

Sample Interview Questions for Small Company Hiring Managers

By Eric Rudolf

When it comes to the hiring process, small company managers are used to carrying the bulk of the load. While our counterparts within the Fortune 1000 have access to things like onsite recruiters, online assessments and multi-departmental search teams, small company managers rarely have the time or the patience to endure an interview process that exceeds more than two rounds. But at the same time, inserting the wrong employee into a small company environment can be devastating to both the culture and the bottom line. Balancing these two things—a lack of hiring infrastructure and the need for a quality hire—is as much an art as it is a science.

With the rapidly changing priorities, mix of personality types and lack of structure that almost always come with working in a small company environment, successfully surviving one requires a mix of political savvy, street smarts and straight out survival skills. Standard interview questions like "Where do you see yourself in five years?" and "What is your biggest weakness?" might protect you from an eventual lawsuit, but they will rarely uncover the best candidate for your open position.

Below are two sets of interview questions for use by small company hiring managers. The first set is designed for all candidates, and will assist in narrowing the initial field. The second set should be used only for candidates considered 'finalists' for a position. Note that simply *asking* these questions is a much smaller piece of the puzzle than actually *getting an answer*. For example, accepting a response of "I like all of them" to the question "Which parts of this job would you dislike the most?" will result in no useful information. Space for note taking has been left after each question, so feel free to print this document and use it during your interviews as-is. Also note this tool does NOT include all of the questions a hiring manager will want to ask during an interview. Questions relating to the candidate's industry-specific experience, knowledge of the product line and educational background must be included as well.

And finally, if you would like to improve this tool by sharing some of your favorite small company interview questions, please email them directly to me at eric@thesmallcompanyblog.com. If I use them in the next release of this document, I will give you full credit for your submission.

Question Set #1: Interview Questions for All Candidates

The questions in this section are designed to get a feel for the candidates—the way they think, the way they like to work, their level of past responsibility, and their comfort level operating in a typical small company environment. When asking these questions, be sure to elicit complete answers from each candidate, so you may fairly compare them all at the completion of the interview round.

1. How do you like to be managed?
2. How do you currently interact with your supervisor? How do you prefer to interact—how often, using which communication methods, how formally, etc?
3. Describe a time when you managed three or more major initiatives or large projects at once.
4. Have you ever been given a project with very little direction on how to complete it? What did you do? How did you handle it? What was the outcome?
5. Describe a situation in which you used your own judgment to prioritize a long list of action items.
6. Have you ever been asked to walk away from a project after investing a significant amount of time in it? How did that make you feel? How did you handle it?
7. What methods or tools do you use to keep track of multiple action items?
8. Describe a situation where you provided both tactical and strategic support for an initiative or project.
9. Describe a situation where you worked on an initiative or project from the beginning to the end.
10. If you are given 10 things to do, and you only have time to complete three of them, how do you choose the three?

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Question Set #2: Interview Questions for Finalists

The questions in this section are designed to dig deeper into the candidates you have identified as finalists—their cross-organizational vision, their strategies for handling conflict, and the goals they have set for themselves. With this round of questions, be wary of red flags like truncated responses, attempts to change the subject, and answers that don't seem to match those given during the previous interview.

11. What is one thing you absolutely could not handle in a boss, or in a company you work for?
12. If you were angry about something, how would I know?
13. If you truly believed I was making a bad decision, and I refused to listen to you, what would you do?
14. Name one thing I could tell you about this job right now that would make you not want it anymore.
15. Describe the most difficult person you've ever worked with.
16. Describe a time where you took something personally.
17. What do you do when you're out-voted on an issue?
18. Would you consider yourself to be "political?"
19. If you disagree with someone's assessment of a situation, how do you handle it?
20. If every job in the world paid the same amount of money, what would you choose to do for a living?
21. Which pieces of this position do you least look forward to doing and why? Which ones do you most look forward to?

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