, to take what action. Sometimes they include what's going to happen just before they act. The exercise might take no more than two or three minutes. And it offers many benefits:

- The team leader learns if anyone is confused.
- It reminds everyone of their colleagues' roles, which is critical if someone makes a mistake during the activity and others have to cover for them.
- Team members can also review their Plan B -- what they will do if something goes awry.
- It's action-oriented, and gets people warmed up for the task.
- It increases accountability.
- And the team can determine if there are any remaining issues before starting.

This short, simple and powerful exercise can be used in many settings. Some IT units use it when deploying a new piece of software. It can help conference planning teams the day before the event begins. And many managers use a variation of the pre-brief on Monday mornings. They hold a "stand-up meeting," at which their direct reports review key events from the previous week and the major tasks for the current week. At a good stand-up meeting, the leader also asks if anyone needs some assistance for any important tasks. A pre-brief is similar in its focus on action, roles and accountability. It differs in that it focuses entirely on an immediate task at hand.

Managers and leaders who use their own version of a pre-brief know a fundamental reality about organizational communications: Many people don't hear things accurately the first time. People may think they do, but there's often a gap between what was said and what people heard. And that's especially true during major organizational changes.

Pre-briefs can go a long way toward eliminating that problem. They can help you know whether what you said and what your team members heard is the same, and enable you to take immediate action when there's a gap. Leading organizations in today's turbulent environment is complex and challenging. Nothing is more critical than getting the communications right.

This article was printed from: <http://www.governing.com/columns/smart-mgmt/col-avoiding-organizational-miscommunication-pre-brief.html>

# 10 Persuasion-Killing Phrases You Should Never Use

Topic: [HR Management](#)

Price is the author of recently published [Well Said! Presentations and Conversations That Get Results](#).

Of course, you've got to know your audience and tailor your content to meet their needs, says Price. And being sincere, natural, enthusiastic, and passionate go hand in hand with maintaining good eye contact and being calm and polite.

HOWEVER, beware of the 10 killer phrases that doom your pitch to failure. If you want to maximize your success as you climb the career ladder, says Price, here are 10 phrases you should never utter:

## 1. AVOID "I can't do that" or "That's impossible" or "That can't be done."

Even though you may feel this way on the inside, these negative phrases are perceived by others as pessimistic, unconstructive, and even stubborn. Your boss, peers, and customers most likely want to hear what CAN be done. Instead say, "I'll be glad to check on that for you" or "What I can do is ..." or "Because of company policy, what I CAN do is ..."

## 2. AVOID "You should have ..." or "You could have ..." or "You ought to have ..."

These words—should, could, and ought—imply blame, finger-pointing, and fault. There's no quicker way to upset a boss, colleague, or customer than to suggest that he or she is guilty of something (even if it's true). Instead, take a collaborative approach. "Please help me understand why ..." or "Next time may we adopt an alternative approach ...." or "I understand your challenges; let's resolve this together..."

## 3. AVOID "That's not my job" or "I don't get paid enough for this" or "That's not my problem."

If you're asked to do something by your boss, coworker, or a customer, it's because it's important to them. Therefore, as a team player, goal #1 is to figure out how to help them get it accomplished. Even if it's not in your job description, saying so displays a career-limiting bad attitude.

For example, if your boss lays an unreasonable request on you, reply by saying, "I'll be glad to help you accomplish that. Given my current tasks of A..., B..., and C..., which one of these would you like to place on the back-burner while I work on this new assignment?" This clearly communicates priority; reminds the boss of your current work load; and subtly implies realistic expectations.

## 4. AVOID "I may be wrong, but..." or "This may be a dumb question, but..." or "I'm not sure about this, but..." or "This may be a silly idea, but..."

Eliminate any prefacing phrase that demeans or negates what you're about to say. Instead, get rid of the self-deprecating phrase, drop the 'but,' and make your comment.

## 5. AVOID "I'll try."

Imagine your boss says to you, "I need your proposal by 10 a.m. tomorrow for the customer meeting." Your reply is, "OK. I'll try to get it finished." The word "try" implies the possibility it may not get finished. It presupposes possible failure. Instead say, "I'll get it finished" or "I'll have it on your desk by 9 a.m."

Find out what the buzz is all about. [Take a no-cost look at HR.BLR.com](#), solve your top problem, and get a complimentary gift.



## 6. AVOID "I think..."

Which of these two statements do you find to be more effective: "I think you might like this new solution we offer" vs. "I believe (or I'm confident) you're going to like this new solution we offer"? The difference in wording is fairly subtle. However, the influence communicated to your customer can be profound. Reread each sentence. The first one contains two weak words, "think" and "might." These words make you sound unsure or insecure about the message, and subtly undermine your credibility. Notice how the second sentence is confident and strong. Replace the word "think" with "believe" and strike the tentative "might." That's a statement from someone who believes in what he or she is saying.

## CHECKLIST: 12 of the Best Job Interview Questions to Ask Local Government Candidates

- Please tell us why you are interested in this position.
- Please describe how your previous work experience has prepared you for this position. Please be specific.
- How do you feel your educational background has prepared you for this position?
- Although we have reviewed your resume and have been briefed on your qualifications, would you tell us a little bit more about your professional background and interests?
- What are your three main professional goals for the next five to 10 years?
- What are your biggest work-related accomplishments? Why were you able to attain them?
- What are your biggest work-related failures? Why did they occur? What have you done to prevent them from recurring?
- What are the two most difficult problems you have encountered in your previous positions? How did you solve them?
- What strategies do you use to anticipate problems? Give an example. If a problem arises that you have not anticipated, how are you likely to handle it? Give an example.
- Can you give an example of creative problem solving from your past work history?
- Describe your experience in working with citizens from various cultural backgrounds. What approaches have you used to ensure adequate attention is given to the varying needs of these groups?
- Describe an ethical dilemma you have faced in the workplace. How was it resolved? What was your role in the resolution? What, if anything, would you do differently if you were faced with the same issue again?



Screening Candidates   candidate sourcing

# 10 Unique Candidate Screening Questions You Should Always Ask



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We know you've seen them. The plethora of blogs, whitepapers, articles, and ebooks with advice about interviewing candidates. There are "how to's," "do's and don'ts," and, of course, "best practice" resources saturating the internet. Their titles insinuate that the interview process should be simple, so long as you follow a predetermined number of "quick and easy steps."

In reality, even seasoned recruiters and HR pros occasionally struggle with the interview process. In an effort to better screen candidates prior to face-to-face interviews, many companies rely on phone interviews or video interview technology.

Below are 10 common HR screening questions to ask when interviewing qualified candidates via video or phone.

***Learn how to get better results out of your screening process  
by personalizing your process.***

## 1. "What is your ideal job?"

This is a great first question as it gives the potential employee a chance to open up right off the bat. Pay attention to things they say they want that you can't provide as an organization or in this specific role. If the potential employee mentions something your company can provide, it gives you a chance to make a note for the face-to-face interview (should they make it that far).



demotivates candidates. Listen for statements that seem defensive or blame-heavy. A candidate who answers honestly and with some self-awareness is likely a solid choice.

Effective #CandidateScreening questions let the candidate know this #hiring choice isn't just about the company, but them too.

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## 2. "Why do you want to work here?"

This is the perfect opportunity to discover how much research the potential candidate did beforehand. Another tip: Compare this response to their answer from the first question on this list. The goal is not to screen people out, but to spot similarities between their ideal job and the open position.

**EVEN BETTER:** *"This is how we differ from [insert competitor here]. How do you think you'll handle that?"*

Again, the purpose isn't to eliminate anyone from the running with this question, but rather to get a sense of whether they have appropriate expectations. A small architectural firm with a few regional employees will have different pros and cons than their conglomerate counterparts. Even if the candidate doesn't know that, this pre-interview question serves to manage expectations that can vary by industry, size, region, and management styles.

## 3. "What can you contribute to our company?"

Here is where you find out what your potential candidate can bring to the table. What is their "it factor?" How can this candidate diversify your talent pool? Listen for specific details or examples of previously-performed tasks. If you understand what the position needs and how current candidates can fit into the position, it will be easier to fill your open position in a time-efficient way.

**EVEN BETTER:** *"The team you're working on will be completing this project by the end of the year. How do you see yourself being involved?"*



thoughtful answers and gives examples of similar work they've completed in the past.

“

*“Leadership skills are often considered to be the most valuable form of human capital found in an organization. Spying leadership potential early in an employee's career allows organizational leaders to assist the next generation of leaders to reach their maximum potential.”*

*- Mark Williams, Management Training Specialists.*

#### **4. “What attributes are you looking for in a team/employer?”**

This question allows you to gauge how the candidate will fit in with not only their team but the overall company culture. Note the items that are important to them that jive with your work environment. A good clue to see if the candidate is positive fit for your company is hidden within the things they mention as desirable attributes. If the candidate mentions several things they want that aren't part of your culture, you've spotted a red flag.

**EVEN BETTER: “Everyone has unique strengths. On your future team, we have an abundance of [insert team dynamic here]. How do you see your skillset fitting into that environment?”**

With an abundance of assessments and raft of personality tests, most candidates will at least have some concept of their strengths. Whether it's DiSC or an app-based assessment, if they take their professional development seriously, they'll have explored it. Their answer will speak to interpersonal skills and self-awareness.

#### **5. “How would your past experiences influence decisions you would make here?”**

This gives you a window into the potential candidate's employment history, beyond what is listed on their resume. An ideal candidate should draw connections between what they learned from their previous employment and how it has helped them grow as a professional.





