

The [MedReps.com](https://www.MedReps.com)

# Guide to Effective Interviewing

# Introduction

When the MedReps team set out to research the most effective interview techniques for hiring quality sales reps, we were surprised by the ongoing debate surrounding the most effective interview questions and tactics. Not only did we discover a heated dispute over the best types of interview questions, but also about the effectiveness of the interview itself within the hiring process.



Despite its apparent flaws, the interview remains a necessary part of the hiring process. This guide reveals what you need to know about the different interview styles so you can determine which ones will help you to hire the best medical sales professionals.

# The Problem with Interviews...

Anyone who's ever been on a first date knows how awkward conversations with strangers can be. But despite the discomfort, if both parties see something worth pursuing, that first date will probably lead to a second, third, or fourth before it gets serious, and then there will be countless more dates before a couple decides to make the ultimate commitment.

*Okay, so the analogy isn't perfect.* Hiring decisions obviously aren't quite as permanent as the decision to get married, but it does involve selecting a candidate who – on some days at least – you will spend more waking hours with than you do your spouse. And yet, many times this decision is made after a couple hour-long conversations with a candidate on their very best behavior.

That's not to say the purpose of the interview is to “trip up” a candidate and get them to say something incriminating, but a good interviewer will ask questions designed to reveal a candidate's character, work ethic, value system, and of course, their proficiency in the skills required by the position. But is it possible to gain this insight during an interview? Are there really questions that can successfully glean this information in a few brief meetings with a candidate?



Results on a resume can tell you something about a candidate's qualifications, but managers generally rely on the interview to "get to know" the candidate and see if they'll be a "good fit." But how much can a series of routine interview questions really tell you about a candidate? And even if you ask some "tough" questions, who's to say the candidate didn't prepare for those questions after reading them on an employer review site like Glassdoor?

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The interview process itself may be flawed. A three-year study by Leadership IQ found that 46% of new hires fail within 18 months of employment and only 19% achieve unequivocal success. Mark Murphy, CEO of Leadership IQ, explains why the interview process is partly to blame:

*"The typical interview process fixates on ensuring that new hires are technically competent. But coachability, emotional intelligence, motivation and temperament are much more predictive of a new hire's success or failure. Do technical skills really matter if the employee isn't open to improving, alienates their coworkers, lacks drive and has the wrong personality for the job?"*



# Preparing for the Interview

Some of the problems with interviews could be prevented by better preparation on the part of interviewers. If hiring managers spent more time defining their ideal candidates' values, attitudes, and work habits, they would have a clearer idea of what qualities to look for during the interview.

A typical job description goes into great detail about the qualifications and technical skills required by the position but usually only cites generic terms like “team player,” “go-getter,” and “hard worker” to describe the ideal candidate's attitude. As a result, the manager has no criteria for evaluating the candidate's personality, and thus is likely to rely on their own personal preferences to determine “fit.”

For example, an outgoing hiring manager may dismiss a shy or soft-spoken candidate as “not right for the job” even though the position may not benefit from an outgoing personality. By outlining the personal traits important for the position *prior* to meeting with candidates, the interviewer would be less likely to let irrelevant preferences affect their decision.

Now in the case of hiring a sales professional, dismissing a candidate for being shy or soft-spoken is certainly understandable. In fact, these qualities may be on a list of unwanted attributes for that position. Thinking through the desired characteristics, as well as the unwanted traits, can help the hiring manager stay focused on what's most relevant during the interview.

# Interview Formats

Recruiters and hiring managers may use several interview formats during the hiring process – a phone call for the initial screening, followed by a face-to-face interview with the hiring manager, and maybe a panel interview with the potential team. Technology has introduced some additional options such as the video conference call or a Skype interview in which the recruiter or hiring manager can speak to a candidate “face to face” via computer or mobile device. These methods help companies eliminate travel costs in the earlier stages.



Companies aiming to save time may utilize the group interview, a format in which multiple candidates are invited to “interview” at the same time.

The group interview may be largely informational, consisting of a presentation on the company and what the job entails, or it may be more like an audition interview in which candidates are put together and expected to solve a problem or discuss a topic. The hiring manager can then observe how individual candidates respond to a team environment, who naturally falls into a leadership role, who is particularly persuasive, etc.

