



## Interview Tips Beyond Q & A

### Encourage Candidates to use a Storytelling Approach

Great support reps possess an abstract set of skills that can be difficult to address head on. You need to find conversational side doors to draw these qualities out by asking questions that require a story to answer.

By asking candidates to give examples of their personal experiences, you can determine if the actions described display the candidate's professional maturity. This aids in determining if the candidate has the ability to objectively assess the situation by how they tried to resolve them in the past. These questions also encourage candidates to share a relevant on-the-job anecdote, but they also require them to tell a story in a coherent, narrative fashion.

### Reading Between the Lines

What do a candidate's stories say about their penchant for patience, their willingness to help, or their talents as a team player?

Do all of their examples lead to *someone else made a bad decision and that's why it didn't work*?

Here are some good storytelling questions to get you started:

- Tell me about a time when you were trying to convince somebody to do something. Give a specific instance and explain how you handled it.
- Did your previous team ever have a project go completely awry? What went wrong? What was the final outcome? (Note: Leave out "What could you have done better?" to give them a chance to respond unasked or completely miss the opportunity.)
- Describe a negative interaction you had in a customer service situation with a different company. What do you think they could have done differently to make it better?

### Listen to How They Listen

An active listener is a prepared problem solver. Instead of auto-piloting to a solution based on what they expect to hear, they're patient enough to listen to how a customer *feels* and respond accordingly.

By asking multi-part questions, the interviewer can often determine the candidate's temperament and adaptability to a potential situation. If a candidate carefully addresses each point you've asked them to discuss, that means they're an engaged and sincere listener. It's also a good indication you've found somebody who will treat customers well when they show up to talk to your company.

Try some of these examples:

- What interests you about customer service, in particular? Where do you see this role taking you?
- How did you hear about Anderson County's \_\_\_\_\_ Department? Is there something specific that stands out to you about us?
- What's a time you had to give somebody an answer they didn't want to hear? Were you able to approach it in a way that resulted in an overall positive outcome? If so, how?

### **Throw a "Zag" into your Interviews**

Boilerplate questions don't reflect the reality of support. They surprise no one, they won't surface an ability to thrive under pressure, and their limited framing begets limited answers. That's no good, because you're searching for creativity; work isn't a multiple choice test, requiring creative interviewer questions. Instead, complement your must-ask questions, your "zigs," with a few questions that "zag."

- Ask a question the candidate won't know the answer to. How do they respond? When they're new, they'll face many questions that will leave them stumped. This will show you how they will respond when in the situation.
- Ask a question that has nothing to do with your department: "Who's the most underappreciated hero/heroine in any story? Why?" Is their response charming, or does it fall flatter than an "N/A" reply in a written interview?
- Get people to commit with one question ("What are you a perfectionist about?") and then dig deeper with a second ("When has this created conflict between you and someone else?")

You can also zag by how you conduct interviews. By taking potential support hires out for coffee, you are able to observe how someone interacts with the outside world. This can speak volumes about their self-awareness and personal motivations. A person who can't be bothered to say "please" and "thanks" is not a person who should be in the business of professionally making other people happy.

### **Get Real Answers from References**

References can be a valuable component of the interview process if handled correctly. Granted, it can be a challenge to have a forthright conversation with a person who has been hand-picked to deliver a glowing review, but the right attitude (and some good questions) will go far.

First, asks a reference to rate a candidate from 1-10 in terms of living up to their potential. Most people will respond an 8-9, but then follow-up by asking, *“How could they get to a 10?”*. This often lowers people’s guards and gets them talking about both a candidate’s shortcomings and their ability to improve. You’ll get honest feedback about a person’s trajectory and their commitment to self-improvement; information that’s hard to glean from anywhere else.

It’s also important to ask for specific anecdotes and to frame questions so they can’t be answered with a pat “yes” or “no.” For example, “What’s a time that this person resolved a team/customer conflict?” will get you a lot further than, “Do they work well with others?”

### **One Chance to Get it Right**

The tricky thing about interviews is you only have one shot to set the right tone and learn what you need. Even good candidates will struggle to shine in a bad interview. The best interviews are not strict question-and-answer sessions; they’re structured conversations that draw out candidates’ attitudes, strengths, and challenges.

Try not to rush to fill the silence; it’s okay to let your candidates sit quietly before they answer a question. It can give them time to formulate their thoughts, and it can also result in them revealing more than they initially intended.

It’s also okay to ask similar questions at different points during the interview. Often, the best stories will come out when candidates have had a few minutes to think about an earlier question. By revisiting important areas, you give them the best chance to reveal their character and skills to you.

With a considerate process and clever questions in hand, you’ll own up to your end of the bargain and set the stage for candidates to reveal who they are, how they work, and if they’re the person you’ve been looking for.

Please contact your Human Resources & Risk Management Department if you would like to discuss this process at 865-264-6300 or [kwhitaker@andersontn.org](mailto:kwhitaker@andersontn.org)