Every candidate will have lessons learned in their back pocket. Whether from failure or success, they should have some career-defining experiences to draw from. If the experiences they mention are positive, it can provide insight into their values and what drives them. If the experiences presented are negative, it is an indicator of their level of resiliency. Listen for clues that the lessons they learned were the right ones, shaping their development to make better future decisions

Build a set of #interview questions that lets #candidates know you're here to fill their career goals too, not just the company's.  
@ClearCompany



## 6. "Who would you consider a role model? Why?"

Learning about what types of people who inspire your candidates gives leaders a unique insight into the types of things they value. Those who inspire us, whether it's a thought leader, author, artist, previous boss or family member, typically serve as a benchmark for which the candidate strives to reach. If your candidate mentions a role model who is known for their strong work ethic, stellar personal conduct, etc., you're in good business!

**EVEN BETTER: "Tell me about a lesson you learned from a colleague you didn't enjoy working with."**

Like it or not, most of us learn from our less-than-pleasant experiences. Learning from a coworker you did not particularly enjoy shows resilience and grit, two of the most valuable qualities in leadership.

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This question is a more realistic version of the ever-popular interview question, "What's your superpower?" "What do you do best?" asks candidates to identify what they take the most pride in, whether personal or professional. You might find a quality that could be fused into the workplace.

According to Gallup, in companies where managers focus on employees' strengths or positive characteristics, nearly seven out of ten (67%) of employees are engaged. Even more impressive? Businesses that focus on employee strengths have reduced turnover, increased profitability, higher customer engagement, and fewer safety incidents.

**EVEN BETTER: "What is your least favorite part of your chosen profession?"**

Much like working with those we don't particularly like, powering through something that is a necessary evil of your profession makes for a more well-rounded and seasoned professional. If they are honest about what really irks them about sales (expense reports) or what they hate about project management (writing briefs), then you can work with both their weaknesses and strengths to allocate workload throughout the team, or at least give your managers a heads up.


## 8. "What motivates you to come to work every day?"

Dig for unique responses with this question to see if you can find some personal insight. It's important for managers to get to know their employees personally so they can later help them succeed and achieve goals through work.

“

*"If employers approach employees from the perspective of 'Your work here will make you more successful at this company, and elsewhere,' employees will recognize the commitment to development, feel more appreciated and understand that their employer invested in them"*

*-Rick Devine (@rick\_talentsky), from TalentSky Inc.*

Mark Murphy, New York Times bestselling author and founder of Leadership IQ, reports five major motivators that drive people's actions at work: achievement, power, affiliation, security, and adventure. If you are hiring for a new position and you aren't sure how the new role will fit within a team, a candidate motivated by security wouldn't be a great fit. Instead, you should hire someone motivated by adventure. Does this candidate have a 

giving back to the community. Self-motivation is an important quality to have in your team members. If this typical screening interview question gets shrugged off by your candidate with a lack-luster, "paying off my student loans?," you may want to take a pass.

**EVEN BETTER: "How do you communicate best?"**

I'd wager there is little more valuable than knowing how to communicate with your employees and giving everyone in the organization a sort of "key" on the best way to provide feedback, help others learn, and offer praise. It's possible your candidate has never been asked this before, so be patient while they think it through. Offer some clues for them to look at, such as a time they got feedback that was appreciated based on the way it was delivered or training that really stuck due to a particular style they liked.

## 9. "What makes you tick?"

There are aspects of every job that are less than exciting, but the right hire will be able to look past them and explain what excites them. When you ask this question, you're also saying, "How can we best work together?" We want candidates to know we're listening to their needs too, not just filling our own.

**EVEN BETTER: "What frustrates you in the workplace?"**

While some candidates might identify minor things, others may offer insight into their work habits. If they mention tardiness, you know they respect others' time. If the candidate speaks of preferring to work individually but the position is highly collaborative, move on to the next candidate.

## 10. "Tell me about a time when you overcame a challenge."

This question identifies a candidate's problem solving skills and resiliency. Behavioral questions like these are tougher for candidates to answer, but give HR a much deeper read on *how* a person works instead of the cut-and-dry information provided on their resume.

Effective screening processes help teams recruit more A Players by enabling them to move faster, get interviews with top applicants and make offers before the competition does.

**EVEN BETTER: "Tell me about a time you had a colleague's back."**



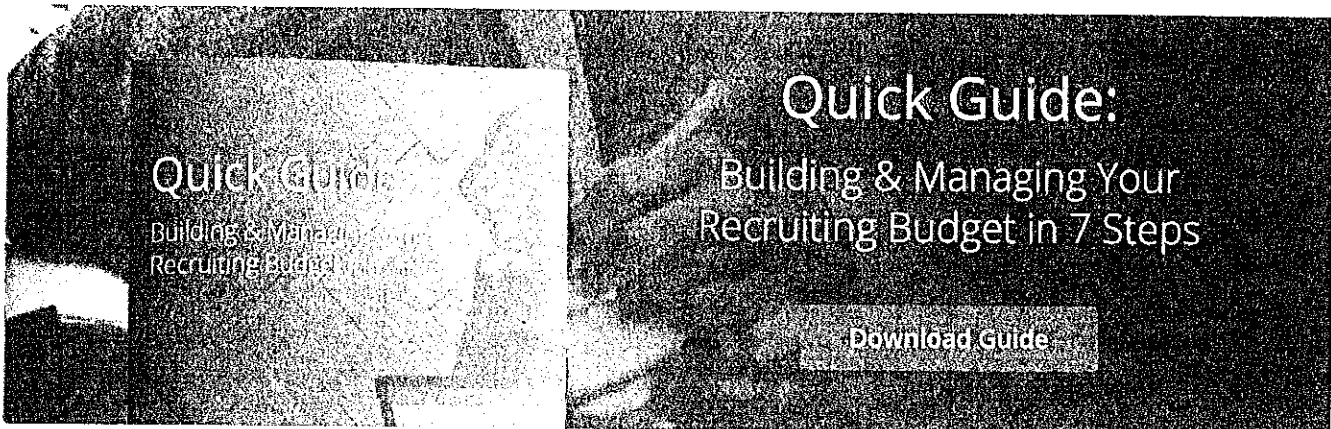
someone based on it and now they help others.

Effective screening interview questions help teams interview and recruit more A Players by enabling them to move faster, get interviews with top applicants, and make offers before the competition does. Questions that elicit a personal, thought-provoking response will guide your interviewing process into a new realm of efficiency.

***Read more about candidate screening best practices  
to get to the core of your talent management!***

You don't need a dedicated sourcing team to get ahead of competitors on talent. Take a free demo with ClearCompany's Applicant Tracking System and get ahead with your candidate screening strategy.

*Post Updated on June 19, 2019.*



Meredith Wholley

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As a Marketing and Event Manager, Meredith coordinates best-practice content and brand-awareness events for ClearCompany. With her career in HR tech, Meredith works closely with HR practitioners and is passionate about providing them with the tools and information they need to succeed.

## Further Reading





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# 25 Tricky Interview Questions and How to Answer Them

Don't let your job search ride on a piece of paper.

ARTICLE | Mar 24, 2015

By Peter Studner

By Peter Studner

Yes, it's important to craft a strong, accurate resume but like it or not, most jobs are secured or lost in the interview stage. Don't let your job search ride on a piece of paper.



I never saw a resume -- and only a resume -- get a job. That's why you should put as much effort as possible into preparing for interviews than you do into any other part of your job search campaign.

While there are no perfect answers, some thought and discussion about potentially tricky interview subjects can help you avoid disaster. Here is a sampling of interview questions that tend to trip up job candidates.

## What salary are you looking for?

Whenever possible, I suggest that candidates not provide a specific answer to this question until the negotiations phase, *after* a position has already been offered. To defer the discussion, try returning the focus back to the interviewer and noting: "It's hard to discuss salary without knowing more about the job or responsibilities."

Or, if you are discussing a specific job: "What is your range?" Then relate your experience to the salary range without being precise: "I think my experience would put me near the high end of your range, don't you?"

### **What were you making in your last job?**

If at all possible, do not volunteer information about your past salary. A diplomatic way to put the salary question aside is to reply, "I was well compensated in my previous company, but really do not wish to prejudice myself here by being too high or low. Can we delay this until after we've looked at all the aspects of your current needs? What is your range for this job?"

### **Have you ever been fired?**

If the answer is yes, have a good explanation worked out and tested with friends. For instance: "We had a change in general managers, and although I had been doing a great job as you can see from my accomplishments, I was let go for one of his former associates." Or: "The company decided to close down its California operation and offered me a job in Chicago. We would like to stay in this area, so that's why I'm looking around."

### **Can you work under pressure?**

Indicate that you can and ask the interviewer how much pressure is involved in the position. Learn what the interviewer means by pressure. The definition can vary significantly from person to person and company to company. If you are a pro at pressure jobs, describe a few accomplishments.

### **What did you think of your last supervisor?**

Whatever your true feelings might be, stay positive. This is not the time or place to list your boss's shortcomings or frustrating behaviors. I suggest responses like: "She was the kind of person I could learn from." Or: "We were able to communicate well and things got done quickly."

### **What is your greatest strength?**

Before interviewing, reflect on your personal strengths and make a list of them (e.g., "natural number sense," "able to multitask," "good with people," "able to teach others," etc.). Then tie each of them to a professional accomplishment.



When asked this question in an interview, answer with the strength you feel best fits the position being discussed, and be sure to offer the anecdote that goes with it. Conclude your response by asking the interviewer if this is the kind of quality that would help his or her company.

### **What is your greatest weakness?**

As with your strengths, prepare a list of weaknesses beforehand. This time, tie each weakness back to what could also be considered a strength. Your answer can be, for example, "I like to get things done. Sometimes I get impatient, but I'm getting a handle on it."

