
The Character of Success
for
Managers at Bryant University

Interviewing Guide

(Revised 8/25/04)

Career Strategies, Inc.
Boston, MA

–A New Approach to Interviewing for Managers at Bryant University–

An interviewer's biggest concern is, "How can I tell in an interview what a candidate will actually do on the job?"

The purpose of this interview guide is to give you the tools necessary to ensure that the person you choose in the interviewing process is a person who will be a star performer on the job – not the person who has the best looking credentials or the person with the slickest interview style. Once you have tried this approach to interviewing and have seen how easy and successful it is, you will never go back to another approach.

What's different about this way of interviewing?

This approach to interviewing is based upon two things: the Success Factors described in the Character of Success for Managers at Bryant University (see page 4) and a social science approach to interviewing sometimes called behavioral event interviewing.

The Success Factors were completed in June, 2003. They are based on interviews with twenty-one Bryant managers who were asked for data concerning themselves and at least three other managers as well. These Success Factors give you, the interviewer, a target to aim for in an interview.

Behavioral event interviewing means that you look at samples of behavior and match those samples to components of the Success Factors. If you can assess behaviors in the candidates you interview and match them to the behaviors of the best performers on the job, you can be assured of hiring a star performer.

How can you accurately assess future behavior in candidates?

There are two reliable ways to assess future behavior in an interview. They are:

1. To observe what a candidate does naturally during the interview process. (See #1 below.)
2. To find out what the candidate did in the past in similar circumstances. (See #2 below.)

1. How can you observe candidate behavior in an interview?

Of the two assessment methods, observing behavior is the more valid predictor. What people actually do without practice or rehearsal is real data about how they will perform on the job in the future.

Here are some easy examples. If you are looking for flawless follow-through skills, someone who doesn't call back a recruiter when he said he would is probably not going to follow through on the job. Or, if you are looking for someone who can express himself or herself clearly in person, look at *how your candidate communicates*, not just *what he or she said*. This guide will give you some behaviors you can observe in your candidates to predict their behavior in the future on the job.

2. How do you ask for samples of past behavior?

To find out what candidates did in the past, you have to ask open-ended questions about past behavior. It is important to ask these questions in an open-ended way so that they give you the data and *you* evaluate it, not the other way around. For example, if you ask a candidate for a manager position, "What is your management style?", you will get a great deal of rhetoric at a high level of abstraction. They are evaluating their own style and presenting you with their conclusions.

If, on the other hand, you say, "Tell me how you assured yourself your projects were on track," you are more likely to get example answers. From these examples you can predict how a candidate will perform in similar circumstances. For instance, if a candidate answers, "I always meet individually with everyone daily to see how they are doing and I audit their progress with surprise visits," you will have some real data about the candidate's management style. If another candidate answers the same question with, "We have weekly team meetings, and everyone shares what they are doing and what they need from the rest of us. Then, we talk about the possible obstacles we face and how to get around them and plan for the next week," you would get a different impression of the person's management style.

It is important to remember that it is the answers that matter, not the question itself. If you don't get the behavior sample you are looking for the first time you ask a question, ask another question like, "Can you give me an example of what you mean?" And if that example isn't enough, ask for another one. You should feel free to ask as many follow-up questions as you have to, to make sure that you have the behavior sample that you need to make a judgment about what the candidate would do in the future.

For each of the traits identified as critical to success for Bryant managers, this guide will give you both open-ended questions to ask and samples of excellent answers.

Do hypothetical questions predict future behavior in candidates?

Hypothetical questions are questions like "What would you do if..." or "How would you handle a situation like...". Most candidates will try to guess the answer you have in your mind or give you a theoretical answer. That doesn't help you predict what they will actually do on the job. All the answer says about candidates is how fast they can make up something on the spot.

How do you identify technical or functional qualifications?

Hiring managers can identify the technical or functional qualifications they are looking for in much the same way as they look for Success Factors. The best way is to look at samples of a candidate's work. For example, if you need someone who can write project plans or final reports, you should ask for an example of a project plan or final report to review. The candidate can always mask out any confidential or proprietary information.

A person doesn't have to have been in communications or graphic design to have a portfolio of work to review. People in most jobs can be asked for writing samples or other work samples. When you are

reviewing work samples, you should be matching them to the level of functional sophistication you need in the job you are hiring for.

