

# **INTERVIEWING: MORE THAN A GUT FEELING**

**Richard S. Deems, PhD**

## **Chapter One**

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650 South Prairie View Drive, Suite 125 #124  
West Des Moines, Iowa 50266 USA**

**Phone 515-229-0737  
[www.medialearninginternational.com](http://www.medialearninginternational.com)  
[info@medialearninginternational.com](mailto:info@medialearninginternational.com)**

## Foreword

For the past 20 years, I have coached job candidates on the interviewing process. I constantly listen as supervisors, managers, recruiters, and executive-search professionals talk about how they interview and the kinds of questions they ask. I listen to people in job-search situations describe the kinds of interviews they've experienced. Information from all of these sources has helped me successfully coach JobGetters.

When approached about writing this book, it didn't take me long to say, "Yes." *Interviewing: More Than a Gut Feeling* has given me an opportunity to take what I have learned and apply it to the other side of the table—that of the interviewer.

If you've ever worried about

- ◆ How to be more effective when you conduct a hiring interview
- ◆ How to predict a candidate's future job performance
- ◆ How to hire people who will be truly successful in their jobs

then this book is for you. It will take you through the process of planning and conducting effective hiring interviews, and tell you how to evaluate the candidates to arrive at the right hiring decision.

There are two phrases you will read again and again throughout this book. The first is, "*The single best predictor of future job performance is past job behavior.*" The second is, ". . . so you can hire the person who will be successful in the job."

When you start using these phrases in talking to candidates, to peers, to subordinates, and also to superiors, you set in motion a mind-set that has the potential to radically change your hiring procedures. The result?

- ◆ Others will notice that people in your department are able to get things done.
- ◆ Others will notice that people in your department enjoy working with you.
- ◆ Others will notice that people in your department really enjoy their work.
- ◆ Finally, your boss will notice that your employee turnover has been reduced.

And all of this happens because you've taken the time and effort to hire people who will truly be successful in their jobs.

## How to Read This Book

This book has been designed to be highly user-friendly! The writing style is easy to understand, and the organization of each chapter is simple to follow. Interactive exercises in each chapter will help you think through the information you've read and make it your own. To help you even further in your understanding of this material, try these suggestions:

- ◆ Turn to the Table of Contents to see how the book is organized.
- ◆ Take a quick look through this book, scanning or reading headings and paragraphs that interest you. Try to get a feel for how the book is organized and what it has to say.
- ◆ Put the book down and write out three questions you have about interviewing—questions that may have prompted you to read this book in the first place.
- ◆ Review your first question and try to identify a key word, phrase, or topic that might indicate where in the book this question will be answered. Turn again to the Table of Contents, and look for that key word, phrase, or topic. If you don't find it there, think of another word or phrase that relates to your question.
- ◆ When you've found a reference in the Table of Contents, turn to the part of the book that deals with your question and look for the answer. If you are referred to other sections or chapters, read those additional pages too. Continue until you have your answer.
- ◆ Use this same procedure for the rest of your questions. As you find answers to each of them, you may still come up with other questions. If you do, just repeat the process.

Of course, you also can pick up the book and begin reading from cover to cover. Each chapter begins with objectives and contains interactive exercises for you to complete.

Perhaps most important, an Interview Planning Guide is included to help you prepare for your interviews.

The publisher and the author hope that our information truly helps you in your efforts to hire the right person for your job . . . based on *more than a gut feeling*.

## About the Author

Richard S. Deems, Ph.D., is the founder and CEO of Deems Associates Inc., a national career-management consulting firm. For nearly 20 years, Dr. Deems has helped thousands of people across this country and in Canada prepare to interview for jobs with confidence.

In *Interviewing: More Than a Gut Feeling*, Deems presents a step-by-step system to help decision-makers implement effective hiring decisions—decisions based on more than a gut feeling.

Deems received his bachelor's degree from Nebraska Wesleyan University, his master's degree from Northwestern University, and his Ph.D. from the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, with an emphasis on adult development.