Or maybe you have actually come up with a way to mitigate your weakness: "I'm a stickler for details, but I do not want to be a micromanager. So at my last job, I asked each staff member to devise their own checklist of weekly tasks. It gave them some autonomy and satisfied my desire for quality control."

### **You've moved around a lot; how long would you stay with us?**

Make sure that your answer doesn't make you seem indecisive, fickle, or uncommitted. A good answer might be, "I'm seeking a long-term opportunity where I can learn and grow. Does this come with the position we are discussing?"

### **What motivates you?**

Resist the temptation to joke, "A steady paycheck!" Try to tie your motivation to the work being done at this specific company. In addition you could mention things like the opportunity to learn and grow, to work with smart people who are passionate about their jobs, to innovate, and to contribute to the success of an organization.

### **What do you not like to do?**

This is a loaded question. A positive reply might be, "I'm the kind of person who does whatever is necessary to get the job done. When I do run into something disagreeable, I try to do it first and get it behind me. I have no particular dislikes."

### **How would your boss, coworkers, and subordinates describe you?**

Be ready to give some examples of the kind of team player you represent. If you are not into office politics and have harbored good relationships at work, mention it. And remember that



the interviewer may ask your references the same question. I strongly suggest meeting with your references before the interview stage in order to talk through your career goals and how they can best support them.

### **What is the toughest part of being a manager?**

A good reply is: "To surround myself with people who are better than I am in their individual specialties."

### **Why do you want to work for our company?**

Your reply could be based on the company's reputation for products, management, international scope, technology, or as a nice place to work and grow. The most important thing is to avoid generic answers. Know the company's products, policies, and potential for you.

### **Why should we hire you?**

If you know the job requirements and can match them with some accomplishments, briefly share those anecdotes. Then say, "If there are opportunities to do that and more here, then this is a great fit. What do you think?"

### **What has been your biggest failure?**

Discuss this question with friends, mentors, and possibly your references before the interview. If at all possible, think of something you were later able to correct. Then the story isn't just about a failure, but also about a learning experience.

### **What kind of day-to-day schedule did you have in your last job?**

The interviewer isn't looking for a minute-by-minute breakdown of a typical day. Stress action, performance, and results rather than administrative work.

### **How do you feel about the progress you made in your last position?**

Rather than discuss your feelings, per se, stress your accomplishments. For instance: "When I started with the Blake Company, I was given responsibility for their operations in Mexico and Costa Rica. After I turned them around, they made me general manager for Mexico and Central America. How are your international operations performing?" An answer like this

communicates great information about your value as an employee while still conveying positive feelings about your progress.

### **Did you have any frustrations in your past job?**

Frustrations are a normal part of any job, and interviewers know this—so don't claim you didn't have any. Relate some of the bottlenecks you experienced, but more important, indicate what you did to overcome them.

### **Do you like to compete?**

Competition is great as long as it does not sacrifice the rest of the team. If you are competitive, I suggest relating that quality to the total company effort and not to your personal ambitions.

### **How long do you think it would be before you could make a contribution to our company?**

Don't be in a hurry when providing an answer to this question. There normally is a period of transition before a new hire learns the ropes. You might say, "If the transition goes according to plan, I would guess relatively soon. What would you expect?"

### **What was the last book you read?**

You *do* read. Saying that you don't in this setting is a misstep. But be careful not to fib. Your interviewer may have read the same book!

### **Don't you feel that you are overqualified for the position?**

Ouch! If you have a lot of experience and the company is thinking of hiring a younger person, you may get this kind of query. A good answer is: "I imagine my experience would make me more valuable sooner!"

### **Do you mind working for someone of the opposite sex or someone younger than you?**

It's the job that counts. Stick to the job specification and don't get sidetracked on implications.

### **How do you take criticism?**

Most people have problems taking criticism. If the criticism is part of a formal evaluation program where you can learn and improve, that is fine. "I would welcome the opportunity to learn how to do my job better. Do you have a formal program for employee evaluation?"

## How do you spend your free time?

Be reasonable. This is not the time to mention that you like jumping out of planes, even if it is true.

You may not be asked these specific questions in your interview, but know how you want to answer them will ensure that you're prepared to discuss a wide variety of topics that might come up. You don't want to have to formulate a complicated answer in the midst of an already nerve-wracking situation.

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# SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Listed below are sample questions that will help you gather information from the applicant and are lawful under EEO guidelines. Decide which questions best suit your needs. It is important that you plan the interview ahead of time. Naturally, you will use different questions for different job requirements and different job levels.

## 1. Interest in the Organization

- 1.1. Why would you like to work with us?
- 1.2. Where or how did you hear about this opportunity?
- 1.3. Why did you decide to apply for this position?
- 1.4. What do you know about our organization?
- 1.5. What do you know about our services?

## 2. Work Related

- 2.1. Tell me briefly about your work history.
- 2.2. What previous work experience do you think prepared you for this position?
- 2.3. Which past positions have given you the most satisfaction?
- 2.4. Which past position has given you the most frustration?
- 2.5. Describe for me one or two of the most important accomplishments in your work career to date?
- 2.6. What kind of supervision have you experienced in you previous jobs?
- 2.7. What supervisory style would you use with your subordinates?
- 2.8. What might your subordinates say are your strengths and weaknesses?
- 2.9. What would you say are your strengths and weaknesses?
- 2.10. What has been your biggest career disappointment?
- 2.11. Why are you thinking about leaving your current position?
- 2.12. What kind of an organization would you like to work for?
- 2.13. How does the position we have open now fit into you work plans?
- 2.14. What new knowledge or experience did you gain from your last (or current) job?
- 2.15. Why should we hire you?
- 2.16. What did you do on your last job that was innovative or new?

## 3. Education and Training

- 3.1. What kind of formal training do you have?
- 3.2. What special certifications do you have?
- 3.3. What special skills do you have?
- 3.4. What aspects of your education or training have prepared you for this position?
- 3.5. What courses did you like the most in school?
- 3.6. What courses did you like the least in school?
- 3.7. Describe for me the most enjoyable experience you had in school.
- 3.8. How did your teachers/professors influence you in the pursuit of this profession?
- 3.9. How has your education or training helped you perform better in your job?
- 3.10. Why did you choose \_\_\_\_\_ as your major?

## 4. Relationships with People

- 4.1. Describe for me your ideal boss.
- 4.2. What kind of co-workers do you like best? Least?



- 4.3. Describe to me your favorite supervisor.
- 4.4. What disagreements have you had with your coworkers?
- 4.5. How would you describe your relationships with people in other departments?

**5. Career Plans**

- 5.1. Why did you select this area of work?
- 5.2. Who influenced you the most in your career choice?
- 5.3. What are your short term goals?
- 5.4. What are your long range goals?
- 5.5. What are you doing to prepare yourself for these goals?
- 5.6. What factors do you believe are the most influential in determining a person's chance for advancement?

**6. Job Performance**

- 6.1. Describe the performance appraisal style used by your last employer.
- 6.2. Tell me how you were evaluated during your last two evaluations.
- 6.3. What areas of improvement were pointed out to you during your last performance appraisal?
- 6.4. What do you believe are the most important performance criteria in your area of expertise?
- 6.5. All of us have pluses and minuses in our performance. What are some of yours?
- 6.6. What do you think is a good attendance record?
- 6.7. As a supervisor, how would you handle an employee who is chronically late or absent?

**7. Salary and Benefits**

- 7.1. Are you aware of the beginning salary for this position?
- 7.2. What benefit is the most important to you?
- 7.3. How does our salary package compare to your last employer?
- 7.4. What do you consider a good salary increase?

**8. Career Field**

- 8.1. Why do you want to work in \_\_\_\_\_?
- 8.2. What do you feel is the most important aspects of \_\_\_\_\_?
- 8.3. Which areas of your field do you think will expend the most?

**9. Miscellaneous**

- 9.1. After reviewing the job description, are you able to perform the essential functions of this job?
- 9.2. Are you aware of our working hours?
- 9.3. Are you available to work weekends?
- 9.4. Are you able to work holidays?
- 9.5. Are you able to work overtime?
- 9.6. Are you aware that you must sign a confidentiality agreement?

## The Right and Wrong Way to Ask Questions

- ❑ Ask open-ended questions that require explanations rather than a simple yes or no answer.  
**Example:** "Tell me about your work experience with an IBM personal computer." Not "have you ever used a n IIBM personal computer?"
- ❑ Avoid personal questions that are not job related.  
**Example:** "Would you have any problems with working one night a week." Not "What will your spouse say if you work one night per week?"
- ❑ Assume a relaxed conversational posture. Put the applicant at ease.
- ❑ Control the session, but do not become overbearing, demanding or defensive.
- ❑ Allow the applicant to respond. Make reflective comments that encourage the applicant to continue talking.  
**Example:** When the applicant mentions an interest in the outdoors, a reflective comment might be "You like to work outdoors." This should elicit an affirmative response and continued dialogue from the applicant.
- ❑ Do not force the applicant to take a defensive posture by asking judgmental questions. Keep the questions as open-ended and positive as possible.  
**Example:** "Tell me why you would like to work for our company." Not "So you want to quit your present job. How do I know you won't just quit this job?"
- ❑ Allow the applicant to respond at his or her own pace. Do not overload the person with several questions at the same time. Give the applicant the opportunity to clarify statements.  
**Example:** "You have heard good things about our sales force, why do you think you would enjoy working here?" Not "What have you heard about our sales force? Who told you? Do you believe it? Why do you want to work here? Do you think you will be a good sales trainee?"

