
12. PERSONNEL MATTERS

12.5 INTERVIEW SKILLS FOR SCHOOL GOVERNING BODIES (SGB's) AND EDUCATORS

12.5.1 Legislative and Policy Framework

- *The South African Schools Act, No. 84 of 1996* [SASA]
- *The National Education Policy Act, 1996 (Act No. 27 of 1996)* [NEPA]
- *Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998* [PAM], Chapter B

12.5.2 Guidelines for the Development of School Policy on Educators: Interviewing Educators

(a) Interviewing Educators: Guidelines for SGB's

When you're seeking to fill vacancies for your school, it's vital to use the interview process to identify the most qualified candidates. Successful interviewing is similar to many other "communications" skills - it's a matter of asking the right questions, listening to the answers, and getting candidates to talk honestly about their abilities and attitudes. The good news is that candidates are predisposed to be open about themselves, so your challenge is to ask questions that guide them to the information you need to make a hiring decision. Use the tips below to hone your job interview talents.

- **Pace your interview**
Use your first few questions to loosen up the candidate and set the tone for the rest of the interview. Questions that deal with a person's work experience -- such as "Tell me about a typical day on your current job. What do you like about it? What don't you like?" -- can get a candidate to open up and start talking...which, after all, is the point of an interview.
- **Listen more than you speak**
If you're spending more than 20 percent of the interview talking, then you're not giving the candidates a chance to talk about themselves. The purpose of an interview is to help you make a decision based on how a person responds to your questions. You need to take time to listen to those responses.
- **Set a schedule**
Put interviews on your calendar, and treat them as you would any other business appointment. Make sure you give the candidate your undivided attention - clear your desk; put your phone on "do not disturb;" close your door; let people in your office know you don't want to be interrupted.
- **Ask open-ended questions**
Avoid any question that can be answered with a simple yes or no. Instead, use open-ended questions to encourage candidates to talk about themselves. Listen to responses, and ask plenty of follow-up questions such as "Why do you think that's the case?" or "How did you do that?" If you need more information, ask the candidate for it.
- **Ask probing questions.** Your job is to get to know each candidate as well as you can. Chances are your candidates will prepare well. They will have reviewed the Web, read your literature and have a working familiarity with your operations. Use your questions to figure out which candidates are responding in a rote fashion and which are thinking critically about the challenges you face.
- **It is not that difficult to identify the winners here.**
Successful candidates will be prepared without being rote. They will have thought through the issues carefully. They will offer strategies for improvement and organizational development -- without being judgmental or heavy handed.

- They will also reveal themselves because of their command of the issues, their constructive suggestions, their humour and the ease with which they communicate. You will discern a level of honesty, clarity and hopefulness in their responses. You will want to ask more, talk more and engage them more fully in the process.
- Less qualified candidates will be uneasy straying from the text. They will avoid difficult questions, refrain from frequent eye contact and communicate their uneasiness both through their stilted responses and their body-language. When backed into a corner by thorough questions, they will offer platitudes and glib responses because they have not thought through the issues with any level of care. These are the candidates who will jump headline into a salary discussion -- before you have had the opportunity to assess their credentials fully.

Be cautious about candidates who:

- Arrive late for interviews or who get lost (not prepared)
 - Bellyache about their current job (negative/disloyal)
 - Describe every accomplishment as a personal feat (loner/non-team player)
 - Never give others credit/quick to blame others (loner)
 - Speak before processing a question and its implications (careless thinker)
 - Act as if they know more about your organization than you do (bossy/controlling)
 - Use the passive voice extensively in conversation (not willing to take charge)
 - Use diminutives to address junior staff/women professionals/their seniors
 - Use profanity in their discourse (inappropriate)
 - Boast about their financial success (cocky)
 - Put down their spouses, partners or colleagues (ego issues)
 - Describe themselves as "loners" or "difficult to please" (acknowledged egotist)
 - Have poor table manners (inappropriate)
 - Cut others off before they have finished a thought (impatient)
- Ask questions before you describe the job
Avoid providing a detailed job description at the beginning of the interview. A smart person will pick up on your description, and start phrasing all responses around what he or she perceives you want to hear. By asking as many questions as possible before you review the job, you'll be encouraging more honest answers.
- Evaluate all like candidates based on similar criteria
Before starting your interview process, meet with the SMT and/or SGB to hammer out which skills/priorities are most important for success. Then, work to create a concrete list of assessment benchmarks. Then, evaluate all candidates methodically based on your consensus check-list. If for example, fundraising ability becomes the focus of a HOD, make sure that you ask all candidates similar questions about their involvement and results in this regard. Some schools find a checklist helpful. When a multi-person committee is involved in the interview process, it is good to both numerical and quality analysis of all candidates. When you ask all candidates similar questions, you can compare their responses more precisely. You control the interview agenda. You get most of the information you need to make an informed decision. This approach also minimizes opportunities for cronyism and favouritism to undermine the process. If all candidates are treated with similar respect and as asked to meet similar criteria, you can trust your result when one emerges as the consistent candidate of choice.
- This approach is helpful when you are reviewing two equally qualified candidates. You can use your checklist and the priorities you have set, before the appointing process, to figure out which candidate is the better fit for the role you want to fill.
- Avoid standard questions
Everyone knows some of the typical interview questions - Where do you want to be five years from now? What are your strengths and weaknesses? Tell me about yourself? The problem with these questions is that many candidates have spent time preparing their responses. These scripted comments are of little use to you. Instead, try to come up with challenging questions that force interviewees to think on their feet and give an honest appraisal of their strengths and limits. For example, scenario-based questions, where you ask the candidate to react to a typical on-the-job situation, can paint a more accurate picture.
- Consider a two-interview process

Use a first interview to pare down candidates to the top two or three. Then use a second round of interviews to select the best. The second interview might be conducted by people who will interact with the candidate most closely. Their input is important.

- Know what you can't ask
The law is very strict regarding questions you can't ask during a job interview. In general, these forbidden questions are ones where the answer could be used to discriminate against a potential employee. They usually focus on non-job-related information such as age, race, marital status, religion, politics, gender, sexual orientation or disability.

(b) Interviews: Tips for Educators

- Preparing for an interview, be it for teaching or other jobs, is basically just the same. But the very important interview techniques for teachers are to know your teaching philosophy to be really prepared for an interview. Knowing this will help you better understand what you need from a school administration to boost your professional growth and success. Study the PAM and make sure that you are knowledgeable about the requirements for the specific post level.
- The rule of thumb in dressing for the interview is to dress professionally and conservatively. If you have done your research, you should have an idea of the school's work ethic, which should give you an idea of how to dress appropriately. First impressions, while they can't substitute for sound preparation are, nonetheless, highly important. Decisions are sometimes made in the first minute or so of the interview.
- Before the actual interview, do your homework first. Do some research about the school, its culture and mission statement (visit their website and read the reports). You may also look for the extra-curricular activities that they offer which you might be interested in leading or joining. It will create a good impression on the SGB if they know that you are knowledgeable about their school like the achievements of the school and the socio-economic qualities of the community.
- Be aware of body language, both your own and your interviewer's. Sit up, don't fidget, wiggle your foot, or make too many hand gestures. Try to maintain a relaxed, open manner. Eye contact is vitally important. Keep your voice level at an appropriate volume. If you speak very softly, this may be interpreted as shyness or a lack of assertiveness. Speak clearly and in complete sentences.
- Other interview techniques for teachers include giving specific answers to the questions being asked to you and looking professional during the interview. The interviewers for teaching posts are very particular about a prospective teacher's teaching style and philosophy. So, it is recommended that you highlight these things during the interview and cite specific examples of experiences and successes that you are very proud of. In presenting this, you should mention how you planned it and how the learner was assessed.
- It is also suggested as part of the effective interview techniques for teachers that you present your portfolio during the interview. This is very beneficial in giving you a better chance of getting hired. You can use your portfolio by explaining your successes and showing how you modified the instruction when you encountered problems. You can also show learner work and your rubric for grading as part of the portfolio to impress the interviewers.
- The most important interview techniques for teachers during the interview itself are to make an eye contact with the interviewer or panel of interviewers while answering their questions. This shows your confidence and creates a connection with the audience. Do not be afraid also to accept new challenges and be open for it. This will show your professionalism and being a team player.
- To prepare for the interview means to prepare for the possible questions that might be asked to you as well. Basically, the questions will start with what's on your resume. These questions would focus on your qualifications, training, teaching skills, work experience, and classroom management style. The most common questions that you might encounter are about handling difficult learners, motivating learners to be good in school, handling parent-teacher confrontation, and increasing parent involvement in their children's education.
- Aside from practicing how to answer interview questions, it is also included in the interview techniques for teachers to practice your listening skills. Remember that good listening skills can be learned and it takes

constant practice to master it. You will not only need it during the interview but in the classroom as well if you already start practicing your profession.

