Other Aspects of the Selection Process

Using Targeted Simulations®

As an interviewer, wouldn’t you like to make hiring decisions based on more than the results of an interview? If you could see how candidates would perform on the job before making a hiring decision, you would have more confidence in your decision. Behavioral simulations—exercises that simulate some of the situations and challenges a candidate will face on the job—provide just such an opportunity. Using a job-related simulation, you can observe the person in situations similar to those required on the job. By using a simulation as part of the Targeted Selection interview, you can better predict how a candidate will perform.

The information you can get from a simulation is often difficult to obtain in an interview if the individual has never been in situations where he or she could demonstrate the required behavior (e.g., someone who has never coached anyone being evaluated on his or her coaching skills). Simulations have been documented by researchers and organizations worldwide as accurate predictors of future performance.

Although behavioral simulations are powerful selection and promotion tools, they can be time consuming to administer and evaluate. Also, decision makers must be trained in how to assess the data collected. To overcome these drawbacks, DDI designed Targeted Simulations to be administered as part of the candidate interview.

Targeted Simulations, which take 30 minutes or less to administer and evaluate, give you a chance to observe candidates performing in situations they might encounter on the job.

Targeted Simulations are appropriate when:

- **You are dealing with targets that are difficult to evaluate in an interview.** For example, by observing a candidate’s level of skill in Formal Presentation, you will gain valuable information about his or her ability in this target.

- **You want to supplement the information you’ve gathered on critical targets.** For example, candidates seeking leadership positions could participate in a team member interaction exercise.

- **A candidate has limited job experience.** It can be difficult obtaining meaningful, job-related data when interviewing candidates with limited job experience (e.g., recent college graduates). Simulations give candidates a chance to demonstrate skills (such as decision making, sales ability, planning and organizing) they have developed but haven’t had the opportunity to use in job-related situations.
• **A candidate is seeking a position in a new field.** The challenge you face in interviewing a person who is changing careers is that the candidate’s experience and skills might be different from those required in the job (e.g., an engineer applying for a sales position or a production team member applying for a leadership position).

### Administering Targeted Simulations

Use the following steps when administering and conducting simulations:

1. **Make a transition to the simulation.**
   - Explain the simulation process to the candidate.
   - Offer a short break before beginning the simulation.

2. **Provide instructions to the candidate.**
   - Describe how you will conduct the simulation.
   - Provide written instructions. If appropriate, read them aloud to the candidate.
   - Summarize the instructions’ key points (e.g., time limits).

3. **Allow preparation time.**
   - Follow the timing guidelines for the simulation.
   - If appropriate, provide a private space for the candidate to prepare.
   - While the candidate is preparing, complete the preparation for your simulation role.

4. **Conduct the simulation.**
   - After the candidate has prepared for the simulation (usually 5–10 minutes), ask if he or she has any questions.
   - Begin the simulation.
   - Follow the instructions for your role during the simulation.
   - Record the interaction, if appropriate (see next page).
   - Take notes (see next page).
   - Debrief the candidate (see page 4).
5. Close the simulation/interview.
   - After administering the simulation, close the interview.
     - Provide information about the organization and position.
     - Answer any questions the candidate might have.
     - Inform the candidate of the next step in the selection process.

6. Complete the Evaluation Form (part of the Targeted Simulation materials).
   - Complete this form as soon as possible after the simulation or interview.

Additional Information

- **Recording the interaction (interactive simulations)**—When conducting simulations, you might want to record the dialog so that you can concentrate on your role rather than on observing and taking notes. Most candidates find taping to be acceptable in this situation. A tape recorder can be less distracting than an interviewer trying to role-play and take notes at the same time.

  When recording an interaction:
  - Test the tape recorder to make sure it’s working.
  - Inform the candidate that the simulation is being recorded.
  - Start recording a few moments before the simulation and engage the candidate in brief small talk. This will help put the candidate at ease.

- **Taking notes**—When conducting a simulation in which you act as a roleplayer, take minimal notes but be sure to complete the Evaluation Form immediately afterward.

  While taking notes, try not to distract the candidate or indicate the types of behaviors desired. For some roles, note taking is part of the role (e.g., as a prospect taking notes on product information or a team member making note of techniques suggested by a team leader).

  When conducting a simulation that does not include role playing, taking notes as the candidate is talking is acceptable. For instance, during a planning exercise, as the candidate outlines the schedule, you should record the plan and the candidate’s reasons for it.
• **Debriefing the candidate**—After the simulation ask how the candidate would evaluate his or her performance. The responses will give you information about the candidate’s self-insights and self-assessment.