That level of sophistication may vary depending on the other people you have on your team. For example, when you have a team of people relatively new to their position, you might want to bring in a more experienced person for balance and to take the training load off yourself. Or, you might want to add a person with a different set of skills that your team needs. If you have a team of experienced people with strong financial skills, for example, you may want to add someone with strong change management skills. When you are screening for technical or functional qualifications, it's important to consider the needs of your team as a whole.

As with Success Factors or personal traits, you can also evaluate a person's technical expertise with stories. Ask for detail about one of the important functional tasks on his or her resume. For example, "Tell me how you went about improving the quality of service to students in that department." In this case, the follow-up would be technical questions related to the function of the job.

Whether you are looking at work samples or asking for stories, keep in mind that you must get a picture of what that individual actually did. If you are looking at a project plan, for instance, you should use as a follow-up question, "What was your role in putting this together?"

Watch out for the candidates who answer all story-related questions with "we." Yes, it does show a team orientation, but it makes it hard for you to judge what the person actually did. Don't assume. Ask for clarification — "Tell me a little about what you did to develop this project plan." Then, you'll have a real basis for judgment.

What this guide contains:

After the listing on the next page of all the Success Factors describing the Character of Success for Managers at Bryant University, you will find sample questions and answers to look for, along with behavior to observe for each of the five Success Factors. There are far too many questions and behaviors to use without exhausting both you and the candidate! Just select the ones you think are most relevant. Good luck. You are hiring for the future of Bryant University.

If you have concerns about whether a question you come up with is legal or illegal...

All the sample questions in this guide are legal and appropriate. But if you are ever unsure about whether a question you are thinking about asking is legal or illegal, or just plain inappropriate, *don't guess!* Take a couple of minutes and run the question by someone in Human Resources, they would be happy to help you.

The Character of Success for Managers at Bryant University

Excellent managers at Bryant University:

1. **Communicate and exemplify the University's mission for students.** They:
 - Demonstrate by their actions a personal commitment to students.
 - Identify opportunities to contribute to the University's mission inside and outside of their own areas.
 - Relate their own department's goals to the mission.
 - Talk about the mission on a regular basis.
 - Act for the good of the University, not just for their own or their department's good.

2. **Mentor and develop a team.** They:
 - Hire the right people.
 - Assign people the right responsibilities for their development.
 - Actively get to know their staff.
 - Listen to the team's concerns and suggestions.
 - Give clear feedback throughout the year.
 - Develop their team's strengths and help them overcome their weaknesses.
 - Hold people to results, and not always mandate the process for getting them.

3. **Work across functions to achieve the University's goals.** They:
 - Respect everyone, no matter his or her role.
 - Orchestrate activities that increase communication between the silos.
 - Negotiate solutions acceptable to those involved.
 - Are persuasive with their peers.
 - Make time for cross-functional activities.

4. **Lead change at Bryant.** They:
 - Articulate the reasons for the changes.
 - Are receptive to new ideas and approaches.
 - Are flexible and open to new assignments.
 - Are aware of what's going on outside of Bryant and bring that knowledge back to Bryant.

5. **Accept responsibility and hold others accountable.** They:
 - Express their concerns in a professional way.
 - Acknowledge when they have made a mistake.
 - Do more than their job requires.
 - Delegate responsibility to their staff and back them up.

Success Factor 1: Excellent managers at Bryant University communicate and exemplify the University's mission for students.

Sample Questions to Ask:

- Describe how your department contributes to the mission or overall objectives of your organization.
- Can you give me a couple of examples of what you yourself contributed to the mission of your organization? Either within or outside of your own area?
- How do organizational objectives get communicated within your organization? What is it that you have done to get the message across? Can you give me some specific examples?
- Tell me about a time when there was a conflict between what you wanted to accomplish and what another department wanted. How was that resolved?
- Have you ever had to give up something you wanted for your department? What were the circumstances, and how was the situation resolved?
- What do you do to make sure that your people know what your organization's strategic and tactical objectives are? Can you give me some specific examples?
- Have you worked directly with students? Can you tell me about a difficult interaction with a student? A situation when you may have had to bend the rules for a student? A situation in which you felt you really had to hold the line about a student request? A time that you really made a difference to a student?

