

Interview Questions for Hiring Process Excellence Leaders

By Regina M. Clark, CSP

Being able to conduct an effective employment interview is critical to having the right people in the right jobs. Often, executives are asked to interview or screen applicants for critical positions and they don't know how to start the interview or what questions to ask. Every interview should begin with developing rapport or making the interviewee comfortable.

Next, the questions begin. Asking the right types of questions is crucial to an effective interview. Never ask questions that are illegal, like "Are you married?" Stay away from close ended questions that elicit a yes or no answer unless you need a yes or no answer. For example, "This position requires 50% international travel. Can you manage that?" or "How many years have you been involved with Process Excellence?" are appropriate close ended question. Generic questions like, "Tell me about yourself?" or "What are some of your strengths?" can be a waste of time, they do not elicit fact based answered. Let's face it; anyone can say good stuff about themselves. **Specific behavioral questions that are tied to the requirements of the job are the best types of questions to ask.** Here are a few behavioral questions that you can use when hiring a process excellence leader. Keep in mind that you are looking for someone that understands the business, has technical competence, leadership potential, and is a team player.

Technical Requirements

1. Describe your DMAIC project experience and tell me how the project was tied to a business initiative.
2. Describe your experience using Lean tools.
3. Describe your Design For Six Sigma project experience
4. How do you decide which tools to use?

Leadership potential

5. Describe a challenging situation that you were involved in as a process excellence person and tell me how you dealt with it.
6. Tell me about a mistake that you made and what you learned from the mistake.
7. What have you done to develop your leadership potential?
8. Tell me about a time when you were able to influence others to do something that they did not want to do.
9. Tell me about a risk that you have taken at work. What was the outcome?
10. Tell me about your role as a team member on a specific project team.
11. Tell me about a difficult person or boss that you have worked with. What was your approach in working effectively with him/her?

Training Requirement

12. Describe any teaching experience that you have had.

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13. Describe a time when you had a difficult person in your class and tell me how you handled the situation.
14. Tell me about your greatest challenge delivering Process Excellence training. Please be specific.
15. Tell me about a coaching or mentoring relationship that you have been involved in.
16. Share a story or example with me that you have used during training.

Negotiation

17. Tell me about a negotiation situation that you were in. Did you reach a mutually agreed upon outcome?

Change

18. Tell me about a time when you encountered a person that was resisting change, how did you help them embrace the change?
19. Describe a conflict situation that you were involved in and tell me about the outcome.
20. Tell me about a time when you challenged conventional wisdom to get something done.
21. Tell me about a major change that occurred in your work life and how you dealt with it.
22. Every Process Excellence Leader is a change agent. Tell me how you have been a change agent in the past

Customer Focus

23. Tell me about a positive experience that you have had working with a specific customer.
24. Tell me about a time that you were working with a customer and things didn't go so well.
25. How have you collected VOC data in the past?

Behavioral questions are challenging. The interviewee is forced to think of and share specific examples on the spot. Make sure that you allow silence to let the job candidate think. If he or she responds with, "*I can't think of anything*" say, "*take your time, we're not in a rush*" and be quiet. Eventually the job candidate will think of some examples.

Good interviewers also probe for contrary evidence. Everything can't be positive or negative. There is no perfect job candidate. If a job candidate is full of self praise and can't identify areas for improvement, he or she probably has a huge ego and is not the best candidate for the job. Good job candidates also look the part and communicate effectively during the interview. If a job candidate has difficulty making eye contact during the interview, he or she probably doesn't possess the communication skills that you need in a process excellence leader. Let's face it, it doesn't matter how technically brilliant a person is, if they can't communicate what good is their brilliance!

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If you expect your Process Excellence Leaders to deliver training, you might want to schedule a second interview and ask the candidate to deliver a training module for a selection committee. Don't assume that just because someone looks good on paper, they have the skills to present information, facilitate meetings or train others.

Be non committal when you end the interview. Always thank the candidate for their time and let them know that you will get back to them. Behavioral interviewing is effective because past performance usually predicts future behavior.

Hopefully, the job candidate will send you a thank you note or follow up letter. If not, they are not doing all that they can do to leave a positive, lasting impression.

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