For example, a candidate thinks a simulated sales call went well, while you, as the prospect, thinks the candidate was pushy. This would be a valuable insight to consider when evaluating the candidate on Impact or Sales Ability/Persuasiveness. You also might ask the candidate, “Have you ever encountered a situation like this before? How did you handle it?” The candidate’s responses might provide important STARs that didn’t come out in the interview or might magnify the insights obtained from the simulation.

To complete the Evaluation Form:

1. **Evaluate the behaviors/actions** listed under each key action for a target, using the rating scale provided in the simulation.

2. **Evaluate the key actions.** Consider the quantity and quality of the behaviors/actions you evaluated in step 1 to determine effectiveness ratings for each key action. Use the same rating scale as in step 1.

3. **Rate the target.** Consider both your key action effectiveness ratings and the answer to the bottom-line question to determine the overall rating. Use the 1–5 scale described in the Targeted Simulation.

**Legal Considerations of Using Behavioral Simulations**

To have legal credibility, behavioral simulations must:

• Be used to evaluate a candidate’s performance in tasks or behaviors that:
  – Are job related.
  – Are not easily or quickly fixed with training.

• Be related to on-the-job success in the area that they simulate. (Keep records to establish that the content of the simulation is similar to the job requirements.)

• Reflect the targets that were determined during the job/role analysis as being important to the job.

• Elicit the candidate’s behavior in the targets in a way that is reliably observable.

• Have a standard administration procedure.
- Have consistent evaluation standards.
- Be administered to all candidates who reach a specified phase of the selection system.
- Provide the candidate with time for preparation (except in situations in which the person on the job would not have time for preparation).

**Note:** A simulation does not need to apply to total job performance. For instance, many areas of a salesperson’s job do not directly relate to selling.

Use simulations consistently for all candidates. Using a simulation only when time permits or only when you want to gather additional information about a particular candidate is illegal.

**Designing Your Own Simulation**

If a job is unique to your organization, you can design your own simulation (providing your organization has this expertise). Remember, it’s important that simulations accurately assess job competencies and meet the legal considerations.

You also may ask your DDI representative for help in developing a simulation for your organization. With more than 30 years of experience in developing and using simulations, DDI can create accurate and legally defensible custom simulations.

**Tips for Using Targeted Simulations**

- Administer a simulation that accurately represents on-the-job activities.
- Carefully follow the six steps for administering the simulation (pages 66–67).
- Thoroughly review both the roleplayer and administration instructions.
- Make sure you are familiar with the role you will play, the objections you will raise, and the issues you will discuss. The quality of your role play affects the quality of the data you collect.
- As a roleplayer, don’t talk too much. Your goal is to get information from the candidate, so be sure the candidate has adequate time and opportunity to provide that information and to demonstrate his or her approach to the situation.
- Discuss the Targeted Simulation data during the data integration discussion. Make a presentation on the data you collected in the interview and then the data collected from the simulation.
Benefits of Targeted Simulations

Targeted Simulations can benefit you, the candidate, and the organization in many ways.

- Simulations provide interviewers with an opportunity to observe the candidate performing critical job activities.
  - Rather than relying solely on the candidates’ self-descriptions of behavior, interviewers gain a clearer understanding of candidates’ abilities by observing them in situations that simulate key job activities.

- Interviewers are better able to assess the capabilities of a candidate who has little direct experience.
  - Seeing candidates perform in job-related situations provides additional insights into their abilities in competencies where they’ve had little direct experience.

- Candidates believe they have been given a fair opportunity to demonstrate their abilities.
  - Candidates are attracted to employers who have a genuine interest in their skills. Targeted Simulations provide an opportunity for candidates to show what they can do. Simulations also convey the interviewer’s as well as the organization’s intention to get accurate data about a candidate.

- Using interviews and simulations together gives you an in-depth understanding of a candidate’s experience and ability to perform job-specific tasks.
  - While the structured interview gives you the opportunity to focus your questions on areas of the candidate’s past performance that relate to the job, the simulation allows you to observe the candidate actually performing tasks or activities required on the job.
Resume Screening

Carefully reviewing a candidate’s electronic or paper resume (or curriculum vitae) is one of the most important elements in the selection process, yet many managers and human resource professionals gloss over this crucial activity. As a result, they waste valuable time interviewing unqualified candidates, or qualified candidates are screened out because their skills are not recognized.