While candidates may feel slighted by the group interview, it can be an effective way for companies to quickly narrow the applicant pool. Most companies, however, give candidates the courtesy of a one-on-one evaluation.

# Personal Interview Styles

One's personal interview style is usually dictated by their management style. That is, a manager who instills fear in employees will likely adopt an **intimidating** interview style, and a more approachable manager will likely have a **friendly** interview style.

While most often, the interview style develops naturally out of the interviewer's inherent personality, it can also be a strategic choice used to test a candidate. For example, an interviewer may adopt a more intimidating style during the stress interview, or they may choose to be overly friendly in an attempt to make the candidate so comfortable that they reveal more about themselves than they might have done otherwise.



Sometimes interviewers adopt a **persuasive** style in an attempt to “sell” the job to the candidate. A persuasive interview style, like the friendly style, can give the candidate false confidence. Alternatively, a **transparent** interviewer will be upfront with the candidate about their intentions and expectations for the interview without being overly friendly or intimidating – an approach welcomed by most candidates.

# Types of Interviews

The interview is an unavoidable part of the hiring process, but how you choose to interview is completely up to you (or perhaps the company you work for). Knowing the prominent interview techniques available can inform an interviewer's choices, but it's unlikely they will select one style and use it exclusively. Most interviewers will settle on some combination of the following types of interviews:

**Traditional**

**Directive**

**Behavioral**

**SOARA/STAR**

**Case/Audition**

**Stress**

# Traditional

**Overview:** A Traditional interview is exactly what most job candidates are expecting. Standard questions such as “Where do you see yourself in 5 years?” and “How would a past supervisor describe you?” are almost mandatory. Traditional questions invite the candidate to paint a positive picture of themselves, after which a smart interviewer will ask follow up questions to dig deeper into their answers.

**Pros:** The Traditional format puts both the interviewer and the job candidate at ease because both parties generally know what to expect.

**Cons:** Most candidates will be ready for these questions, so you are unlikely to learn anything about them that they don’t want you to know. Additionally, most candidates are fairly certain about what it is the interviewer is hoping to hear and will answer the question accordingly. However, just because they give the “right” answer doesn’t mean they’ll choose the best action when put to the test.

Sample interview questions:

- Tell me about yourself.
- Start with your most recent position and walk me through your resume.  
*(Often used by unprepared interviewers!)*
- Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
- What kind of work do you most enjoy?
- Describe your ideal supervisor.
- Do you prefer working with a team or on your own?
- Why do you want to work here?
- Do you consider yourself a leader?
- What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?

# Directive

**Overview:** The goal of a Directive (also called Structured) interview is to extract similar information from all candidates so that the interviewer can more fairly assess candidates based on the same set of criteria. Questions are prepared beforehand and the interviewer typically takes notes to document the candidate's answers. The focus is on the candidate's qualifications and relevant experience rather than personality and cultural fit.

**Pros:** The Directive style allows for more parity between candidates and thus may be favored by corporations with strict guidelines for the hiring process. The Directive style is also useful in an initial screening of candidates.

**Cons:** The leading style of questioning is designed to elicit specific information – and nothing more. A lack of open-ended questions prevents the interviewer from learning anything unexpected about the candidate.

## Sample interview questions:

- What is your quota for the current year? What did you achieve in the previous quarter?
- How many calls do you make per day in your current/most recent position?
- How many people do you manage?
- Do you have experience with Salesforce CRM?
- Have you worked with an iPad as a sales tool?
- How many years have you been calling on C-level hospital executives?

# Behavioral

**Overview:** Based on the idea that past behavior is the best indicator of future performance, the behavioral interview prompts the candidate to recount detailed descriptions of past events and accomplishments related to their career. Behavioral interviewers aim to extract specifics about a candidate's involvement in and contributions to any relevant achievements listed on their resume.

**Pros:** When used effectively, this technique draws relevant information out of the candidate that they may not have revealed otherwise. It prompts them to provide specific examples of their past successes (and in some cases, failures), after which the savvy interviewer will ask follow up questions to gauge their level of involvement.