## MEET SOME INTERVIEW SUCCESSSES AND FAILURES

▪ <b>SUCCESSSES</b>	▪ <b>FAILURES</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Interviewers who do a thorough analysis of job requirements in advance.</li> <li>▪ Interviewers who compare qualifications on the application with the job requirements prior to the interview.</li> <li>▪ Interviewers who develop a logical plan in advance based on information required to make a selection decision.</li> <li>▪ Interviewers who get applicants to talk freely, and listen while they do so.</li> <li>▪ Interviewers who adhere to equal employment opportunity guidelines.</li> <li>▪ Interviewers who evaluate the facts, and avoid premature conclusions and stereotyping.</li> <li>▪ Interviewers who make selection decisions based on the applicant's qualifications and ability to handle the job requirements.</li> </ul> <p style="margin-top: 20px;">Add from your own experience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪</li> <li>▪</li> <li>▪</li> <li>▪</li> <li>▪</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Interviewers who rely on memory for job requirements.</li> <li>▪ Interviewers who examine applications only superficially before the interview.</li> <li>▪ Interviewers who interview without a plan.</li> <li>▪ Interviewers who do most of the talking and very little listening.</li> <li>▪ Interviewers who disregard the legal implications of their actions.</li> <li>▪ Interviewers heavily influenced by characteristics that are not job related.</li> <li>▪ Interviewers who make job selections casually with limited consideration of qualifications versus job requirements.</li> </ul> <p style="margin-top: 20px;">Add from your own experience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪</li> <li>▪</li> <li>▪</li> <li>▪</li> <li>▪</li> </ul>

## WHAT INFORMATION IS NEEDED

- What previous experience or education has the applicant had which relates to the available job position?
- What are the vocational objectives of the applicant?
- Why does the applicant want to work for this company?
- How familiar is the applicant with this company and the position he or she is seeking?
- Why does the applicant think he or she should be hired? What contributions can the applicant make to the company?
- How much money does the applicant want to earn? Why?
- If the applicant is currently employed, why is he or she seeking a different job?



## HOW TO EVALUATE CANDIDATES OBJECTIVELY

There are several ways to maintain objectivity when evaluating prospective employees. They include the following. Check those you agree are important.

- Evaluate the extent of the applicant's experience and the effectiveness of past performance against your job requirements. Are both acceptable? Try to remember that ten years of experience is quite different from one year of experience ten times. Focus on what was accomplished in past jobs.
- Determine the level of responsibility previously held by the applicant. Is it about the same? More? Less? Can the applicant make the transition to the position in question?
- Examine the skill and knowledge level of the applicant. Are they adequate to meet your needs? Are they applicable to the job?
- Identify the applicant's strengths. Are they adaptable? Will they enhance the position in question?
- Determine the applicant's weaknesses. Would they have a negative effect on performance, or be inconsequential?
- Evaluate indicators of stability and progress. Can you reasonably project the future based on the past record? Are stability and progress important to the job?
- Will the applicant be compatible with others in the work group?
- Probe the history of the candidate to determine past dependability, productivity, and attitude toward work, co-workers, supervision, and customers.

# SAMPLE INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES

## *NONDIRECTIVE TECHNIQUES*

### 1. PAUSE.

The most purely non-directive technique is the pause, where the interviewer looks at the applicant but does not speak. A pause of ten seconds puts great pressure on the respondent to say more.

Example:

Applicant: You know I think they took advantage of me?  
Interviewer: Silence – 5 to 10 seconds  
Applicant: Yeah, they promised me a promotion but I never got it.

### 2. NEUTRAL RESPONSE, SUCH AS HEAD NOD, OR "UH HUH".

A large body of research demonstrates that, if the interviewer simply nods his or her head or says "uh huh," the respondent will be encouraged to say more. This is just a subtle way of showing respondents that you are paying attention and taking in what they are saying.

### 3. REFLECTING IDEAS.

Here the interviewer paraphrases what the other party has said.

Respondent: "...and I also filled in for the foreman when he was tied up."  
Interviewer: "So, you did occasionally have some supervisory responsibility on this job."  
Respondent: "Oh yes, the boss was usually away a couple of days each month and I would handle scheduling of the work for five men, also..."

### 4. REFLECTIVE FEELINGS.

Every spoken thought has two components: an idea and the speaker's feeling about the idea. Often the feeling component is indifferent, but in some interviews very strong feelings can be expressed. It is crucial that the interviewer detect and acknowledge the respondent's feelings rather than trying to ignore them.

*Example 1*

Respondent: "I figured that I couldn't do their work and mine, so I had to stop helping out the other supervisors as much as I used to."  
Interviewer: "You don't sound very happy about that decision."  
Respondent: "I'm not, but I had to cut down. I was spreading myself too thin."  
Interviewer: "I guess you felt practically at your wit's end."  
Respondent: "Well, I just couldn't think of anything else to do."

*Example 2*

Applicant: "I didn't get any credit for the new system even though it was my idea and I worked over 1,000 hours on it."

Interviewer: "You feel your creativity and willingness to work long hours were not appreciated?"

**5. SUMMARIZING.**

It serves as a stimulus for the respondent to add more.

*Example 1*

Interviewer: "So in essence, you are having difficulty adjusting to this new team member."

Respondent: "Well, that's part of it, but the addition of that person has also altered my job. You see, I used to have sole responsibility ..."

Respondent: "... and in addition to my major responsibility of supervising the clerks and scheduling their work, I was also charged with controlling the budget."

Interviewer: "So your primary supervisory responsibilities were to plan the work day, allocate work loads to your various clerks, and check their work on a daily basis. You also kept the department within budget. Is that correct?"

Respondent: "Yes"

Interviewer: "Well I think I understand that part of your former work quite well. Now I'd like to turn to another topic. To what extent did you get involved in the actual technical detail of your clerk's work?"

*Example 2:*

Applicant: "So basically it was my baby all the way."

Interviewer: "It was your idea, you sold it to management, and then worked out all the details. Right?"

# **SAMPLE INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES**

## ***DIRECTIVE TECHNIQUES***

### **1. OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS**

An open-ended question is simply one which cannot be answered yes or no. While these questions are useful throughout the interview, they are particularly appropriate in the early stages to get the respondent talking. An early open-ended question might be, "What were the major responsibilities of your most recent job?"

### **2. SPECIFIC PROBE**

This type of question is used to focus on a particular topic, seek new information to build on a previous statement, or repeat a question.

Respondent: "I've always had the ability to get my employees to extend themselves and work hard for me."

Interviewer: "So you feel you've had success at motivating people. What specific steps do you take to promote this kind of motivation in your employees?"

Applicant: I was beginning to pick up vibrations that my job might be phased out.

Interviewer: U-huh. What vibrations?

Interviewer: Which of your qualifications contributed to your promotion?

Applicant: Well, you see the former supervisor retired, so the job was open.

Interviewer. I see. But which of your qualifications contributed to your promotion?

### **3. CLARIFYING INFORMATION OR INCONSISTENCIES**

A clarifying question attempts to determine the meaning of a response, or to resolve inconsistencies.

Applicant: A person who is not part of the in group can't expect an increase.

Interviewer: What do you mean by in group?

Applicant: That being the case, I decided to look for another job.

Interviewer: I'm sorry, I seem to be confused. I thought you left that job to finish your analytical training.



## FINAL CHECKLIST FOR INTERVIEWER

- Did I try to make a favorable impression on the candidate during the first few minutes of the interview?
- Did I refrain from making any judgment about the candidate during the first few minutes of the interview?
- Did I put the candidate at ease?
- Did I pause after the candidate seemingly finished a remark to give him a chance to talk further?
- Did I occasionally repeat parts of the key sentences of the candidate in a questioning tone to secure elaboration?
- Did I ask one question at a time?
- Did I make my questions clear?
- Did I avoid asking questions that suggested the answer I wanted?
- Did I appear interested in the candidate and give him full attention?
- Did I avoid expressing approval or disapproval of the candidate?
- Did I avoid indicating my own attitude?
- Did I use language appropriate to the candidate?
- Did I allow the candidate to digress briefly without abruptly returning him to the point?
- Did I talk the minimum amount?
- Did I control the direction of the interview?
- Did I obtain maximum information on all relevant points?
- Did I follow up leads?
- Did I spend most of the time exploring areas on which information could not be obtained as well from other sources – for instance, reference checks?
- Did I get a complete work history?
- Did I take notes of important points?
- Did I avoid taking notes when the candidate was under stress?
- Did I hear and see the vocal and physical mannerisms of the applicant as well as listen carefully to what he said?
- Did I give the candidate an opportunity to ask questions?
- Did I sell the job if this was deemed desirable? Did I sell at the right time?
- Did I continue observing until the candidate left the room?
- Did the applicant have a good impression of the organization when he left?
- Did the candidate leave with a feeling that he had had an opportunity to do himself full justice?

# 30 Interview Questions You Can't Ask and 30 Legal Alternatives

Updated: September 21, 2013

In every job interview, the goal is to obtain important information while building a friendly rapport with the candidate. But some questions are just a little *too* friendly. Protect yourself and your company from legal trouble and embarrassment by avoiding the wrong questions while still getting to the root of the concern behind the question. Read on for 30 ways to turn litigious questions into insightful, legal alternatives.



## Nationality

Certainly, you want to be sure that a candidate can legally work for you, but it's important to be careful how you ask. These questions address citizenship, language and other touchy subjects.

1. What you can't ask: Are you a U.S. citizen?

Although this seems like the simplest and most direct way to find out if an interviewee is legally able to work for your company, it's hands-off. Rather than inquiring about citizenship, question whether or not the candidate is authorized for work.

*What to ask instead.* Are you authorized to work in the U.S.?

2. What you can't ask: What is your native tongue?

Finding out about a candidate's native language may seem like a good way to find out about their fluency, but you may offend applicants that are sensitive to common assumptions about their language. Additionally, as an employer, it's not your concern how the applicant attained fluency in a language – just that they are fluent.