The main purpose of screening resumes is not to screen people out, but to screen people in. Most managers want to see the best candidates first and, if possible, only the top candidates. Reviewing resumes allows you to rank the candidates by their qualifications for the job. Doing so ensures that the remainder of the selection process will focus on those people who are most qualified for the position.

When confronted with a flood of resumes, too many organizations rush through them, missing the good ones. This doesn’t have to happen. Online pre-hire screening tools are available. Using them reduces the number of resumes that need to be reviewed by hand.

What to Look For

The job to be filled will determine what kind of information you will look for in a resume. Look for information that indicates the candidate’s competence in the job’s targets. For instance, accomplishments, education, job experience, and job changes hint at the presence of certain targets.

Before screening resumes:

- Review the targets for the job.
- Identify examples of the kinds of information that could provide hints about the presence or absence of each target.
- Train the people who will be screening the resumes to use this information to sort and rank the candidates.
This chart illustrates some of the things to look for when screening a resume for a person applying for a sales representative position.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Behavioral Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motivational Fit</td>
<td>+ history of sales positions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+ experience with cold calling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+ charity, fund-raising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– history of leaving sales job for nonsales job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– short time in sales positions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales Ability/Persuasiveness</td>
<td>+ sales awards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+ sales volume</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+ selling to audience similar to job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– extensive sales experience with no career advancement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied Learning</td>
<td>+ high college GPA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+ difficult major (and good grades)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+ outstanding university (and good grades)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– low grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiating Action</td>
<td>+ successes outside of work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+ awards for outstanding achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+ unique (beyond job description) activities at work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+ wide range of activities outside of work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+ progressive job changes to seek career advancement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– lack of any of the above</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Factors to Consider

When reviewing resumes, keep the following issues in mind as you weigh the candidate’s suitability for the open position:

- **Frequent job changes (without career advancement).** Do not view a candidate negatively if he or she made frequent job changes for developmental reasons. However, frequent job changes (for instance, every year) throughout a career can be a sign of problem behavior, especially if the job changes do not advance the person’s career. Such changes could indicate that the candidate was pressured to find new jobs because of poor performance or that he or she is not certain what career to pursue. Both of these problems are related to job skill and motivational fit targets.

- **Gaps in employment history.** Don’t assume that employment gaps are caused by a candidate’s incompetence or inability to hold a job. They can occur for several reasons:
  - Staff reductions (unrelated to performance).
  - Spouse being transferred.
  - Time off to start a family.
  - Health problems.
  - Extended vacation. (You might want to check other information, such as hobbies, for an explanation for any employment gaps.)
  - Sabbatical.
  - Career changes/experimentation.

It’s too early in the selection process to use an employment gap to screen out an otherwise strong candidate. However, be sure to explore an employment gap thoroughly before making a job offer.

- **Years of experience.** Having years of work experience is not necessarily a strong indicator of a candidate’s potential. After 10 years in a job, some people will be performing at the same level as when they were hired. During the resume screen, focus on activities and behaviors instead of years of experience.
• **Degrees, certifications, and other credentials.** Certification should be used as a criterion for screening resumes only if certification is a job requirement (for certified public accountants, psychologists, teachers, etc.). Before using the lack of a degree or certificate as a criterion for rejection, make sure it’s a job requirement. Many organizations have lost lawsuits because they could not justify why a college degree was a job requirement. Often a candidate has the knowledge and skills needed to be effective in a job even though he or she does not have a formal degree or certificate.

On the other hand, having a degree or certificate does not guarantee that the candidate will perform the job activities effectively. Effective interviewers know that they also need to investigate a candidate’s depth of knowledge or experience.

• **Achievements and awards.** Achievements and awards can indicate a person’s level of initiative. Some people set low goals for themselves and achieve little. Others have a long record of outstanding accomplishments throughout their work history.

• **Topical resumes.** The topical resume, which is organized by activities or skill areas instead of chronologically or by job, can be difficult to interpret. Some candidates use the topical format to conceal a gap or flaw in their work history. Others use this format to accentuate their experience and accomplishments. Also, some career counselors or resume books recommend this method. When reviewing a topical resume, search for:
  
  − Experience (time) in the listed jobs.
  − Employment gaps.
  − Career progression.
  − Frequent job changes.