**Cons:** Whatever the candidate reveals is 100% from the candidate's perspective and thus will not always provide a complete picture of the situation. For example, a candidate may cite their successful work on a project and leave out the fact that it was team-driven. However, good follow up questions would reveal this detail.

## Sample interview questions:

- Describe a time when you were able to build a relationship with an initially hostile prospect or customer.
- Describe a time when you *weren't* able to win over a prospect. What do you think you could have done differently?
- Tell me about a time you were tasked with defining a strategy for achieving results. What was the outcome?
- Tell me about a time when management asked you to change your priorities or focus.
- Describe a time when you were given direction you did not agree with.
- Describe a situation, with a prospect or with a colleague, where you adapted your communication style to make a connection.

# SOARA / STAR

*(Situation, Objective, Actions, Results, Aftermath) /  
(Situation, Task, Action, Result)*

**Overview:** An extension of Behavioral interviewing, the SOARA or STAR technique prompts the candidate to recount the specific details of their past involvement in relevant business situations. More than simply asking the candidate to describe a situation, successful execution of the technique will trigger the candidate to share details related to objectives, actions, and results.

**Pros:** Like Behavioral interview questions, asking SOARA or STAR-based interview questions will jog a candidate's memory and help them to give you a complete picture of how they have conducted themselves in past relevant situations.

**Cons:** Past behavior may not be applicable in the current market. How a candidate successfully handled a problem in the past may not be the best way to handle that same problem now.

## Sample interview questions:

- Describe a challenging situation you faced in your recent sales career.
- What was your goal during that time?
- What steps did you take to reach your objective?
- How did your team/manager/customers react?
- How did your choice and subsequent action impact your ability to reach quota?
- Looking back, what would you have done differently?
- How did that situation inform your thoughts on the sales process?

# Case or Audition

**Overview:** In the Case or Audition interview, the candidate will be asked to demonstrate their skills rather than simply talk about them. The candidate may be presented with a simulated business scenario or “case” about which they are encouraged to ask questions and gather data to fully understand the situation before walking the interviewer through the steps they would take to solve the problem. A brainteaser or riddle may also serve as a “case.” Frequently used by consulting firms, the Case interview technique applied to a sales position might require the candidate to prepare and perform a sales presentation for the interviewer or interviewing team.

**Pros:** By simulating a probable business scenario, the interviewer can more effectively evaluate how the candidate will perform in the given situation. If actions speak louder than words, the case interview provides the best insight into a candidate.

**Cons:** The simulation is just that – a simulation. It may not be an accurate representation of how the candidate would behave in “real” circumstances.

## Sample interview questions:

- How would you recommend a pharmaceutical company go about evaluating the pros and cons of acquiring a given biotech company. (McKinsey case interview example)
- One of the largest healthcare groups in your territory has instituted a no-see policy. How do you continue to get information to physicians?
- Sell me a bridge.
- Prepare a presentation on one of our best selling products.
- Your nephew is running a lemonade stand over his spring break. After selling only 3 cups on Monday, he asks you for help. What do you recommend? (Reportedly asked by McKinsey)

# Stress

**Overview:** The stress interview involves subjecting a candidate to an uncomfortable situation and evaluating how they handle it. The interviewer may create the stressful circumstance by making the candidate wait an hour or more for the interview to begin, by insulting the candidate, allowing long pauses after a candidate's answer, or tactlessly asking stress-inducing questions about a layoff or an admitted area of weakness. Unconventional questions such as brainteasers and riddles may also be used as part of the stress technique.

**Pros:** The stress interview allows the interviewer to see how a candidate may operate under pressure, so this method is ideal for evaluating candidates for high-pressure positions. The use of brainteasers or riddles may provide additional insight into how candidates tackle problems. Oddball questions may also trigger genuine reactions that reveal an unexpected aspect of a candidate's personality.

**Cons:** The stress interview can be revealing, but it can also irritate talented, qualified candidates to the point they feel the job isn't worth the hassle. *(Plus, it can be kind of mean!)*

## Sample interview questions:

- Companies hold onto their top performers regardless of economic trends. So, why were you let go?
- Why didn't you make your quota in Q2 of 2011?
- Your numbers aren't all that impressive. (Silence)
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how weird are you? (Reportedly asked by Zappos)
- You are shrunk to the height of a nickel and thrown into a blender. Your mass is reduced so that your density is the same as usual. The blades start moving in 60 seconds. What do you do? (Reportedly asked at Google)

# Illegal Interview Questions

A good interviewer will dig deep to uncover what kind of employee a candidate might be, however, there are some areas best kept covered. The US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) prohibits discrimination against a job candidate based on race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy), national origin, age (40 or older), disability or genetic information.