*What to ask instead:* What languages do you read, speak or write fluently?

3. What you can't ask: How long have you lived here?

Familiarity with local culture may be important to the position, but it's important not to ask about a candidate's residency in the country or region directly. Rather, ask about their current situation, and they may volunteer information about their past along the way.

*What to ask instead:* What is your current address and phone number? Do you have any alternative locations where you can be reached?

## Religion

Religion is a subject that should be treaded upon lightly at the office, and even more so in interviews. Protect yourself from overstepping the boundaries but still get the information you need with these questions.

1. What you can't ask: What religion do you practice?

You may want to know about religious practices to find out about weekend work schedules, but it's imperative that you refrain from asking directly about a candidate's beliefs. Instead, just ask directly when they're able to work, and there will be no confusion.

*What to ask instead:* What days are you available to work?

2. What you can't ask: Which religious holidays do you observe?

Again, scheduling is important, but don't risk stepping on toes to find out what you need to know. Simply confirm that your interviewee can work when you need them to.

*What to ask instead:* Are you able to work with our required schedule?

3. What you can't ask: Do you belong to a club or social organization?

This question is too revealing of political and religious affiliations and candidates are not required to share such information with potential employers. Additionally, this questions has little to no relation to a candidate's ability to do a job. For this question, it's important that the wording focuses on work.

*What to ask instead:* Are you a member of a professional or trade group that is relevant to our industry?

## Age

Maturity is essential for most positions, but it's important that you don't make assumptions about a candidate's maturity based on age. Alternately, you have to be careful about discrimination towards applicants nearing retirement. These questions will keep you in the clear.

### 1. What you can't ask: How old are you?

While it seems like a simple question, it's in fact quite loaded. Knowledge of an applicant's age can set you up for discrimination troubles down the road. To be safe, just ensure that the candidate is legally old enough to work for your firm.

*What to ask instead:* Are you over the age of 18?

### 2. What you can't ask: How much longer do you plan to work before you retire?

Again, asking this question opens up discrimination troubles. While you may not want to hire an older worker who will retire in a few years, you can't dismiss an applicant for this reason. Instead, see what the candidate's plans are for the future; they may plan to work for a number of years.

*What to ask instead:* What are your long-term career goals?

## Marital and Family Status

These questions primarily concern women with children, but they're applicable to everyone. Ensure that you don't make assumptions, and avoid embarrassing candidates by using the following questions.

### 1. What you can't ask: Is this your maiden name?

This question, like many others, may seem innocent and simple, but it's off-limits. A woman's marital status isn't something that's required to be shared with employers. Instead, verify whether or not she's gained experience using any other names.

*What to ask instead:* Have you worked or earned a degree under another name?

### 2. What you can't ask: Do you have or plan to have children?

Clearly, the concern here is that family obligations will get in the way of work hours. Instead of asking about or making assumptions on family situations, get to the root of the issue by asking directly about the candidate's availability.

*What to ask instead:* Are you available to work overtime on occasion? Can you travel?

### 3. What you can't ask: Can you get a babysitter on short notice for overtime or travel?

Don't make the mistake of assuming that a candidate has children or that they don't already have proper child care plans. As with many other questions, the key here is to ask directly about availability.

*What to ask instead:* You'll be required to travel or work overtime on short notice. Is this a problem for you?



4. What you can't ask: Do you have kids?

This one is for positions in which the candidate may work with children. The added experience of children at home may be a bonus for you, but it's not an employer's place to ask about this. Rather, inquire about the candidate's experience, and they may volunteer this information to you anyway.

*What to ask instead:* What is your experience with "x" age group?

5. What you can't ask: Who is your closest relative to notify in case of an emergency?

Although not especially offensive, this question makes assumptions about the candidate's personal life. They may not be close to relatives and instead prefer to list a friend or caretaker.

*What to ask instead:* In case of emergency, who should we notify?

6. What you can't ask: What do your parents do for a living?

Asking a candidate about their parents can reveal a lot, but it's not directly related to their future performance in a position. However, if you are trying to find out if your candidate's family has traditionally worked in your industry, this question is a good way to find out.

*What to ask instead:* Tell me how you became interested in the "x" industry.

7. What you can't ask: If you get pregnant, will you continue to work, and will you come back after maternity leave?

Ultimately, you want to invest your time in a candidate that will stick around, but you can't ask a woman to share her pregnancy plans, or lack thereof, with you. Discuss her general plans for the future to gauge her commitment level, baby or not.

*What to ask instead:* What are your long-term career goals?

## Gender

Once you've reached the interview stage, a candidate's gender is almost always clear. It is important, however, to ensure that you don't make assumptions about a person's abilities based on this information.

1. What you can't ask: We've always had a man/woman do this job. How do you think you will stack up?

Leave gender out of this question, and you should be fine. Inquire about the applicant's ability to handle the job, but don't ask directly about how being a man or woman could affect it.

*What to ask instead:* What do you have to offer our company?

2. What you can't ask: How do you feel about supervising men/women?

This question, although it may seem like a valid concern, is not acceptable. The candidate may not have any issues working with the opposite or same sex, and you'll seem crass for even bringing it up.

*What to ask instead:* Tell me about your previous experience managing teams.

3. What you can't ask: What do you think of interoffice dating?

The practice of interoffice dating can be distracting, break up teams and cause a number of other problems in the workplace. But asking this question makes assumptions about the candidate's marital status and may even be interpreted as a come-on.

*What to ask instead:* Have you ever been disciplined for your behavior at work?

## Health and Physical Abilities

Your employees' health and abilities may be essential to getting the job done, but it's important to avoid assumptions and discrimination. Stick to these questions in order to avoid embarrassment and legal troubles.

1. What you can't ask: Do you smoke or drink?

As an employer, you probably want to avoid someone who has a drinking problem or will take multiple smoke breaks throughout the day. It's even a concern for insurance. Instead of asking about this directly, find out if they've had trouble with health policies in the past.

*What to ask instead:* In the past, have you been disciplined for violating company policies forbidding the use of alcohol or tobacco products?

2. What you can't ask: Do you take drugs?

This question is just a simple confusion of terms. Your interviewee may think you're asking about prescription drugs, which is off-limits. Make sure you specify that you want to know about illegal drug use instead.

*What to ask instead:* Do you use illegal drugs?

3. What you can't ask: How tall are you?

In a labor environment, height may be essential to the job, but this question is too personal. As with many of these questions, it's best just to ask directly about the candidate's ability to do what's required of them.

*What to ask instead:* Are you able to reach items on a shelf that's five feet tall?

4. What you can't ask: How much do you weigh?

This highly personal question is embarrassing for most and is not necessarily relevant to a candidate's ability to do even a physical-labor job. Avoid making assumptions, and ask about abilities directly.

*What to ask instead:* Are you able to lift boxes weighing up to 50 pounds?

5. What you can't ask: How many sick days did you take last year?

No one wants a flaky employee, but even the most dedicated workers get sick every now and

then. Take a look at missed days as a whole to measure the candidate's commitment.

*What to ask instead:* How many days of work did you miss last year?

6. What you can't ask: Do you have any disabilities?

Disabilities, whether they're physical or mental, may affect a candidate's ability to do the job, but it's critical that you avoid asking about them. Rather, find out if the applicant can handle doing what's required.

*What to ask instead:* Are you able to perform the specific duties of this position?

7. What you can't ask: Have you had any recent or past illnesses or operations?

Again, gauging commitment is important, but illness isn't something that most people can help. The answer here is to make sure that the candidate can perform the job while avoiding questions about his or her physical abilities.

*What to ask instead:* Are you able to perform the essential functions of this job with or without reasonable accommodations?

## Miscellaneous

Avoid interviewing gaffes by sidestepping these questions about residence, legal troubles and military service.

1. What you can't ask: How far is your commute?

Although hiring employees who live close by may be convenient, you can't choose candidates based on their location. Find out about their availability instead.

*What to ask instead:* Are you able to start work at 8 a.m.?

2. What you can't ask: Do you live nearby?

If your candidate lives outside of the city your company is hiring in, it may be necessary to have them move to your area. But again, you can't discriminate based on location. Rather, find out if the applicant is willing to move closer to the office.

*What to ask instead:* Are you willing to relocate?

3. What you can't ask: Have you ever been arrested?

In sensitive positions, like those that deal with money, you may want to find out about your candidate's legal fortitude. But ensure that you ask only directly about crimes that relate to your concern.

*What to ask instead:* Have you ever been convicted of "x" (fraud, theft and so on)?

4. What you can't ask: Were you honorably discharged from the military?

A bad military record can be illuminating, but you can't ask about it. Instead, ask about the candidate's experience, and they may volunteer this information on their own.

*What to ask instead:* Tell me how your experience in the military can benefit the company.

5. What you can't ask: Are you a member of the National Guard or Reserves?

Losing an employee to military service can be disrupting, but it's critical that you don't discriminate based on assumptions of a candidate's upcoming military commitments. Find out what their plans are for the short term instead.

*What to ask instead:* Do you have any upcoming events that would require extensive time away from work?