• **Salary.** When a candidate specifies a salary requirement that is higher than you can realistically offer, don’t assume that the candidate (even a strong candidate) is automatically out of reach. Often, candidates will settle for less than specified in their resume or application if the responsibilities, opportunities, or location is right. Some candidates use an “it-never-hurts-to-ask” strategy, exaggerating their real salary requirements as a negotiating ploy.

Generally, during the resume screen, don’t eliminate a strong candidate who is asking for a little more than you can offer. Be sure to clarify salary potential in a telephone screen before inviting the person for an interview.
• **Resume writing and organization skills.** Can you evaluate a candidate’s writing ability and organizing skills by reading a resume? The answer is a partial yes. You can get some idea of a person’s writing ability and organization skills from the way the resume is arranged, how facts are presented, and the way it’s laid out and structured (neatness, organization, grammar).

Many experienced interviewers adhere to this rule: It’s difficult to determine if a well-prepared resume was done by the candidate or by a professional resume service; however, if the resume was done poorly, the candidate deserves full credit.

• **Creativity in resume preparation or presentation.** Presenting job experience creatively (e.g., a video of achievements or a well-worded, customized cover letter) can indicate skills needed for some positions, such as in marketing or public relations. Such exceptional creativity also might indicate initiative or high work standards. But, be careful not to be overly influenced by such creativity if it’s not important to the job.

### Who Should Screen

Anyone can screen resumes if they are properly trained. Training is especially important for people screening resumes submitted for jobs with which they are unfamiliar. Ask the people who will be interviewing candidates to help identify evidence for targets that might appear on the resume, and then train the resume screeners to use these criteria.

Once trained, an administrative or personnel assistant can perform an initial screen, and then pass on the findings to the hiring manager. The manager can review the list and change the priorities (if necessary) before moving on to the next step in the process.

**Note:** Every creator of employment ads should review the resumes received in response to the ads. This review allows the originator to evaluate the advertisement, using the number of qualified responses to gauge its effectiveness. Misleading ads, or those without enough information to allow candidates to screen themselves out, can result in time wasted in reviewing resumes from unqualified individuals.
How to Screen: Hard Copy or Paper Resumes

Experienced interviewers sort resumes into several piles so they can focus on the most qualified candidates without being distracted by candidates who fail to fit the job requirements.

One common approach is to divide the resumes into three groups:
- **Group 1**—Highly qualified candidates who should be given further consideration.
- **Group 2**—Potentially qualified candidates who can be considered if the candidates in Group 1 must be dropped for some reason.
- **Group 3**—Candidates who, on paper, aren’t as strong as those in Groups 1 and 2.

After screening and sorting resumes according to qualifications, the interviewer reviews the highly qualified resumes and ranks them based on how well each fits the job requirements. Whether the next step in the selection process is a telephone screen or an interview, the interviewer should decide how many candidates to contact, and then identify that number from the highly qualified group.

How to Screen: Online or Electronic Resumes

Applicant tracking systems (ATS), a type of online screening, offer a more efficient way for screening resumes than manual screening. Most ATS provide for:
- Automatic parsing of resume content into key data fields.
- Keyword search and keyword matches.
- Knockout/Prescreening questions.

Applicant tracking systems can help to eliminate the need for manually screening every resume. However, savvy candidates will craft a resume based on job requirements and keywords that may not correspond to their abilities. Generally, the use of highly accurate screens will provide organizations with not only fewer resumes to screen but also higher quality candidates.

Benefits of Resume Screening

Effective resume screening increases the accuracy of selection decisions because it:
- Screens in the most qualified candidates and eliminates those who are less qualified.
- Saves interviewers time because they interview only the most qualified people.
- Allows more time to be spent with top candidates.
- Saves candidates time by identifying possible job fit or lack of fit before they become more involved in the selection process.
Testing

Testing—whether paper-and-pencil or online—provides organizations with another method for winnowing the pool of candidates to a more manageable number. In some organizations, tests screen out more than 75 percent of less-qualified candidates, greatly simplifying the task of HR managers and interviewers. In addition to reducing the size of the candidate pool, testing can increase the quality of the remaining candidates, further contributing to a more efficient and effective selection system.

Importance

Tests prove their worth by accurately and efficiently screening out individuals who fail to meet the basic requirements for a position while identifying and ranking those qualified candidates who should progress in the selection process. These tests—which are sometimes called “inventories”—give interviewers an early insight into each candidate’s strengths and weaknesses and instill confidence in the eventual selection of the best candidate.

