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Prepping for an interview on the other side of the desk

METRO
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Published: January 30, 2011 6:53 p.m.
Last modified: January 30, 2011 6:56 p.m.

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Improvising your way through a job interview when you're the fellow looking for some work could cost you a job – but winging it when you're the one hiring is just as bad of an idea.

"Don't go in there thinking 'I'm just going to ask them to tell me about themselves,'" stresses Laura DeCarlo, president of Career Directors International. "Have about 30 questions."

But if you prep your interview like a police investigation – full of confrontational, tightly focused questions – you could provoke nothing but awkward, stilted answers.

The job seeker ought to be made comfortable, Boston-based career coach Leenie Glickman notes – and if you really want to get a preview of the person you might be working alongside, you'd do better to spark a naturalistic conversation than host a narrow pop quiz. "All of your questions should be open," she suggests. "Like 'Tell me about, tell me about, tell me about.'"



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Plan out the conversation, but make sure your questions are open-ended and the candidate feels comfortable.

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"If you want to learn about the candidate, ask them to give you an example," DeCarlo concurs. "Tell me about a time when you had to face a challenge."

To keep to the conversation from drifting toward irrelevance, figure out before the interview what you're looking for: a qualified candidate with full command of a certain skill, or an easy-going but go-getting employee who would fit in well with your company.

"Sometimes the technical skill is very important, and sometimes it's more about finding the right personality match for your company," DeCarlo says.

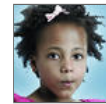
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Interviewers who freestyle their 20-minute chat risk courthouse drama if the conversation strays into personal matters. "You could ask an innocent question and end up with a lawsuit, and you were only asking it because you think, 'Oh, I have kids, too, how wonderful,'" cautions DeCarlo. "Because of so many legal issues, someone who has liability should probably look at becoming involved in a human resource organization like the Society for Human Resource Management," she says.

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