## Related Categories

- Accounting (/accounting)
- Business Intelligence (/business-intelligence/business-intelligence)
- CRM (/crm)
- ERP (/erp)
- HR Software (/human-resources)
- Marketing Automation (/marketing-automation)
- Pricing & Demos (/pricing-demos)

## Featured Research

### 10 Ways to Wow Your New Hire (/resources/item/10-ways-to-wow-your-new-hire)



(/resources/item/10-ways-to-wow-your-new-hire) Fewer than 1 in 3 employees in the workforce today describe themselves as "engaged." And more and more,

engagement, or lack thereof, is cited as a reason people leave jobs. How do you foster engagement and when does it start? Discover how the following 10 new hire best practices can ease new employees' entry into your organization and help turn new hires into passionate, productive team players. more (/resources/item/10-ways-to-wow-your-new-hire)



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CONFIDENTIAL

Background Check Authorization

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
(First) (Middle) (Last)

Former Name(s) and Dates Used: \_\_\_\_\_

Current Address Since: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Mo/Yr) (Street) (City) (Zip/State)

Previous Address From: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Mo/Yr) (Street) (City) (Zip/State)

Previous Address From: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Mo/Yr) (Street) (City) (Zip/State)

Social Security Number: \_\_\_\_\_ DOB: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Drivers License Number/State: \_\_\_\_\_

The information contained in this application is correct to the best of my knowledge.

I hereby authorize \_\_\_\_\_ and its designated agents and representatives to conduct a comprehensive review of my background causing a consumer report and/or an investigative consumer report to be generated for employment and/or volunteer purposes. I understand that the scope of the consumer report/ investigative consumer report may include, but is not limited to the following areas: verification of social security number; credit reports, current and previous residences; employment history, education background, character references; drug testing, civil and criminal history records from any criminal justice agency in any or all federal, state, county jurisdictions; driving records, birth records, and any other public records.

I further authorize any individual, company, firm, corporation, or public agency to divulge any and all information, verbal or written, pertaining to me, to \_\_\_\_\_ or its agents. I further authorize the complete release of any records or data pertaining to me which the individual, company, firm, corporation, or public agency may have, to include information or data received from other sources. \_\_\_\_\_ and its designated agents and representatives shall maintain all information received from this authorization in a confidential manner in order to protect the applicants personal information, including, but not limited to, addresses, social security numbers, and dates of birth.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Notice to California, Minnesota and Oklahoma Residents:**  
Please check the box below if you wish to receive a copy of a consumer report that is requested.  
 I wish to receive a copy of any Background Check Report on me that is requested.



**BACKGROUND RESEARCH AND REFERENCE CHECK FORM**  
(For use as a telephone checklist or to mail to employers)

\_\_\_\_\_ has applied for the position of \_\_\_\_\_  
with \_\_\_\_\_

Your considered and frank evaluation will be appreciated.

**A. EMPLOYMENT REFERENCE**

Applicant stated he/she was employed by you from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_  
in the capacity of \_\_\_\_\_ Is that  
correct? \_\_\_\_\_ If not, please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

Applicant stated his/her salary was \$ \_\_\_\_\_ per \_\_\_\_\_. Is that correct? \_\_\_\_\_

Did that include bonus, overtime, fringe benefits, etc.? \_\_\_\_\_

Did someone refer this employee to you? \_\_\_\_\_ Who? \_\_\_\_\_

How well did he/she carry out his/her duties for you? \_\_\_\_\_

If he/she was good at the job, did you try to get him/her to stay? Please explain:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

When there was a particularly urgent assignment, what steps did he/she take to  
make sure it was done on time? \_\_\_\_\_

His/her current resume describes the job with your organization as \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Do you agree? \_\_\_\_\_

How did he/she get along with other employees? \_\_\_\_\_

Was he or she absent from work more often than average for your employees?

Explain:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Continued*

b.

**PERSONAL REFERENCE**

How long have you known applicant? \_\_\_\_\_

In what capacity? \_\_\_\_\_

When did you last have contact with him/her? \_\_\_\_\_

How? \_\_\_\_\_

**C. EMPLOYMENT AND PERSONAL REFERENCE**

To your knowledge, is there anything that would prevent this person from holding or performing satisfactorily in this responsible job?  Yes  No:

If yes, please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

None of us is perfect at everything. Please describe the applicant's shortcomings: \_\_\_\_\_

To your knowledge, has this person ever been convicted of a felony or other crime in a civilian or military court (excluding minor traffic violations)?  Yes  No

If yes, please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

**REMARKS:** (Please add any comments you think would be helpful to us in assessing this applicant's suitability for the job listed above. Thank you.) \_\_\_\_\_

Name and Title of Person Providing This Information: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Number: ( ) \_\_\_\_\_

Organization/Company Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_

*Signature*

*Date*

Thank you -- A stamped, return-addressed envelope is enclosed.

**SAMPLE "NO HIRE" LETTER**

*(Typed on Letterhead)*

**(Date)**

**(Applicant's Name  
and Address)**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

After careful consideration, another applicant was selected for the \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ position available with \_\_\_\_\_  
(COG)

We greatly appreciated the response of so many well qualified applicants and your particular effort to inform us of your background and experience.

Again, thank you for the interest you have expressed in our opportunity, and please accept our best wishes for the future.

Sincerely,

Executive Director

## Appalachian Council of Governments Employee Orientation Checklist

### Finance

- Payroll
- W-4
- Direct Deposit
- Health Insurance (payroll deduction)
- SC Deferred Compensation/ 401k
- SC Retirement System
- Disability Insurance
- Flexible Medical Spending (ProBenefits)
- Dependent Care account
- Optional insurance / AFLAC
- Coffee fund/ employee fund
- Credit Union
- United Way
- Health Insurance Policy/ Claims

### Administration

- Policy manual
- Building keys
- Business cards
- Regional directory
- Organization chart/ staff directory
- Phone and address list
- Front desk sign-out procedures
- Vehicle sign-out
- Vehicle/fuel procedures
- Parking
- Fire alarm/ fire drill
- Security alarm instructions
- Recycling
- Mailbox
- Meetings/ meals
- Kitchen rules

### Workroom/ Equipment

- Copier codes/ procedures

- Binder machine
- Mailing instructions
- UPS/Fed Ex instructions
- Use of Fax
- Personal mail/ copies
- Room sign-out
- Equipment sign-out

### **Computer/ Communications**

- E-mail address
- E-mail overview
- Login password
- Phone instructions/ Voicemail
- ACOG Home Page
- Overview of server system, shared drives

### **Department**

- Staff introduction
- ACOG service area Map
- Supplies
- Work hours
- Flex time
- Time sheets
- How to- Check requisitions, travel/ meal reimbursement
- Overview of dress code, smoking policy

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**Department Director**

---

**Employee**

**\* Place this completed and signed checklist in the employee's personnel file. Give a copy to the employee.**

#### Useful information websites:

S.C. Appalachian Council of Governments -	<a href="http://www.scacog.org">www.scacog.org</a>
S.C. Retirement System -	<a href="http://www.retirement.sc.gov">www.retirement.sc.gov</a>
S.C. Deferred Compensation, 401k savings (optional) -	<a href="http://www.scrs.csplans.com">www.scrs.csplans.com</a>
Medical Flexible Spending (optional) -	<a href="http://www.probenefits.com">www.probenefits.com</a>
Health insurance claims, SCLGAG -	<a href="http://www.masc.sc/rms/healthclaimspage.aspx">www.masc.sc/rms/healthclaimspage.aspx</a>
S.C. General Assembly Homepage (SC Law, Regulations)	<a href="http://www.scstatehouse.net">www.scstatehouse.net</a>



# JOB DESCRIPTION WRITING GUIDE

This guide provides the basics of writing a job description and covers the following sections of the job description:

- ◆ **Position Details**
- ◆ **Job Duties (“What you do”)**
- ◆ **Performance Standards (“How you do it”)**
- ◆ **Job Factors**

For more comprehensive instruction, the Compensation Department offers Job Description workshops to provide administrators, managers, supervisors, and staff employees with the necessary tools to write effective job descriptions. Please see the Compensation Main page or FSDP page on the Organization Development website for dates and times of the next Job Description Workshop available to you.

## POSITION DETAILS

This Position Details section contains general information about the job – the current or requested classification, working title, pay range, exemption status, department name and number, position number, percentage of effort, the job description summary, comparable positions, etc.

**Working Title** – The working title for a job should be based upon the main function or role of the job. It is important to stray away from vague and very specific job titles, instead create a working title that appropriately describes both the level of responsibility and role of the job. Here are some examples of good working titles and those that need some improvement:

### Good Working Titles

Program Director  
Administrative Assistant  
Help Desk Support Analyst  
Business Manager

### Working Titles that need improvement

Director of the XYZ Program at the School of AB  
Assistant to the Director of ABC Dept  
Systems Programmer II  
Administrator III

**Job Description Summary** – The job description summary:

- \* Contains 1 - 3 paragraphs
- \* Summarizes the main points of the job description which may include key responsibilities, functions, and duties; education and experience requirements; and any other pertinent information (i.e. scheduling requirements, travel, etc)
- \* Is used in job postings

**Comparable Positions** – Use this section to list any positions in the department that have a similar role or level of responsibility. It is useful to the Compensation Analyst during the classification process and helps to ensure positions are classified consistently.

On the following page, you will find an example of the Position Details section.

# JOB DESCRIPTION WRITING GUIDE

## Position Title

<b>Job Classification</b>	Administrator I
<b>Hiring Range</b>	\$20,064.00-\$30,480.00
<b>FLSA Status</b>	Non-Exempt
<b>Provisional Period</b>	6 Months
<b>Pay grade level</b>	5
<b>EEO-6 Category</b>	PR
<b>Salary Minimum</b>	\$20,064.00
<b>Salary Midpoint</b>	\$30,480.00
<b>Salary Maximum</b>	\$40,896.00

## Position Information

<b>Department</b>	99999 – Department Name
<b>Working Title</b>	Admissions Coordinator
<b>Assignment Category</b>	Regular, Full-Time
<b>Position number:</b>	5557777
<b>Campus</b>	Oakland
<b>If other campus, please specify</b>	
<b>Job Type</b>	Staff
<b>Bargaining Unit</b>	
<b>Staff Work Months</b>	12
<b>Percent of Effort</b> (Use numbers only)	100

### Job Description Summary

(Note: This summary is the language that will be used in the posting to advertise the position on the OHR Employment Web site.)