Benefits

Modern testing programs, especially online tests, provide many benefits:

- Content can be configured to the organization’s unique needs and the open position’s job requirements. Legal credibility and defensibility are ensured through validation approaches and by measuring job-relevant behaviors.
- Recruiters and hiring managers spend their time interviewing qualified candidates.
- Turnover is reduced by identifying candidates who fit with the job and organization.
- Key focus areas can be identified to leverage suggested behavioral interviewing questions.
- A snapshot of strengths and development areas for new hires can be obtained.
- Tests generally are easy to implement and manage.
- Speed and success of the hiring process are enhanced.
Tips for Choosing Online Tests

When choosing online tests, answer these questions:

- What type of test should be used—skill, behavioral, personality, or cognitive? (Behavioral tests have high validity with low adverse impact.)
- Is the test built upon the competencies, knowledge, experience, and personal attributes/motivations required for success in the job?
- Have the tests been validated?

Using online pre-hire screening tools, such as tests, can greatly reduce the number of resumes a screener needs to review. Consider this typical scenario:

- An organization receives 100 resumes for a job opening.
- After all 100 candidates complete an online screening process designed around job knowledge, experience, fit, and abilities, the number of qualified resumes is reduced to 80.
- All 80 candidates complete a behavioral test based on job-related competencies and dispositions. From this, the top 20 percent of candidates are identified, reducing the number to 16.
- Resume screeners read all 16 resumes and invite the best candidates to an interview.
Reference Checking

Sooner or later all interviewers have to go beyond the completed application, resume, or interview to collect additional data and verify the facts given by a candidate. Reference information can be provided by people who know or have worked with a candidate, including managers/supervisors and team members, internal and external clients, vendors, etc.

Importance

Conduct a reference check to verify facts and obtain targeted data. Verifying facts obtained in interviews or from resumes involves checking the accuracy of:

- Dates (e.g., length of employment at various organizations).
- Accomplishments (e.g., college degree or salary level).
- Experiences (e.g., type of products handled or machines operated, type of clients).

Verifying facts can be handled by human resources personnel who usually can get the information they need from staff members in other human resources departments or school registrars’ offices.

On the other hand, obtaining data on a person’s behavior and performance in critical targets—and clarifying doubts or concerns you might have—is a more difficult task to accomplish, but an important one. Its results can have great impact on the accuracy and success of the selection process.

Valuable Function

Reference checks serve a valuable function: They fill in the blanks that inevitably occur in every selection process. Using reference checks allows you to:

- Follow up leads or hunches about performance in a target.
- More fully explore certain areas.
- Get a more satisfactory answer to a question.
- Gain additional behavioral evidence in targets.

For these reasons, reference checks usually are scheduled near the end of the selection process. Confirmation of leads or hunches is extremely important because it is not fair to deprive a person of employment or promotion without facts.
**Whom to Call**

- The more recent the behavior and the more similar it is to the job, the better its value as a predictor of future behavior. Therefore, contact people who have observed the candidate recently, and focus on behavioral information from a job that resembles the one for which the candidate is applying. For example, if the candidate is applying for a financial analyst position, a person who has observed the candidate in a job similar or related to a financial analyst would provide you with more useful information than a college sports coach.

- **The number of reference checks** is limited only by your creativity and tenacity. How many people you contact depends on the candidate’s background, the importance of the job, and similar considerations.

- When reference checking, don’t rely solely on human resources departments, if possible. Usually they give only the basic facts on a person; use them only as a starting point.

- **High school and college administrators often are reluctant to release information.** College officials might only be able to confirm enrollment dates, credits completed, and degrees.

- **Former leaders can be excellent references** because they’ve observed and evaluated the candidate’s work and on-the-job performance. Don’t let a former leader’s move to another position or organization inhibit you; get that person’s phone number and address and follow up.

  Keep in mind that in some organizations, people might spend more time working with other groups than with their own leader or team. For example, a systems analyst assigned to a cross-functional project probably works more closely with the project’s team leader than with his or her formal leader.

- **Tell the candidate the names of the people you plan to contact.** This shows the candidate that you are trying to make a serious, thorough selection decision. You also might get some insight into the candidate’s relationship with these people; this information can help you interpret the data.