He is the author of numerous articles on career-management issues and is frequently quoted as an expert in the career-management field. Deems is also the author of *I Have to Fire Someone!* and *Making Change Work For You* from Coastal.

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# Chapter *One*

## *Why “More Than a Gut Feeling”?*

### Chapter Objectives

- ▶ Why hiring needs to be based on more than a gut feeling.
- ▶ How past behavior is the single best predictor of future performance.
- ▶ Your company’s true costs for employee turnover.
- ▶ The dangers of litigation due to faulty hiring practices.
- ▶ How hiring practices affect the company’s reputation.
- ▶ The hiring process.

A lot of hiring gets done based on nothing other than a gut feeling.

**A** lot of hiring gets done based on *nothing other than a gut feeling*. Assumptions. Intuition.

And a lot of employee turnover results because that gut feeling, that assumption, that intuition just wasn’t very accurate. The person who seemed so perfect in the interview couldn’t get the job done. That person with the pleasant personality really didn’t have the job skills you needed. The candidate who had a fast answer for every question during the interview couldn’t take the fast pace on the job.

If you’re like most managers, one of your greatest fears is that you’ll hire the wrong person. You want to hire the person who, ultimately, will be the most successful in the job. That’s because you know from experience that your operation will function more smoothly and will be more productive if the right person is in the right job.

If you're like most managers, your greatest need is for a system of interviewing that doesn't force you to rely on a gut feeling or your intuition. You want a system that enables you to gather the right information and use it to make informed hiring decisions. You want a system that has built-in predictability, so you know that the person you hire will be successful on the job.

This book will introduce you to the practice of behavior-based interviewing. The concept of behavior-based interviewing is simple: Your interview questions target the candidate's past job behavior . . . because past behavior is a reliable predictor of future performance.

### **Past Behavior Predicts Future Performance**

The single best predictor of a candidate's future job performance is his or her past job behavior. How do we know this is true? Because it's been proved in thousands of actual job situations for more than two decades. Interviews that probe for past job behavior have been found to be more reliable than ones that focus on personality traits, such as “I'm dependable,” or “I'm hardworking,” or even, “You can count on me.” And hiring decisions based on actual behavior are far more accurate than those based on gut feelings.

What many successful interviewers have found is that the way in which a person handled a specific situation in the past gives you valid information about how that person will approach a similar situation in the future. If a person has worked well with customers in the past, he or she will most likely be effective with customers in the future. If the person has had trouble communicating well in the past, you can predict that he or she will continue to have communication problems in the future.

This is the foundation for behavior-based interviewing. Once you understand this concept, you can plan to ask the kinds of questions that will give you the information you need to make good hiring decisions.

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**The best single predictor of a candidate's future job performance is his or her past job behavior.**

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## ● Why “More Than a Gut Feeling”?

**Employee turnover costs money.**

### The High Cost of Employee Turnover

Employee turnover costs money, and the cost typically is a lot higher than most managers think it is. The cost of turnover includes everything from recruiting costs, the time to screen and interview new candidates, and the time and money to train the new employee to the cost of lost work time while all this is taking place. In some positions, lost work translates into lost business because customers or potential customers go somewhere else while the new employee is on the learning curve of effectively performing the job.

Some companies have identified employee-turnover costs as ranging from 35 percent to as much as 100 percent of the employee’s annual salary. One organization estimated that it cost them in excess of \$10 million annually to recruit, hire, and train more than 500 new manager-trainees. Bottom line: Employee turnover—for whatever reason—is extremely costly!

Obviously, you can’t hope to eliminate employee turnover completely; it’s a fact of modern business life that people change jobs. But you can reduce needless employee turnover—by doing all you can to make certain you hire the right person in the first place.



## Take a Moment

Stop for a moment and do your own analysis of the real cost of employee turnover. Think of a recent situation in which you had to replace someone because the original hiring decision was a poor decision. Now, review the items listed below and assign a dollar cost to each item. You will need to estimate many of these costs, but try to be realistic. Add them up, and you'll have a good idea of the total cost of just one instance of employee turnover.

