1. **Interviewing Lay Persons**

In formulating questions for interviewing lay persons, the two most important guidelines are to ensure that each question be related to do the job for which the applicant is applying and that the same questions be asked of each applicant for the position (job relatedness and consistency). In addition to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), federal and state antidiscrimination regulations must be considered during the interview process. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act is the federal regulation that prohibits discrimination against individuals based on race, color, sex, religion, and national origin. Because a religious organization may discriminate based on religion, we may require that employee be United Methodist or may indicate that applicants who are United Methodist will be given preference. Consistency is a key here, to be sure all applicants and employees are treated the same. Most of the time, allegations of discrimination during the hiring process are not based on intentional actions of managers. Many will inadvertently ask a question or make a comment that is potentially discriminatory. Sometimes even indirect questions can reveal information about a protected class. According to the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, or EEOC (the agency that enforces Title VI), even these questions are prohibited.

1. **Questions to avoid during an interview.**

- What year did you graduate? *(Age)*
- Do you rent or own a home? *(Sex—according to the government, more males own homes than females, so this question has a greater negative impact on females.)*
- What kind of car do you drive? *(Race, Sex)*
- Have you ever filed for Workers’ Compensation? *(Disability)*
- Have you ever been addicted to drugs? *(Disability – it’s okay to ask about current drug use; however, reformed addicts meet the definition of a person with a disability.)*
- Where do you go to church? *(Religion)*
- What year did you graduate from high school?
- Please enclose a photograph with your resume. *(Race, National Origin, Sex or Age)*
- Are you married? What is your maiden name? *(Illegal inquiry about marital status)*
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- What is your native language? Are you a U.S. citizen? Where were you born? (National Origin)

- Are you disabled? What is the nature or severity of your disability? What caused your disability? (Disability)

- How old are you? What is your date of birth? (Age)

- Do you plan to have children? Do you have children? What are your childcare arrangements? (Sex)

- Are you pregnant? (Pregnancy discrimination)

- Do you have a drug or alcohol problem? (Disability)

2. Here are examples of permitted inquiries (job related):

- Have you ever been fired or otherwise had your employment involuntarily terminated?

- There is a gap in the time frames shown on your resume. Tell me about that.

- Can you show proof of eligibility to work in the United States?

- Are you able to perform essential functions of this job with or without accommodations?

- Would you be willing to travel?

- What would your last boss tell a new potential employee about you?

- What skills do you think you bring to this job?

- How much do you know about our organization?

- Who and what has motivated you in the past?

- Why did you leave your last position?

- What do you consider your greatest work accomplishment?

- When were you last responsible for doing this kind of work?

- What goals did you set for yourself during your last position?

- How were you able to demonstrate teamwork in your last position?

- What does service mean to you?

- How might your skills be improved?
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- Where do you see yourself a year from now? In three years? Five years? Ten years?

- Tell me about the last time you broke the rules to serve a client/customer in need. *(Flexibility, judgment)*

- Tell me how you have used humor to diffuse a tense situation. *(Tact)*

- Give me an example of a time you went above and beyond the call of duty to assist a co-worker when you received no recognition or credit. *(Unselfishness, teamwork)*

- Give me an example of how you worked with an extremely difficult co-worker. How did you handle it? *(Adaptability)*

- Describe a time when a co-worker failed to pull his or her weight. What did you do? *(Adaptability)*

- Tell me about the most difficult customer you’ve ever dealt with. How did you handle it? *(Service focus)*

- What’s the most important thing you’ve learned in the last six months?

