Appendix D: Behavioral Interview Questions: Deciding What to Ask

Take time to identify the competencies and capabilities that are vital to the position you are seeking to fill. The questions below are designed to reveal some of the most commonly-needed competencies: Adaptability, Civility, Commitment, Communication Skills, Dealing with Pressure, Planning and Organizational Skills, Positive Relationship Building, Producing Results, and Management and Leadership. (Note: some questions address several competencies, and may appear more than once below.)

**Adaptability**

- Describe a time when you took a new job that required a much different set of skills, and how you went about learning your new job.
- Have you had an occasion when a prior strength actually turned out to be a weakness in another setting? How did you cope?
- Describe a time when you’ve been in a situation where deadlines and priorities changed frequently or rapidly. How did you handle the situation?
- People react differently when job demands are constantly changing. Give an example of a time when you had to quickly change project priorities. What was the outcome?
- Give an example of a time when you had to adapt to a new process. What did you do and why?

**Civility**

- What is your personal philosophy for showing respect to colleagues that you work with? Can you give an example of how your behavior aligns with this philosophy toward those that you work with?
- Tell me about a time when you were in the midst of a frustrating situation and you needed to maintain your equilibrium and good humor, even when others were not behaving appropriately. What were the circumstances? What did you do? Was there something that you wished you had done differently?
- Talk about a situation from your past where you had to take into consideration the feelings, reactions and comfort level of others in your organization. What was the situation and how did you factor in these additional considerations?
- When you are frustrated by a co-worker's behavior or actions (whatever they might be), what kinds of things do you do or say to let them know that you are frustrated. Give me an example. How did it work to resolve the situation?
- Tell me about a time when you were challenged by a situation where others were behaving in an inappropriate or uncivil way. Did you find yourself acting that way as well, or did your behavior follow a different route? How did things turn out?

- Tell me about a time when you observed a colleague engage in uncivil behavior toward another employee. When you’ve experienced or observed behavior like this at work, does the behavior bother you? In these instances, what did you do, who did you consult?

- How would you describe the level of civility or politeness of your organization? In which areas do you feel comfortable and uncomfortable with it?

**Commitment**

- Can you tell me of a time when you had to go above and beyond your regular job responsibilities? What was the situation and how were you able to accomplish your goals?

- Can you tell me of a time when you changed a process or procedure to make your department or organization more effective?

- What was the most difficult aspect of your previous position and how did you deal with that aspect?

- What major obstacle(s) did you face that threatened your success in your last role, or in a particular project, and how did you overcome it?

**Communication Skills**

- Give an example of how you think about your audience before communicating with them. What factors influence your communications?

- What do you consider when deciding whether to communicate in writing, by phone, or face-to-face?

- Describe a time you used your communication skills to negotiate with an angry person. How did it turn out?

- Tell me about a time when effective listening skills helped you in a problematic situation.

- What do you do when you think someone is not listening to you?

- Describe a time when you were able to overcome a communication barrier. What steps did you take and why?

- Describe a presentation you recently gave. How did you approach the presentation? How did you communicate the materials?

- As a manager, tell me about your experience in explaining or giving instructions to another person.

- Can you tell me about a time when you had to communicate complex information to someone who was not knowledgeable with the “language”? How did you go about doing this?

- Tell me about a time when you had to get clarification on a request that was vague. What did you do?

- Tell me about a time when you felt that someone on your team was not contributing enough. How did you approach them? What was the outcome?
**Dealing with Pressure**

- Tell me about a time when you had to re-prioritize your work and still managed to meet all your commitments. What steps did you take?

- Tell me about a time when a major issue popped up at the end of the workday. What happened? How did you handle it?

- Tell me about a difficult decision you had to make under the pressure of an unexpected deadline. What was the situation? Why was it difficult? What was the decision? What was the outcome?

- Tell me about a time when you could not accomplish a task within a deadline. Why not? How did you address this?

**Planning and Organizational Skills**

- When have you found it useful to develop checklists, procedures, or methods to help cope with a high volume of work?

- Tell me about a time when you had to deal with an unstructured work environment.

- How do you organize your work during a typical day?

- How do you determine which responsibilities are a priority? What methods do you use to ensure that all priorities are met?

**Positive Relationship Building**

- How do you go about forming relationships with your colleagues, managers, and peers?

- Can you give me an example of when you had to deal with a difficult person? What was the situation? What was your relationship to the individual? How did you approach the conversation? What was the end result?

- Can you tell me of a time when you had to present a new, untested idea to your manager? What was your approach? What was the outcome?

- Can you tell me about a time when you were challenged on a decision? What did you say?

- Can you tell me about a time when you provided constructively critical feedback to a colleague or direct report? What did you say and how did it go?

- How do you go about taking the initiative to get the information you need to get your work done (specifically from other co-workers)?

- Tell me about a time when you felt someone on your team was not contributing fully to their work. How did you approach them? What was the outcome, in terms of the relationship and initiative?
Producing Results (deliverables)

• Tell me about a project or responsibility in which you were involved and are proud of the outcome. What was expected? What were the results? How did you face the challenges?

• Tell me about a responsibility you were given and had no previous knowledge of how to accomplish. How did you react? What was the outcome?

• Tell me about a difficult situation you had to make under the pressure of an unexpected deadline. What was the situation and why was it difficult? What decision did you make and what was the outcome?

• Tell me about a time when you could not accomplish a responsibility within a deadline. Why not? How did you address this with your manager?

• Tell me about a time when you felt someone on your team was not contributing enough to an initiative. How did you approach them? What was the outcome of the initiative and how was your relationship with this person impacted?

• Describe a time you had to analyze data in order to produce a particular product, program, or result. How did you gather the data? How much time was spent and how was the information presented? What was the end result?

Management and Leadership (if appropriate)

• Tell me about a time when, as a manager, you were successful at getting someone to change an ineffective behavior. How did you approach the situation?

• Tell me about a time when you had to assemble a team for a project. How did you go about doing this and why did you choose these individuals?

• Describe a time when you had to lead a group through some major changes.

• When did you feel your leadership was most tested? What did you do as a result?

• Tell me about a time when you helped a direct report advance his or her career.

• Tell me about a time you had to give difficult performance feedback to someone on your team.

• Can you tell me of a time when you had to let someone go?

• Tell me about a time when you felt that your team did not agree with your decisions. How did you go about persuading them to see your perspective? What was the outcome?

• Tell me about a time when you felt someone on your team was not contributing enough to a task. How did you approach them? What was the outcome of the task?