Note: If the candidate hasn't had experience with students, the questions in the last bullet above can be used by substituting the word "customer" for "student."

Excellent Answers:

Excellent candidates should be able to:

- Understand and describe the mission or objectives of the organization they work for and the concrete steps they have taken to align their staff with those objectives.
- Clearly state what they themselves have contributed either within their area or through working with another part of the organization. They should be able to describe results as well as activities.
- Give concrete examples of what they have done to communicate their organization's objectives.
- Weigh the needs of their own part of the organization against other departments or the organization as a whole. They should be able to understand and accept a decision that didn't go their way. Answers that show a skill at adept political maneuvering on behalf of their own interests would be the opposite of what Bryant is looking for.
- Show a positive concern and commitment for either students or customers. They should be able to point to many examples of when they made a difference. They should understand and articulate the student or customer point of view a difficult interaction. Benchmark the "bend the rules" and "hold the line" questions against the best manager you know at Bryant. Do the candidate's answers show a similar flexibility and firmness?

Behaviors to Observe:

All excellent candidates should:

- Show they have done some of their own research on the mission and direction at Bryant, the strengths of the University, and the students Bryant has and is trying to attract.
- Show a solid understanding of the mission and problems, and opportunities of their current employer.

-
- Communicate clearly the objectives of their current department and current employer.
 - Get excited talking about what they have done for students or customers.

Success Factor 2: Excellent managers at Bryant University mentor and develop a team.

Sample Questions to Ask:

- Pick two or three people you have hired to work for you. What were they like when you first met them and why did you hire them? What are they doing now?
- Tell me about one or two people who worked for you who were relatively inexperienced or new to your organization. What did you do to bring them up to speed? What were the first assignments you gave them? Why?
- How do you make sure your team is on the right track? Can you give me some examples? Can you give me an example of a time when you thought they were on the wrong track? What did you do?
- Assess the strengths and weaknesses of your current team. What actions have you taken in the last three months to develop the strengths and help them overcome the weaknesses?
- Tell me about the best group you managed. Why were they the best? How did they get that way?
- Tell me about a time when your people just weren't getting the results you expected. What did you do about it?
- Give me a couple of specific examples of important assignments you have given people who work for you. How did you follow up on their progress?

Excellent Answers:

Excellent candidates should be able to:

- Describe people they have hired in terms of fit with the team as well as credentials.
- Show a teaching and professional development orientation toward their staff.
- Show that they have taken the time to understand the people who work for them. They should be able to describe what they have done to give their staff appropriate developmental assignments.
- Indicate in their answers their receptivity to team concerns and suggestions.
- Give examples of the feedback they have given to the team or to individuals during the year.
- Be able to describe the success and the professional development of the people working for them.
- Describe team results, not just the team interaction.
- Indicate in their descriptions of their own follow-up approach that they are focused on results and not micro-managing.

Behaviors to Observe:

All excellent candidates should:

- Take obvious pride in the people they have hired and helped to develop professionally.
- Listen carefully in the interview and use what they have heard later in the conversation.

-
- Ask questions to start to get to know the people that may be reporting to them.
 - Talk about their accomplishments in terms of results, not just activities.
 - Credit people working for them, e.g. “Nancy had a great idea...”.
 - Say “we” when describing their team. Or are all their stories “I” stories?

Success Factor 3: Excellent managers at Bryant University work across functions to achieve the University’s goals.

Sample Questions:

- What other parts of your organization do you work most closely with now? Can you give me a couple of examples of how you work together?
- Tell me about a time when you felt you had to persuade one or more of your peers to get something accomplished for the good of your organization. What was the situation, and what did you do?
- Have you ever had the experience of your own staff not getting along with another part of the organization? What happened?
- Tell me about a time when you thought that communication could resolve organizational issues. What did you do about it?
- Sometimes organizations use cross-functional teams to accomplish organizational goals. Have you ever been involved in one? Helped start one? What was the goal, and what did you do?
- How much of your time in a normal week is taken up with cross-functional activities of any kind? What are these activities? How do you balance the work in your department with these activities?