- A candidate whose only significant work has been done in the organization in which he or she is currently employed poses a special challenge: **The candidate’s current supervisor might not know about the candidate’s job search.** Therefore, the supervisor should not be approached without the candidate’s permission. If the candidate does not want you to approach his or her current leader, other possible sources of information include ex-employees of the organization and clients and business associates in other firms.
• **The candidate might provide reference names** on applications and in resumes. However, you must approach those sources with care. Most likely, the candidate will list people who will give a positive account of his or her job performance.

If your organization’s application form does not request references—but contacting references is the organization’s custom—ask the candidate to suggest appropriate supervisors, clients, or previous coworkers.

• **A reference source might be able to refer you to other references.** After talking to a reference source, ask, “Is there anyone else I can talk with about this candidate’s performance?”

• **The best reference is a person known to the reference checker.** Try to develop a network of contacts in your industry. Reference checking becomes easier, and the references are more forthcoming, when you establish personal relationships with the people who will be providing the data you need.

### Who Should Check

You can train team members or use human resources specialists to take care of some reference checks and to verify facts from interviews and the application form. If you delegate reference checking, give that person a form that guides them through the process.

Most reference checks should be conducted by leaders who will supervise the person if hired or by a key leader-level person in the selection process. A leader has the following advantages over other people:

• It’s often easier for a manager or leader to get through to a reference quickly.

• The leader’s status shows the reference that this call is important and worth his or her time and effort.

• A leader who has participated in the selection process can use the knowledge he or she has acquired to ask intelligent, pointed, productive questions that someone not involved in the process won’t know to ask.

• He or she can ask in-depth follow-up questions when appropriate.
Areas to Be Covered Before Questioning Begins

Do the following before questioning a reference:

1. Give the reference your name and position.
2. Give the name of the candidate being checked and explain the purpose of the call.
3. Ask the reference if this is a convenient time to talk.
4. Determine whether this person is able to evaluate the candidate’s capabilities sufficiently to serve as a reference. Did he or she supervise (interact with) the candidate? For how long? When?
5. Offer the reference the chance to get a file or other information on the candidate.
6. Emphasize that the phone call is strictly confidential.

Questioning Techniques

Depending on what information you’re seeking about a candidate, you can use one of two types of questioning techniques during the reference check:

1. Behavioral questions seek behavioral information on critical targets to be evaluated as part of a selection decision.
2. Situational questions seek behavioral information about an incident or situation the candidate might have mentioned in the interview that you want to verify, such as a report of an unhappy client or an award he or she received.

Note: You might have limited time with the reference, so be sure to prioritize in advance which targets or situations you want to focus on.

Asking Behavioral Questions

Follow these steps to obtain behavioral examples of critical targets:

1. Describe the job and the targets you’re seeking information about.
2. Define each target and describe how the candidate will have to demonstrate these behaviors in the job.
3. Seek relevant examples from the candidate’s past performance. Be sure to follow up to pin down behavior; seek all parts of the STAR if possible.
4. Ask the reference if he or she believes the candidate would perform successfully in each target. Why? or Why not?
5. Ask for additional information that might be relevant to the job.
6. Thank the reference.

**Asking Situational Questions**

Follow these steps to obtain information about a situation or incident from a reference:

1. Briefly describe the situation you are seeking information about.
2. Ask the reference for a complete description of the incident. Ask follow-up questions until all STAR components are pinned down.
3. Check for understanding by:
   - Restating all the STAR components.
   - Summarizing new information.
   - Checking for accuracy of information from other sources.
4. Thank the person for the information.

**Note:** Behavioral and situational questioning techniques also can be useful when gathering behavioral evidence for other personnel activities, such as preparation for performance reviews or coaching discussions. Information can be gathered from coworkers and internal and external customers.

**Discussing Sensitive Issues**

Sometimes a candidate appears very qualified, but an area comes up during the selection process that gives you concern. Follow up on this area during a reference check. For example, if a highly qualified candidate has demonstrated insensitivity to team members during a behavioral simulation, you might note this and then ask if the reference observed such insensitivity on the job. When discussing sensitive issues:

- Wait until the end of the interview, when you’ve developed rapport with the reference, to mention any sensitive issues.
- Explain the issue to the reference and why it concerns you.
- Ask the reference for any information he or she might have that would verify or alleviate your concerns.
- Be sensitive to what the reference implies and does not say and to the questions that he or she tries to avoid answering.
• Give the reference plenty of time to respond. He or she might be hesitant to give information, so be patient.

• Use appropriate questioning to get at what lies behind these indicators.

