

Effective Interviewing

Conducting a good interview requires several skills, the most important being good listening skills. The interviewer's ability to listen well is tantamount to learning what you need to know about your candidate and his or her qualifications for the available position. Learning to be a good listener also ensures that the interviewer is not dominating the interview, which too frequently occurs.

A good interview requires the interviewer to possess thorough knowledge of the position and what experience and skills will be required to meet the expectations of that position. This allows the interviewer to scan for pertinent information in a variety of ways during the interview and also ensures that the interviewer will be able to communicate information about the position in clear, meaningful ways to the interviewee. This helps focus the interview and keeps it "on topic."

The next important skill is to learn about the candidate's strengths and determine if there is a match between strengths and needs; and between attitude and challenge; interest/passion and the intangibles of the position.

Also, critical to being a good interviewer is the ability to read body language, which includes facial expressions, tone of voice, eye contact, body position, physical presentation, etc. Being able to observe the consonance or dissonance between words and body language helps the interviewer determine the authenticity of the information gathered and is critical to making the best selection of a candidate.

Asking open-ended questions insists the interviewee reveal considerable information about him- or herself, including the ability to hear and respond to the question with clarity; the ability to integrate his or her knowledge-base, abilities, and experience in a focused way; it reveals the attitudes and values behind the candidate's words and experiences; it allows an opportunity to reveal his or her work and educational history and the relevance of both to the available position and its requirements; it suggests what the candidate's goals and passion might be in the future; and, finally, it provides the interviewer sufficient information about the candidate's knowledge, skills, and attitudes to determine the fit between what the candidate could bring to the position and what the position demands.

As VISTA Leaders, please discuss and find consensus regarding the following questions related to interviewing:

1. Five skills were identified above for interviewers to master to become good interviewers; identify three additional important skills interviewers should possess.
2. Identify five open-ended, questions (for each of the following three categories) that would provide the interviewer with information about the candidate's Knowledge-base, Skills and Abilities, Attitudes and Motivation.

Effective Interviewing (cont.)

3. One of the most difficult aspects of an interview is to get a clear picture of the candidate's weaknesses or limitations. Suggest at least three ways skilled interviewers can approach this challenge.
4. Prepare an 8–10 minute role play that illustrates the skills identified in the narrative above and in question 1. The role play should illustrate a VISTA Leader interviewing a potential VISTA for a particular project.

Before you begin the role play, set the stage by addressing the following:

- Is this for an urban or rural VISTA position?
- What year in the three-year project plan is the candidate applying for?
- What roles, responsibilities, and abilities are required for this position?