Excellent Answers:

Excellent candidates should be able to:

- Show respect for different kinds of people with different roles and status within the organization.
- Articulate the points of view of people with different interests.
- Tell you the organizational objectives they are trying to accomplish by working cross-functionally.
- Describe how they facilitated consensus in spite of different self-interests or points of view. This answer should show respect for those differences and an understanding of why it was important that everyone agree.
- See the need for communication within an organization, but help make communication occur without necessarily always taking the credit for it.
- Give examples of when they were personally persuasive.
- Show that they take the time for cross-functional activities, but not at the expense of their own area.

Behaviors to Observe:

All excellent candidates should:

-
- Have a positive, optimistic attitude when describing situations, their peers, and other departments. Blaming and complaining behavior is an indication they are not right for Bryant.
 - Demonstrate sensitivity to different kinds of people; for example, by telling you how they intentionally have changed their communication style to make sure they are communicating effectively.
 - Be personally persuasive with you and the other interviewers
 - Refer to the opinions or points of view of others in the interview process.
 - Show respect for everyone they meet in the hiring process. Check in with the receptionist to make sure they have.

Success Factor 4: Excellent managers at Bryant University lead change.

Sample Questions:

- Have you ever been in the position of helping your team operationalize an organizational change? What was the situation, and what did you do? Can you remember what you said to your team?
- What changes have there been in your area in the last six months? Please describe the changes and how they came to be.
- Describe a time when either you or your team had to change direction or take on a new assignment. What was the situation, and what happened?
- Tell me about a time you had to find a completely new approach to a problem. What was the situation, and what did you do?
- Describe a calculated risk you have taken in order to challenge traditional processes or produce positive change. Tell me about a similar risk you encouraged someone who works for you to take.
- What have you and your staff done in the past year to stay up with new developments in your profession?

Excellent Answers:

Excellent candidates should be able to:

- Articulate for you, as well as for their team, the reasons for the changes they describe.
- Discuss how they came up with new ideas and approaches. The best examples would include looking outside their organization or soliciting input from their own staff or others.
- Give positive examples of times when they have taken on new assignments or changed direction and helped their team make the adjustment, too.
- Give concrete, recent examples of what they have personally done and what their team has done to learn and grow professionally.

Behaviors to Observe:

All excellent candidates should:

- Show an interest in how you do things at Bryant.

-
- Share ideas and suggestions easily.
 - Show flexibility in the hiring process if schedules or interviewers change.
 - Ask questions about how Bryant does things, especially new or nontraditional approaches.
 - Show that they are knowledgeable about what other organizations are doing and what is “the latest” in their profession.

Success Factor 5: Excellent managers at Bryant University accept responsibility and hold others accountable.

Sample Questions:

- Have you ever been concerned about being able to follow through on a commitment you had made? What were the circumstances, and what did you do?
- Tell me about a time when you were really worried that your team wouldn’t deliver on a commitment you had made. What did you do about it?
- Describe a mistake you or your team made and what you did when you found out.
- Describe one or two of your most important current priorities. What are the obstacles that might affect your ability to achieve them? What have you done about those obstacles?
- Have you ever felt that you went above and beyond the call of duty? What were the circumstances? What did you do? Why?
- Describe a time when you had the responsibility for something, but not the clear authority. What were the circumstances, and what did you do?
- Tell me about a time when you delegated more than you should have to someone. How did you know? What did you do about it?
- Have you ever helped someone who works with you take a calculated risk? Describe what happened.

Excellent Answers:

Excellent candidates should be able to:

- Show by the examples they choose that they take their responsibilities seriously and will do what it takes to deliver on their commitments, even if that is more than their job requires.
- Describe situations in which they openly expressed their concerns to others in a professional way, whether on their own staff or not. Watch out for negative examples of going above someone’s head to resolve a problem or other kinds of indirect political action.
- Openly acknowledge mistakes and take early action to correct them.
- Show a personal commitment to delivering on what they have agreed to do.
- Show by their examples that they are willing to seek responsibility, even when the authority isn’t clear.
- Give examples of standing behind team members who took a risk or who needed “public” support from their manager.

Behaviors to Observe:

All excellent candidates should:

-
- Get excited talking about the results they produced.
 - Be flawless in their follow-through on anything you ask them for in the hiring process.
 - Be able to express their concerns about the position they are interviewing for in a professional way.
 - Take the initiative to follow up about the status of their candidacy or their interview schedule.
 - Be open about it if they have made a mistake.