- What new skills, knowledge or experience have you gained? *(Willingness and ability to learn)*

- Tell me about the last time you tried something new or took on additional responsibility when there was no guarantee for success. *(Willingness to take risks)*

- Tell me about the last time you asked someone for feedback. What did you do with that information? *(Willingness to learn/listen)*

- Tell me about the last time you had to work with others to accomplish a critical result. What did you do? *(Teamwork)*

3. **Hire for Attitude, Train for Skill**

As you dig for clues about your candidates, focus on attitude and personality. Why? Because it’s easier to teach and train someone who is positive, happy, and willing to please. It’s much more difficult to coach and lead someone who may be skilled, but who continually “sees the glass half empty”. Also, as much as you might like to believe otherwise, it’s extremely difficult to change inherent attitudes in people. There are certain traits that are essential for success, regardless of the position. These traits go beyond experience and previous work history and have become increasingly important, as the
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workforce makeup has changed. Let’s review some of these important attributes:

- **Work ethic.** Ask the candidate what types of choices he or she was responsible for as a young adult. Did the candidate work for an allowance? Did he or she work through high school? A work ethic is often ingrained in childhood. Ask questions that provide clues to an early development of strong work ethic.

- **Loyalty.** Does the candidate have any childhood friends? Is there evidence of long-term relationships that require loyalty?

- **Sense of humor.** This is not the ability to tell a joke, but the ability to go through life’s ups and downs and still keep a smile on your face.

- **Respect.** Did the candidate show respect for the receptionist?

- **Judgment.** There’s no replacement for an employee who exercises good judgment in decision-making. This one relates to common sense. Ask the candidate to give you examples of using his or her independent judgment and thinking to make important decisions.

- **Flexibility.** A person who opposes change can have difficulty growing with the company. Look for clues in the candidate’s life and personal development – evidence that he or she has been open to change, both personally and professionally.

- **Integrity.** The credibility of your company is at stake. Only hire people with complete integrity. Crosscheck information from employment forms and interviews and conduct background checks to verify integrity.

- **Maturity.** Contrary to popular belief, maturity does come with age!

- **Dependability.** This can often be verified through reference checking.

- **Intelligence.** Does not come from formal schooling in most cases. We’ve all met college graduates who can’t formulate a sentence. You can test employees for a general idea of aptitude and ability to learn.

- **Initiative.** Very difficult to assess during the interview, but easy to pick up on shortly after hire.

- **Enthusiasm.** There’s a name for people at our firm who are not enthusiastic. It’s *unemployed!* Hire people who believe in your company mission and philosophy!
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Many of these traits can be identified through personality profiles, proper questioning and, yes, quality time with the candidate. There are no shortcuts. Proper interviewing and hiring take time. The more time you invest with the candidate, the more you will learn about him or her.

4. **Review of Job Description**

It’s wise to review the job description with candidates, including specific position duties, what to expect during a typical week, and the reporting structure. Candidates should also be made aware of the type of physical and/or mental work typically required.

6. **Candidate Evaluation Form**

After the interview is completed, the next step in the process is to document your overall evaluation of the candidate on the Candidate Evaluation Form. By using this form as a guide, you have an opportunity to objectively evaluate each candidate with regard to a number of important job-related traits. This form can also provide the documentation necessary in the event the candidate challenges your hiring decision or alleges discrimination.

As you evaluate candidates, give serious consideration to individuals who:

- Show *proven* capability to do the job, including former achievements, not just past functions.
- Demonstrate interest in the job.
- Radiate enthusiasm.
- Ask logical questions.
- Get to the interview on time and dress appropriately.
- Have good manners and are not condescending.
- Appear able to get along with co-workers.
- Show loyalty to former employers.
- Give the present employer adequate notice when resigning.
- Offer references to contact.

On the other hand, be wary of candidates who:
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- Quit a job without adequate notice.
- Show a lack of achievements at former jobs.
- Seem to know little about former jobs or companies and can’t supply verifiable references.
- Reveal confidential information or talk badly about a former employer.
- Consider violating a contract with a former employer.
- Act pompous or rude to the receptionist.
- Arrive late for more than one of a series of interviews.
- Dress inappropriately or are poorly groomed.
- Travel too far to work.
- Lack enthusiasm.
- Lie about material factors.