Alison Green (of [Ask A Manager](#) fame) says that questions on these topics are not actually illegal, but making a hiring decision based on the answers to them is. To play it smart, it's best to avoid any question that may cause the candidate to disclose information related to EEOC prohibited topics.

Note that if the question is relevant to a candidate's ability to do the job, the interviewer may factor the answer into the hiring decision. In the case of hiring a sales rep expected to conduct business in operating rooms, questions related to their ability to be credentialed for hospital access may be relevant.

[Business Insider](#) advises avoiding questions like these:

- Are you married?
- Do you have children?
- What country are you from?
- Is English your first language?
- Have you ever been arrested?
- Do you have any outstanding debt?
- Do you drink alcohol socially?
- How long have you been in the workforce?
- Which religious holidays do you observe?

# “Now, what questions do you have for me?”

You won't be the only one asking questions in the interview. Top candidates won't hold back when you ask them if they have questions for you. They'll be ready, and you should be too. The candidate you want will likely have several employment options, so while your answers should be honest, they should also aim to impress.

If your candidate *doesn't* have any questions for you, that's a red flag indicating either inexperience or indifference. You should still proceed with “Well, you might be wondering...” and then tell them a little more about the company, why you like your job, and what challenges the person you hire may face in the role.

Some questions to prepare for:

*What will you expect from the new hire in the first 30, 60, and 90 days of employment?*

*How are top performers recognized?*

*How would you describe the corporate culture?*

*What is your management style?*

*What would others in this role say is the biggest challenge they face?*

*What will the person you hire need to do to ultimately reflect well on you and your decision to hire them?*



# Post Interview Review

Immediately following the interview, the hiring manager should evaluate the candidate using a consistent rating system. The system should allow the interviewer to objectively assess the candidate in the areas critical to the position. Naturally, not all areas of evaluation will hold the same importance, so unless you design a formula for weighting answers and averaging out a final score, it's best to simply keep the big picture in mind when making comparisons.

*View the following sample evaluation for a sales rep position.*

Candidate Evaluation		
	5	Ideal / Exceeds expectations
	4	Acceptable / Meets requirement
	3	Adequate / Some training required
	2	Not adequate / Extensive training required
	1	Not adequate
	0	Not enough information
<b>EXPERIENCE</b>	<b>SKILLS</b>	<b>ATTITUDE</b>
Relevance: _____	Salesmanship: _____	Positive: _____
Amount: _____	Technical: _____	Determined: _____
Sales Performance: _____	Leadership: _____	Honest/Ethical: _____
Industry Relationships: _____	Listening: _____	Open to Feedback: _____
<b>Notes:</b>		

# Conclusion

The interview is by far the most subjective part of the hiring process and therefore is probably the most complex. There is no one-size-fits-all prescription for effective interviewing; each interviewer can only learn the techniques and decide for themselves which combination proves most successful for hiring a given position.

Most interviewers don't choose one technique, style, or format and use it exclusively; rather they'll pick and choose from the various methods and create an interview process that works for them. Perhaps they'll use Directive or Structured questions during the initial phone-screen interview, then ease into the face-to-face interview with some Traditional questions followed by Behavioral – prompting the candidate to provide specifics through SOARA or

STAR-based questions. Certain roles may benefit from incorporating the Case interview technique, and for a few positions, perhaps an intense sales role, the Stress interview may prove particularly revealing.

But perhaps the most important part of interviewing isn't the technique or style used, but rather the preparation beforehand and the grading system after. Thinking through exactly which skills and traits are desired for the position will help the interviewer to focus on what's most relevant during the interview. After the interview, rating the candidate using an established scale allows hiring managers to more fairly assess candidates and ultimately, make better hiring decisions.

For more hiring resources visit [MedReps.com](https://www.MedReps.com).

*Good luck and happy hiring!*



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