**Additional Considerations**

• **When to check**—Ordinarily, reference checks should be made near the end of the selection system process. In most organizations reference checks are scheduled immediately before or after the final selection decision (not the job offer). If you get a poor report from a reference check, you probably should schedule an additional interview with the candidate to discuss these findings. Because the reference call is confidential, do not indicate to the candidate your source of concern.

• **Negative or conflicting information**—Resentments that neither you nor the candidate know about, or a poor memory for dates and facts, could be behind a negative or conflicting reference. Negative information from a reference is not usually sufficient cause to eliminate an otherwise good candidate from consideration. The candidate deserves an opportunity for another interview, in person or on the phone, to provide further information.

• **Reluctance to give information**—There are several reasons why someone might be reluctant to provide accurate, detailed information about a candidate:
  
  – The person might be trying to protect the candidate.
  
  – Your questions might be too general. You can avoid this problem by using planned behavioral questions in telephone or person-to-person interviews.
  
  – The person is afraid of legal consequences; most organizations coach human resource personnel to provide minimal facts.

• **Ensuring confidentiality**—Because the reference has been ensured anonymity, the person checking the reference data must not disclose the source of adverse references. The reference information should be carefully corroborated in follow-up interviews to give you the confirming data necessary to make a selection decision.

• **Obtaining permission to check references**—Legally, you do not have to ask a candidate for permission to check references. Most organizations assume that if a candidate provides a list of references, he or she expects them to be checked. Even when the checking goes beyond names provided by the candidate, the policy in most organizations is that reference checking is a legitimate part of the selection process and that special permission is not needed for subsequent checks.
Some organizations, including the federal government, ask candidates for written permission before checking references. A copy of the written permission is sent to the reference source. Sources tend to be less reluctant to provide negative information when the candidate has given written permission. Whether this decreases the liability of the source is doubtful.

- **A candidate’s right to see reference information**—Does a candidate have a legal right to see reference information? Yes—if he or she suspects a problem and pursues a legal remedy in the courts. In this case the candidate can subpoena any written record of the reference information. A planned reference form shows the job-related questions asked and the information obtained. This is better than rough notes that differ from one candidate to the next.

Suits filed on the basis of alleged civil rights violations also might force an organization to produce reference-checking information. Consider this situation: A minority candidate claims he was rejected because of a reference check and charges that the organization normally does not check references of all its candidates. In that situation the organization would have to prove that it did check the references of all candidates in the same thorough manner. The organization’s best response would be to produce completed reference forms on all candidates.

- **Credit checking**—An employer must be able to demonstrate a genuine business need in order to conduct a credit check. Also, federal law requires that a job candidate be informed that a credit check will be conducted on him or her. Most organizations ask the candidate to sign a standard form. The candidate also must be informed that he or she has the right to review the credit information. This information should be clearly printed on the permission form.

Credit checks should be used only when creditworthiness is a job requirement. To eliminate legal problems in this area, require that people filling the position be bonded, if the need can be substantiated. Then the task of checking credit ratings falls on the bonding organization.

### Giving References

There is probably more misunderstanding about the legality of reference checking than any other issue in human resource administration. Some knowledgeable people believe that giving a reference for a candidate is illegal. Others believe that reference seeking is illegal. And almost all people believe that the courts have ruled consistently against reference actions. None of these statements are true.
Like many legal issues, even the most conservative lawyers disagree about what kind of information can be legally provided about a former employee. Here is a summary of what the federal courts seem to be saying a reference source can and cannot provide.

A reference can provide:
- Confirmation of dates of employment.
- Confirmation of position and salary.
- A statement as to whether the employee would be rehired.
- Facts regarding job performance.

A reference cannot provide:
- Hearsay—A reference cannot provide information he or she has not observed or has not obtained from performance records.
- Information based on feelings—A reference cannot provide opinions, guesses, or hunches.
- Hostile or malicious information.
- Unsolicited information. In other words, the reference source should not volunteer information.

A reference source needs to:
- Check the business need of the person seeking the reference.
- Confirm the authenticity of the reference checker by asking the caller for a telephone number and then returning the call.
- Provide facts, being as clear and precise as possible about information that he or she has directly observed.

Benefits of Reference Checks

Conducting reference checks:
- Fills in the blanks that can occur in the selection process.
- Clarifies questions or hunches about a candidate’s behavior in targets.
- Helps you verify facts and obtain additional data about a candidate.
- Helps you verify or eliminate doubts you might have about a candidate’s ability to perform on the job in the targets.
Panel/Team Interviewing

Some organizations might want to have a panel or team conduct interviews. The Targeted Selection methodology can be easily adapted to this approach.

