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**Key Questions to Ask Job Candidates:** There is so much more to a job interview than "can you make this widget?" Carol Ferguson, Vice-President at Toronto-based management consulting firm Towhey Consulting Group Inc. advises. It's one thing to determine if the candidate has the skills to perform the job, figuring out if this person has the "right" attitude is something else altogether

According to Ferguson, there are "Four Competencies" to look for in a potential employee. Teamwork, significant professional accomplishments, communication, and customer and client service skills are areas every employer should examine.

Ferguson has put together a template outlining the sort of questions and answers that will help you ascertain the interviewee's attitudes and expectations:

## **Teamwork**

**Question:** Can you give me an example of a time you were involved in a really highly-efficient team and what was the project you were jointly working on?

**What their answer tells me:** I am looking for a specific example here, not rambling on about how important it is to have good teamwork etc. I want an answer such as: "The challenge was to get the product onto the shelf in two months and I contributed by....." With this question, I'm trying to get a sense of whether the person understood demonstrated teamwork, whether or not they are a leader or if they stand back and watch when there is a task that needs to be completed.

**Question:** Can you give me an example of a time you were involved in a team that didn't work well together at all and more importantly, what did you do to try to get the team back on track?

**What their answer tells me:** Again, I would like to hear a concrete example. I'm interested to know, for example, what the person took on as their role in trying to rectify the situation.

## **Significant professional accomplishments**

**Question:** I'd like to hear about a project you were involved in that you consider was a fabulous success. What was your involvement and what was the outcome?

**Question:** If the person is fresh out of school, or has recently earned qualifications that lets them apply for a more senior position, you might also consider asking: "How did you achieve this goal? Why did you decide to attain this new degree/diploma/advanced course/designation?"

***What their answer tells me:*** From their answer I can gauge how high their expectations of themselves/their own achievements reach. I have a sense of the lengths they are prepared to go to realize those goals.

## **Communication**

**Question:** This is a two-pronged question: 1) Tell me what your ideal work environment would be.

2) Tell me what kind of support from your boss motivates you to superior performance.

***What their answer tells me:*** This question, because it has two components, lets me assess how well the person "listens" and how well they articulate their thought process.

As to the actual answers: As an interviewer, I know my company's work environment. How closely does it mirror the "idealized" one given in the answer? I also know who the interviewee's boss will be: does he or she routinely give this kind/level of direction and support, or does the boss prefer, perhaps, someone more independent?

## **Customer/client service**

**Question:** We've all encountered a difficult client/customer. Can you think of a time this happened to you and how you resolved it?

**What their answer tells me:** I'm trying to find out if the person lobbed the problem off on another employee or on to their supervisor. I want to understand if the person tries to be a "problem solver" and shows initiative. On the other hand, I also want to ascertain if he or she understands when a situation needs to be referred to a person higher up in the company.

One further thought: As an interviewer I probably don't believe that "the customer is always right", but I do believe the "customer comes first." So I want to understand if the prospective employee feels this way and will demonstrate this on behalf of my company.

## **Top three strengths**

**Question:** Please describe what you consider your top three strengths, and, if possible, tell me how these attributes will fit into and help our company grow.

**What their answer tells me:** Firstly, I know the demands of the job for which I am interviewing, so I can figure out from their answer if there is a good fit.

Finally, their answer also lets me end the interview on a high note. Everyone enjoys talking about their capabilities.