The Admissions Coordinator is responsible for administering the admissions and registration processes and providing administrative support to the Program Director. Administration of the admissions process includes serving as the primary point of contact for potential students, preparing recruitment event materials, processing applications, coordinating the transcript evaluation process, and preparing admissions correspondence. Coordinate the initial registration process for students, review and coordinate the transfer credit evaluation process, post transfer credits, and provide general information to students. Administrative support to the Program Director includes preparing general correspondence, answering phone calls, assisting with meeting preparation, making travel arrangements, etc.

A qualified candidate should have one to two years of experience in an academic support or secretarial position, preferably in a University setting. An associate's degree is preferred.

### Comparable Positions

(If there are any comparable positions within the department, identify these positions by position number and note the similarities and differences.)

#1234567

# JOB DESCRIPTION WRITING GUIDE

## JOB DUTIES

The Job Duties section is the foundation of the Job Description. It conveys the complexity, scope, and level of responsibility of a job. Due to the significance of this section, it is important to accurately, concisely, and completely describe the duties and responsibilities of a job.

This section of the Job Description is comprised of three main elements:

<b>Key Accountabilities</b>	The main areas of responsibility within a job, or "buckets of work." A job description usually contains three to five Key Accountabilities.
<b>Duty Statements</b>	Sentences that provide additional information about the tasks associated with the Key Accountability.
<b>Percentage of Time</b>	Estimates the portion of the job that is spent on a particular Key Accountability.

### Job Duties Writing Methods

When the Job Duties are well written and organized, they can accurately convey the complexity, scope, and level of responsibility of a job. To assist in the organization and writing of the Job Duties, two writing methods have been developed:

#### **Method # 1:**

1. Think of the job in terms of its Key Accountabilities, or main responsibilities/functions. Typically, a job will have 3 - 5 major Key Accountabilities. Here are some examples:
  - Budget Management
  - Executive Support
  - Event Coordination
2. After establishing the Key Accountabilities, generate specific job duties associated with each. These are the individual tasks or duties that correspond to the Key Accountability. For example, specific Budget Management duties might include:
  - Prepare budgetary reports
  - Analyze expenditures
  - Monitor levels
3. Condense the specific job duties into two to three concise "Duty Statements," beginning each statement with an **action verb** (see page 8 for a list).

# JOB DESCRIPTION WRITING GUIDE

## Method # 2:

1. Brainstorm a list of all the duties required to perform the job. These are the individual tasks completed on a daily, weekly, monthly or annual basis. Below is an example of a task list:
  - Arrange for catering
  - Compose and types correspondence
  - Coordinate logistical support for meetings, seminars, and departmental events
  - Determine and secures the event location
  - Make travel arrangements
  - Monitor levels
  - Prepare budgetary reports
2. Review the list and group the duties based upon the specific functions and responsibilities of the position, also known as Key Accountabilities.
3. Establish the Key Accountabilities. For this group, the Key Accountabilities may include: Event Coordination, Administrative Support, and Budget Administration.
4. Condense the specific job duties into two to three concise "Duty Statements," beginning each statement with an **action verb** (see page 8 for a list).

Here is an example of a well written and organized Key Accountability Section in a Job Description:

<b>Key Accountability</b>	<b>Event Coordination</b>
<b>Duty Statements</b>	Coordinate all Dean's Office events. This includes securing the event location, scheduling presenters, coordinating the production of event marketing materials and programs, maintaining the RSVP list, and making all catering arrangements. At the event, supervise the event staff and greet the guests.
<b>Percentage of Time</b>	<b>15%</b>

To summarize, here are some things to remember when completing the Job Duties section of the job description:

- \* The Job Duties section should contain 3 - 5 Key Accountabilities.
- \* Title each Key Accountability section to summarize the function / role.
- \* Include 2 - 3 concise Duty Statements for each Key Accountability. The Duty Statements expand upon that particular area of responsibility as well as the role and complexity of the position.
- \* Begin Duty Statement with an **action verb** (see page 8 for a list).
- \* Limit the listing of Duty Statements and Key Accountabilities to what is required to perform the job.
- \* Do not include duties that are no longer performed or those that may be required in the future.
- \* Write the duties in terms of what the position requires, **not** based upon the capabilities of any individual.
- \* Determine an accurate percentage of time the incumbent should spend on that particular Key Accountability over the course of a year

# JOB DESCRIPTION WRITING GUIDE

## PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

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The Performance Standards section:

- \* Conveys the expectations of the job
- \* Depicts the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to be successful in the job
- \* Provides a basis for measuring performance

This section is typically completed by either the supervisor, hiring manager, or designated administrator in the department. There is a Performance Standards section associated with each Key Accountability which provides information about the performance expectations of that particular area of responsibility. Here is an example of a Performance Standard for the "Event Coordination" example in the Job Content Section:

Key Accountability	<i>Event Coordination</i>
<b>Duty Statements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Coordinate departmental and programmatic events</li> <li>▪ Secure the location</li> <li>▪ Schedule presenters</li> <li>▪ Make travel arrangements</li> <li>▪ Coordinate the production of program / event marketing materials</li> <li>▪ Maintain RSVP list</li> <li>▪ Make arrangements for catering and any necessary equipment</li> <li>▪ Staff the event</li> </ul>
<b>Performance Standards</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Event Coordination activities are expected to be carried out with minor supervision.</li> <li>▪ Must be capable of setting priorities and working under pressure</li> <li>▪ Must be able to multi-task, planning several events simultaneously</li> <li>▪ Ability to work well with internal and external participants is essential</li> <li>▪ Knowledge of Microsoft Office Suite is imperative</li> </ul>



# JOB DESCRIPTION WRITING GUIDE

## JOB FACTORS

The **Job Factors** section of the job description outlines the knowledge and skills required to successfully function in the job. The Job Factors cover a variety of areas pertaining to the job, for example, the level of education/experience required, supervision received, and analytical skills and ability required for the job.

The assignment of Job Factors should be completed by the supervisor, hiring manager, or departmental administrator, and, should be reflective of the general responsibility level of that position. For example, an employee in an Administrator I classification would not be expected to be responsible for interviewing, selecting and hiring someone into an Administrator IV position, but may be responsible for interviewing, selecting and hiring a student worker. It is important to remember to include only information that pertains to the position and **not** specific to the skills, experience, and education of the incumbent. The following are all the Job Factors listed in a job description and examples of responses:

<b>Minimum Education Level Required</b>	Baccalaureate
<b>The minimum experience level required</b> (All qualifications listed <b>must</b> be job related.)	Three years of relevant administrative, marketing and/or event planning experience is preferred.
<b>The amount of supervision received by the employee</b> (What is the job classification and working title of the supervisor? How, and to what extent, is the employee's work checked? Note the distinction between initial or special training and ongoing supervision.)	The incumbent reports to the Assistant Director. After initial orientation, the incumbent will be given general direction from the Assistant Director, but is expected to perform duties and responsibilities independently.
<b>The analytical skill required</b> (What is the complexity or standardization of the tasks which are performed?)	The job requires excellent analytical and communication skills as statistical and financial reporting is an essential element to this position.
<b>BOTH the level and budget volume (Dollar Amount) of financial responsibility/accountability</b> (What is the extent of the employee's responsibility for calculating and verifying figures; gathering data; typing requisitions or budget documents; monitoring or analyzing expenditures; preparing reports; approving purchases; planning and authorizing department or grant budgets; etc?)	The incumbent is responsible for managing event budgets. This includes collaborating on budget development, monitoring and approving budgetary expenditures, and analyzing statistical and financial reports. The budget for a single event can range from \$5,000 - \$50,000.
<b>The impact of actions carried by this position</b> (What are the probable results of inadvertent error or mistake in judgment, interpretation, or exercise of responsibility?)	Poorly executed events could result in a negative image for the School and the University or potentially lose funding opportunities.
<b>BOTH the diversity and complexity of the supervision exercised</b> (List the job classification and working titles of those directly trained and/or supervised by this person.)	This position is not responsible for supervising any staff positions.
<b>The scope of the human resources impact of this position</b> (Explain supervisory role in hiring, firing, promoting, evaluating, increasing salaries, etc. of other employees. Does the position carry "lead" responsibility? Explain how, and to what extent, the work of others is checked by the employee.)	Occasionally responsible for interviewing prospective candidates and providing input into the hiring process.
<b>BOTH the level and nature of the INTERNAL contacts</b> (What, if any, University departments does the incumbent contact. Why are these contacts made and how frequently are they made?)	The incumbent has regular contact with senior level University staff and faculty, such as Deans, Directors, Senior Administrators, etc. In addition, the incumbent maintains contact with several areas across the University including University Marketing Communications, Institutional Advancement, the Special Events Office, etc.
<b>BOTH the level and nature of the EXTERNAL contacts</b>	External contacts include staff members at other colleges and universities, government and industry representatives.