Potential Advantages

A panel/team:

- Communicates to the candidate that collaboration is an important value in the organization.
- Provides an opportunity for more people to meet and collect data about the candidate in each interview.
- Reduces the time invested by the candidate.
- Provides the interviewing team with opportunities to reinforce one another’s interviewing skills (for example, coaching new interviewers and providing developmental feedback for experienced ones).
- Gives those not directly questioning the candidate more time to observe and refine their questions based on current observations.

Potential Disadvantages

A panel/team interview may have these disadvantages:

- Even though each interviewer spends an allotted time with the candidate, he or she doesn’t get to interview all that time. Some questions that would have been asked in a one-on-one interview must go unasked.
- The panel approach is not the most effective use of each interviewer’s time. An independent interviewer brings unique data to the data integration session. With a panel interview, each interviewer brings data that the others have already heard.
- Candidates might feel anxious or uncomfortable with several interviewers, which might affect their performance. Unless a candidate will need to respond to panel situations in the target job, the data gathered might be contaminated.
Tips for Using Panel/Team Interviewing

If your organization chooses to conduct panel/team interviews, keep in mind the following suggestions:

• Choose a nonthreatening seating arrangement (a triangle or circle). Avoid placing several interviewers on one side of the table and the candidate on the other.

• To build rapport early, have each interviewer ask some of the questions in the Key Background Review.

• Evenly distribute the targets among the interviewers. For example, when the panel consists of two interviewers, avoid giving the first interviewer the first half of the targets and the second interviewer the second half. Plan to switch back and forth among interviewers. (An example of a panel interview sequence is provided on the next page.)

• To help the candidate stay focused, the interviewer who asked the planned question should also ask any follow-up questions.

• When not directly asking questions, the other interviewers should take advantage of opportunities to empathize with the candidate and build his or her self-esteem.

• Each interviewer should take notes on all the candidate’s responses.

• Each interviewer should generate his or her own ratings before data integration. Data integration should be conducted in the usual way.

• To provide more than one database from which to draw, some organizations use more than one panel interview session with each candidate. While it has its uses, this is a very expensive practice in terms of interviewers’ time.
### Example of a Panel/Team Interview Sequence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Guide Section</th>
<th>Interviewer 1 (Lead Interviewer)</th>
<th>Interviewer 2</th>
<th>Interviewer 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opening</td>
<td>Opens the interview.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Background</td>
<td>Reviews educational background, then says, “My teammate will ask some questions about your work experience.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work History</td>
<td>Asks questions about one or more jobs, and then defers to Interviewer 3.</td>
<td>Asks questions about remaining jobs and leads into first target.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Target</td>
<td>Asks planned behavioral questions and follows up to get STARs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Target</td>
<td>Asks planned behavioral questions and follows up to get STARs; defers to Interviewer 1.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Target</td>
<td>Asks planned behavioral questions and follows up to get STARs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Target</td>
<td>Asks planned behavioral questions and follows up to get STARs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth Target</td>
<td>Asks planned behavioral questions and follows up to get STARs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixth Target</td>
<td>Asks planned behavioral questions and follows up to get STARs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing the Interview</td>
<td>Closes the interview.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Common Interviewer Worries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Worry</th>
<th>Focus on job-related behavior (targets)</th>
<th>Use past behavior to predict future behavior</th>
<th>Assess motivational fit</th>
<th>Use multiple interviewers to get a complete picture of the candidate</th>
<th>Use Key Principles and process skills</th>
<th>Use data integration to make the best hiring decision</th>
<th>Make a positive impression; sell job and organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I miss important information about strengths and weaknesses.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. I’m not sure what questions to ask.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. It takes a psychologist to interpret the candidate’s answers.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. I don’t know if I have enough data to make a decision.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. New hires quit within 90 days.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Candidates don’t accept the job offer.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. The candidate talks too much or not enough.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8. I often run out of time in the interview.</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. I make hiring decisions too quickly.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I let one aspect of a candidate’s background influence the others.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I make decisions about a candidate too casually.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Under pressure to fill a job, I settle for the best candidate from a bad group of them.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I might be asking illegal questions.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Interviewing is a waste of time. It doesn’t make a difference. It’s no better than flipping a coin.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>