- Another helpful interview technique for teachers is for you to get a brief tour to the school to see how the learners and teachers interact and the condition of the school itself. Doing this will help you better understand the schools' culture and management style.

- Most and frequently asked questions

It is of the utmost importance to prepare yourself for a job interview. Below follows the most common questions you can expect while being interviewed by your new colleagues. When knowing a good answer for the questions to come, you will learn more about yourself and can even take the lead in any job interview.

- Tell us something about yourself.
Be sure to highlight your interest and compatibility to work in, for example, a team by talking about your rugby/soccer/hockey experience. Give examples of your assertiveness by talking about your part in the activities of your fraternity or sorority.
- What kind of teaching post did you have before and why did you stop working there?
Try not to be negative and talk about (bad) working conditions that you had to endure; simply explain that you were up for a new challenge and a job with more future perspective. A positive outlook on the future is always better than a negative outlook on the past.
- Why did you apply for this post? Why are you interested in working for our school?
Because it is an interesting institution, it offers new opportunities, you have personal affection with the quality, good reviews from a colleague. Be specific and say something about personal interests that relate to the job.
- You want to teach at this school. What do you have to offer? Can you give us an example of something you have achieved that can be beneficial for us?
Bring up something you achieved in your previous post, think of a successful project or an award your school won and your part in it.
- Can you describe a good and a bad quality of yourself? Can you give us an example in which this has been shown?
This is a tricky question. They are trying to filter out your best quality but they also want to know if you are self-aware and can name a bad quality. Your 'bad' quality shouldn't be really bad, but just something you can work on. For example your perfectionism that sometimes delays your other work. This is not per se a bad quality and it says something about yourself. Just be positive in the entire conversation. Remember, they are lucky to be able to interview you, not the other way around.
- Where do you see yourself in 5 or 10 years?
They want to know how long you will be interested in working at the school. The school invests in your education and experience and they want to benefit from this as long as possible. Employers are not keen on 'job-hoppers', employees that are going from job to job within a small period of time. It is important to give an answer that will explain you are still looking to be working at this school in 5 years' time, and of course in a higher/better function. This will highlight your ambition.
- Are you analytic / creative / entrepreneurial / a team player ... and can you give us an example?
Of course you are, but try to explain and give examples of at least two of these points. For instance: You are a team player because you are playing/have played soccer/rugby/hockey and you proved your skills in a team in your previous job. You are creative because you offer new ideas and you are very active in brainstorming sessions. Try to think of examples you encountered in your previous job concerning these qualities.
- Do you enjoy other activities, hobby's that can be seen as a benefit to your function within our school?
Again, sports, interests, taking good care of your body, it can all be a reflection of how you will treat your job/learners/parents. Of course this doesn't apply to every post, but you can imagine. Also say something about the experience you got from any training you had.

- This job is not always “9 to 5”. Maybe it will involve some overtime. Are you willing to work overtime? Try to explain you do not have a “9 to 5” mentality. They want to hear you are a flexible person that wants to work for their cause. You are the most productive if you have a job that suits you and you are ambitious. Affection for their high teaching standard is also something you should consider before you go for the interview.
- What do you know about our school?
First always check the school's website! Their website will show their plans for the future. More and more schools are showing their strategy, vision and mission. Study these and repeat them in front of your interviewers. Studying the school upfront always leaves a good impression. And you can figure out for yourself if you want to be a part of it.

At the end of the interview it is a common question if you have any questions for them. Try to ask at least one or two questions that involves the school and you. Do not ask about the salary or any additional benefits. And make sure you couldn't have found the answer on their website or any other simpler way.