# JOB DESCRIPTION WRITING GUIDE

## JOB DESCRIPTION DOS AND DON'TS

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Before writing a job description, here are some helpful hints to consider:

### **DO:**

- Refer to the Job Description Writing Guide
- Attend a Job Description Workshop
- Use a factual and impersonal style when writing the job description
- Base the job description on the department's needs
- Write an accurate, concise, and complete job description
- Use complete sentences
- Keep sentence structure as simple as possible, omitting unnecessary words that do not contribute pertinent information.
- Begin each duty/task with an **action verb** (see page 8 for a list).
- Be consistent when using terms like "may" and "occasionally." (These should be used to describe tasks that are performed once in a while, or tasks that only some employees perform.)
- Refer to job titles rather than incumbents, i.e., "Reports to \_\_\_\_\_ Manager" instead of "Reports to Mary Smith."
- Be precise. This is critical for accurate job evaluation and analysis.
- Focus on critical activities.
- Use a logical sequence in describing duties and responsibilities (Key Responsibility first, followed by the corresponding duties)
- Call your Compensation Analyst for guidance

### **DON'T:**

- Use the narrative form when writing a job description
- Base the content of the job description on the capabilities, skills, and interests of the incumbent
- Write the job description based upon the desired job classification
- Write the job description as step by step guide on how to do the job
- Include minor or occasional tasks, which are not unique to a specific job.

# JOB DESCRIPTION WRITING GUIDE

## ACTION VERBS

accommodate	communicate	draft	interface	recruit
achieve	compile	edit	interpret	reduce
acquire	complete	eliminate	interview	regulate
address	compose	enforce	investigate	report
adjust	compute	establish	issue	research
administer	conduct	evaluate	lift	resolve
advise	confer	execute	maintain	review
allocate	consolidate	expand	manage	schedule
analyze	construct	explore	monitor	search
apply	consult	facilitate	motivate	select
appoint	control	formulate	negotiate	solve
approve	coordinate	furnish	observe	specify
arrange	correspond	generate	operate	strategize
assess	counsel	guide	organize	streamline
assign	create	handle	participate	strengthen
assist	customize	hire	perform	summarize
audit	delegate	identify	plan	support
augment	deliver	illustrate	predict	teach
authorize	demonstrate	implement	prepare	train
budget	design	improve	present	translate
calculate	develop	improvise	process	troubleshoot
circulate	devise	incorporate	program	update
clarify	direct	increase	provide	validate
clear	disseminate	inform	quantify	verify
collaborate	distinguish	initiate	recognize	
collect	distribute	instruct	recommend	
combine	document	interact	record	



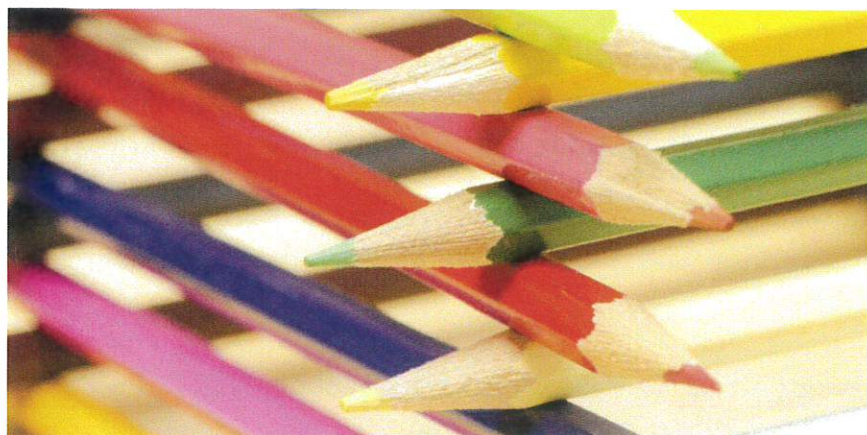
et the Free Newsletter

# VAK Learning Styles

## Understanding How Team Members Learn



By the  
Mind Tools  
Editorial Team



Explore these three learning styles to deliver training more effectively.

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aga7ta

The fact that you're reading this article shows that you have an appetite for learning and improving your skills. But even if you're happy to scroll through words on a screen, is that the best learning style for you?

Would you get more out of it if we were to present this information visually or aurally, perhaps through an infographic or flow chart, or with a podcast or vlog?

In this article we'll look at the VAK Learning Styles model and explore the importance to you and your team of understanding people's different styles of learning.

## What is the VAK Learning Styles Model?

The VAK Learning Styles Model was developed by psychologists in the 1920s to classify the most common ways that people learn. According to the model, most of us prefer to learn in one of three ways: visual, auditory or kinesthetic (although, in practice, we generally "mix and match" these three styles).

- **Visual:** a visually-dominant learner absorbs and retains information better when it is presented in, for example, pictures, diagrams and charts.
- **Auditory:** an auditory-dominant learner prefers listening to what is being presented. He or she responds best to voices, for example, in a lecture or group discussion. Hearing his own voice repeating something back to a tutor or trainer is also helpful.
- **Kinesthetic:** a kinesthetic-dominant learner prefers a physical experience. She likes a "hands-on" approach and responds well to being able to touch or feel an object or learning prop.

A variation on the acronym, developed by New Zealand-based teacher Neil D. Fleming, is **VAR<sup>K</sup>**, or visual, auditory, reading/writing, and kinesthetic:

- **Reading/Writing:** a reading- or writing-dominant learner uses repetition of words and writing. Clearly, there is an overlap with visual and auditory styles, as words and writing can be both, but, commonly, a person who prefers to learn this way remembers or organizes things best in his mind by taking down notes.

## Understanding Learning Preferences

You'll probably already have a good sense of what your learning preference is, as this will have been present from your earliest days at school. For example, is your default response to a problem or challenge to sketch something out on a piece of paper (visual), talk about it (auditory), or build a model or tangible representation of the problem (kinesthetic)?

If you are still unsure of your learning style, you may be able to identify it by considering these scenarios:



- **Think about how you complain.** When you complain about something, chances are your emotions are running high and you'll revert to the communication style you feel most comfortable with. Do you want to see the whites of someone's eyes (visual), harangue someone over the phone (auditory), hammer your fists on the table (kinesthetic), or fire off a curt email (reading/writing)?
- **Imagine yourself in an uncomfortable situation.** If you were lost in a strange city at night, how would you find your way to your destination? Would you use a map (visual), ask someone for directions (auditory), or just keep walking until you worked out where you were (kinesthetic)?
- **What style of presentation do you prefer?** Think back to the last presentation you attended. What was it that most stuck in your mind? Was it the charts or visual aids (visual), the words the presenter used (auditory), or any audience participation (kinesthetic)?

## Strategies for Improving Learning

Formal training for your team is likely the responsibility of your organization's L&D department. But, as a manager, there may also be occasions when you have to deliver basic training or coaching sessions, brief your people, or do team-building exercises. Understanding the three VAK learning styles will help you do all these things more effectively.

### Tip:

This article describes just one approach to learning styles. See our article, [4MAT](#), to explore other models and approaches, and see our other tools and resources [here](#).

The simplicity and intuitive usefulness of the VAK model has contributed to its enduring popularity with teachers and trainers, but it's important to remember that your people will have a different mix of strengths and preferences. So, when you have to deliver training or a presentation, ensure that you include a mixture of aids and methods that will engage your team members, whatever their preferred learning style.

One criticism of the model is that, while it is pretty self-evident that we all learn and retain information in different ways, there is little hard evidence to show that, in general,

you learn better if your training is tailored to one particular learning preference. As this Mind Tools **post** demonstrates, other factors also play their part, such as natural learning ability, technical skill level, interest in the subject, and the learning environment. Training needs to be flexible and responsive to circumstance and context, as well as to learning preference.

The table below offers some strategies you can employ to appeal to people's different learning styles:

<b>Visual</b>	<b>Auditory</b>	<b>Kinesthetic</b>
These learners will respond to and use phrases such as:	These learners will respond to and use phrases such as:	These learners will respond to and use phrases such as:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I see what you mean.</li> <li>• I get the picture.</li> <li>• What's your view?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That rings a bell.</li> <li>• I hear what you're saying.</li> <li>• That sounds OK to me.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That feels right.</li> <li>• How does that grab you?</li> <li>• Let me try.</li> </ul>
Engage visual learners by using diagrams, charts and pictures.	Engage auditory learners by stressing key words, and telling stories and anecdotes.	Engage kinesthetic learners by including physical activities and "hands-on" tasks.

We have numerous tools and resources to help you provide training sessions or prepare briefs for your team, which take into account the VAK learning styles.

Visual (and reading/writing) learners, as we have seen, respond to visual stimulus. They may find it easier to take notes if they use **Mind Maps**® ☺. Mind Mapping breaks down complex subjects into manageable chunks, making it easier to digest and remember information. And they can be made even more effective with color and additional images.

The adage "a picture paints a thousand words" is especially true for visual learners, so find out how to use images effectively and creatively with our article, **Creating Effective Presentation Visuals** ☺.

Auditory learners enjoy the back-and-forth of group discussion and verbal explanation, so it can be useful to include **brainstorming** ☺, debates and **storytelling** ☺ in your training sessions.

Kinesthetic learners thrive on activity, so a good technique is to incorporate group work or **role play** ☺ into your learning. Getting team members out of the training room and

into an environment where they can try things out, such as team-building exercises , can be helpful too.

## Key Points

Understanding your own learning preferences, and those of your team, can help you develop more effective strategies for delivering learning and training at work, and embedding knowledge.

You can use the VAK Learning Styles model to classify some of the most common ways people learn. VAK stands for visual, auditory and kinesthetic:

- **Visual:** learners respond to images and graphics.
- **Auditory:** learners prefer verbal presentations.
- **Kinesthetic:** learners prefer a physical, hands-on approach.

A variation on this is VARK®, or visual, auditory, reading/writing, and kinesthetic.

While understanding these preferences can give you a valuable insight into how to plan and deliver training and learning, people employ all three learning styles to some degree, so it is sensible to present material in a variety of formats.

This site teaches you the skills you need for a happy and successful career; and this is just one of many tools and resources that you'll find here at Mind Tools. Subscribe to our free newsletter, or join the Mind Tools Club and really supercharge your career!

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