\$\_\_\_\_\_ Lost productivity while the position is vacant

\$\_\_\_\_\_ Recruiting costs: advertising and/or agency fees

\$\_\_\_\_\_ Screening costs: reviewing résumés, responding to inquiries, and providing information about the job

\$\_\_\_\_\_ Interviewing costs: time spent contacting candidates, arranging interviews, preparing for each interview, and conducting the interviews

\$\_\_\_\_\_ Evaluating costs: time spent evaluating the candidates and making the selection

\$\_\_\_\_\_ The cost of making the job offer: time spent negotiating with the successful candidate and arranging the start date

\$\_\_\_\_\_ Training costs: the money and cost of introducing the new employee and training him or her

\$\_\_\_\_\_ The cost of reduced efficiency as the new employee learns the job

\$\_\_\_\_\_ Other employee-turnover costs that you have identified

\$\_\_\_\_\_ **Total Cost of One Instance of Employee Turnover**

## ● Why “More Than a Gut Feeling”?

### Exposure to Litigation

Federal legislation mandates that companies practice nondiscriminatory actions during the hiring process. This means that, by law, you are not allowed to make your hiring decisions based on anything other than bona fide occupational qualifications. In other words, if a person has the necessary skills to be successful in the job, you cannot discriminate based on:

**You can't ask certain kinds of questions during the hiring interview or list them on any application forms.**

- ◆ Age
- ◆ Sex
- ◆ Ethnic origin
- ◆ Religious preference or affiliation
- ◆ Sexual preference
- ◆ Marital status
- ◆ Disabilities

This also means that you can't ask certain kinds of questions during the hiring interview or list them on any application forms. Chapter Four—“How Can I Develop Fair and Effective Questions?”—will help you clarify what is and what is not discriminatory.

As our culture becomes more diverse, there has been an upsurge in the number of complaints filed about discriminatory hiring practices. Though a charge of discrimination is often difficult to prove, it also can be very difficult and costly to defend.

### Marketplace Response

The public forms opinions of companies. One thing people always discuss when they talk about an organization is how good (or poor) a job it does in hiring. When an organization earns a reputation for excellence in hiring, it invariably enjoys a good reputation in the marketplace, and several things happen:

- ◆ The organization is able to attract top candidates.
- ◆ Productivity is high.

- ◆ Employees enjoy working for the organization.
- ◆ People are more likely to buy the organization’s products and services.

You can help build a positive image for your organization each time you interview someone. And each successful impression you make is often followed by more success.

### The Hiring Process

When you understand what really takes place in the hiring process, you’ll understand why it’s necessary to make hiring decisions based on more than a gut feeling. You will understand that you need to:

- ◆ Think through the skills needed to be successful on the job.
- ◆ Prepare questions that will get each candidate to talk about these needed skills.
- ◆ Go beyond your gut reactions or assumptions as to who is best qualified for the job.
- ◆ Understand the hiring process.

### Identifying an Unmet Need

The hiring process begins with the identification of an unmet need (see diagram on page 14) . An unmet need may be a task that needs to be accomplished. Maybe it’s a new need, or perhaps it exists because of a job vacancy. Just as a person sometimes must take inventory of his or her experience and best skills and abilities, it’s important to assess the specific employee skills and abilities that will best answer this unmet need.

You need to translate your unmet need into a job description that lists the various duties, tasks, and responsibilities of the job. The more detailed the job description, the easier it will be for you and your candidates to understand exactly what kinds of skills and experience are necessary for success in the job.

