

Outside the Box

PROBING QUESTIONS

Experienced interviewers quickly develop a list of favorite questions, ones they feel yield strong, revealing answers. Mark Jaffe, president of Wyatt & Jaffe in Minneapolis, has a particularly shrewd questions he likes to ask job candidates, “What are people’s greatest misperceptions about you?” Jaffe finds the answers very enlightening because, as he explains, “What you view as misperceptions are other people’s truths.”

Dennis Spring, president of Spring Associates in New York, asks, “If I were to call your manger, what would he or she say is the one thing that you’re relied on for the most?” Spring recommends the question, since “the answer tells me how she perceives herself in the organization, but not through her own eyes.”

Jim McSherry, managing partner of McSherry & Associates 2 in Westchester, Illinois, asks job candidates, “If I were to talk with the people who know you best, how would they describe you?” McSherry says applicants almost always offer him an honest self-appraisal, which, coincidentally, “summarizes and confirms what I’ve learned about them during the time we’ve been talking.”

Looking Long and Hard

A national study conducted by recruiting and staffing firm Spherion Corporation reports that hiring managers interview an average of 8 people for an available position. About 27 percent of smaller companies interview 10 or more people on average for an opening compared with only 14 percent of larger companies. Almost 42 percent of employers believe their managers are interviewing too many people. In an effort to reduce these numbers, more and more companies are turning to prescreening tools (51 percent of those surveyed) and assessment programs (60 percent) to find the most suitable candidates.

The High Cost of Replacement

There’s a sound financial logic behind keeping workers content—if an employee decides to leave, replacing him could end up costing his company two and a half times his salary. This startling ratio was released in a 2006 survey of 444 North America organizational consulting. Yet the amount makes sense if you consider the expense of hiring, training, and severance, plus lost productivity while the position remains vacant. In fact, 43 percent of organizations responding said replacing a worker costs at least three times the employee’s salary.