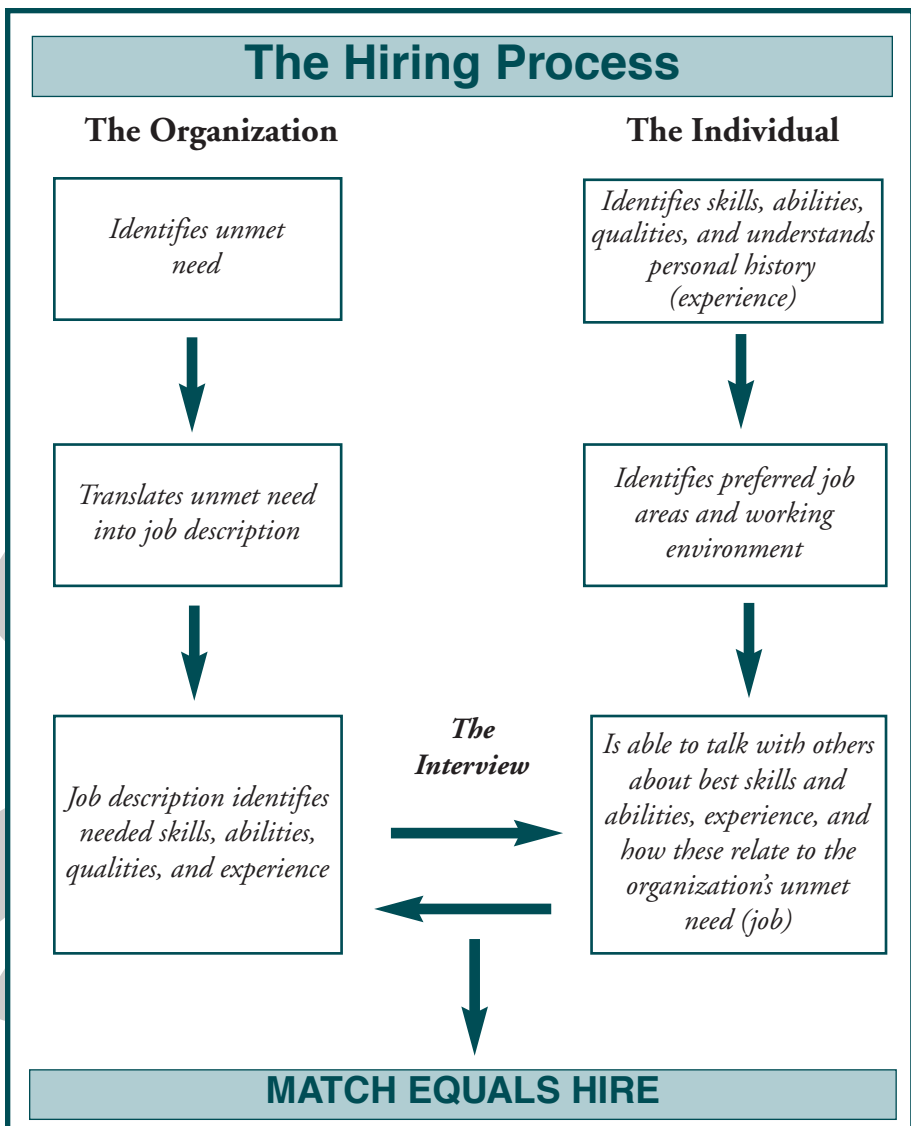
**The hiring process begins with the identification of an unmet need.**

## ● Why “More Than a Gut Feeling”?

### Making a Match

The interview is the interaction between the decision-maker and the candidate that attempts to find out if the candidate has these necessary skills. When there is a match, there is a job offer.

Ultimately, the hiring process is successful only when the hiring decision is based on this match between required job skills and demonstrated candidate skills and experience . . . in other words, on more than a gut feeling.



### Self-Check: Chapter 1 Review

Indicate True or False for each of the statements below.  
Suggested answers appear on page 89.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. The single best predictor of future job performance is past job behavior.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Employee turnover can cost as much as 10 percent of the employee’s salary.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Companies that are effective in hiring enjoy good reputations in the marketplace.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. During the job interview, you cannot ask a candidate’s age or ethnic origin.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. During the job interview, you can ask about a candidate’s marital status.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Companies that are thought to use discriminatory hiring practices often find it difficult to recruit top candidates.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. A poor-performing employee can negatively affect the entire work unit.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Successful hiring involves a lot more than relying on just a gut feeling.

