

What do you consider
are the essential
attributes of an
interviewer and why?

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



Countless interviews are carried out each year by interviewers with the view to eliciting information from interviewees or assessing their suitability for job positions. The duration and cost involved in carrying out these interviews vary greatly (Lamb, Hair and McDaniel, 2000). These interviews are conducted in person or face to face, over the telephone and by email (Evans, Moutinho and Van Raaij, 1996). The ability of these interviews to achieve their desired objectives to a large extent depends on the interviewers employed.

Interviewers with excellent attributes for interviewing are able to achieve the objectives they set for themselves, whereas their counterparts without them often fail to reach conclusive outcomes. By the nature of the work, interviewers need to have genuine interest in people, their behaviours, emotions, lifestyles, passions and opinions (McDaniel and Gates, 1999). Without these attributes, interviewers cannot effectively interact with their interviewees. And without effective interaction, it would be difficult for an interviewer to elicit information from the interviewee or to assess them properly.

It is therefore essential for interviewers to have people's skills, if they hope to be successful at interviewing. They also need to sharpen their interpersonal or interactive skills (Lewis, 1989; Hayden, 1991). A study carried out in Australia has revealed that irrespective of the background of interviewers, those who are relaxed, empathetic and warm in nature tend to be more effective than those without these attributes (Wright and Powell, 2007). The same study further established that these attributes were more

important than knowledge of legislation, prior job experience, and interviewing techniques.

These findings should not be surprising since these attributes enable the interviewer to draw needed information easily from their interviewees.

Papadopoulou, Ineson and Williams (1996) also reported that the degree of empathy shown by the interviewer affected the perceptions of the interviewee. The study of Papadopoulou and colleagues also established that the overall satisfaction of interviewee with the interview was a function of the empathetic behaviour of the interviewer. Interviewers need also to possess excellent communication skills.

Interviewing is all about communication. Therefore, the ability of an interviewer to express himself in clear terms greatly helps during the interviewing process. When questions are clearly posed, the interviewee is able to understand and respond to them accordingly. On the other hand, if the interviewer is unable to communicate clearly to the interviewee, it unduly drags the interview and elicitation of answers to questions posed becomes difficult. Through the art of communication, the interviewer should be able to gain the cooperation of the interviewee or respondent.

Without such cooperation, it would be difficult for the interviewer to make any meaningful headway during the interview. Gaining the cooperation of the interviewee or respondent itself is an art the interviewer must learn.

Another essential attribute an interviewer should possess is the ability to listen (Ross and Kimball, 2007). Good listening skills are needed to be able to

take in new information. Interviewers with good listening skills make excellent interviewers. Communication is a two way process.

To be a successful communicator, one must not only possess the ability to send a message across to another person, but also be able to listen to the feedback received (Van der Zouwen and Smit, 2005). Interviewers with good listening skills are able to hear what is being said and to identify what is not being said (McDaniel and Gates, 1999). From this process, interviewers are able to pose the right type of questions likely to elicit the information most needed. Listening skills are therefore a vital attribute any serious-minded interviewer should possess.

With good listening skills, interviewers would be able to hear and understand what interviewees are trying to communicate to them and respond appropriately. Unfortunately, the acquisition of listening skills does not come easily, so an interviewer should be prepared to spend time in acquiring them. For interviewers to be successful at interviewing they must be deeply knowledgeable in the subject matter they are handling. They should invest the time to adequately prepare themselves for the interview.

That way, they would be equipped to ask simple and straight forward questions likely to draw the required information from their interviewees. Also, interviewers would be better positioned to assess their interviewees if they prepare themselves for the occasion. Good knowledge of the subject matter by interviewers helps them from being side-tracked in the course of the interview. Interviewers are also able to pan out what is essential

information from what is not if they possess adequate knowledge about the subject matter under discussion.

The desire to be curious and yet not too smart is an enduring attribute any prospective interviewer should possess (Ross and Kimball, 2007). Such an attribute helps in the preparation for the occasion and also in probing issues to elicit information from interviewees. Interviewers should have interest in a wide range of topics. They should also have the ability to immerse themselves in a topic and acquire the necessary knowledge and language quickly (McDaniel and Gates, 1999). Other essential attributes of interviewers are consistency and discipline (Barclay, 2001).

Interviewers sometimes use a guide to direct the discussion or conversation during the interview. The possession of these attributes enables the interviewer to keep the conversation on track, no matter how distracted the interviewee attempts to drive it. It is not uncommon to find interviewees attempting to sway the conversation from the path envisioned by the interviewer. On such occasions, it takes the attribute of consistency on the part of the interviewer to keep the interview on track. Without the attribute of consistency, an interview can drag on for hours without any meaningful outcome being arrived at.

Mention has already been made about the importance of prior preparation by the interviewer. This enables a discussion guide to be prepared or where a guide has been given, to be thoroughly studied by the interviewer. Without personal discipline, preparation for interviews would be difficult for the

interviewer. The consequences of poor or no preparation on the outcome of an interview have also been stressed. It is therefore incumbent on interviewers to cultivate the habit of preparing before the interview.

Interviewers must develop strong work ethics. Individual creativity is another essential attribute needed by interviewers. Often interviewers undertake their tasks without procedures, guides and criteria. Even where such criteria, procedures and guides are provided, the outcome of the conversation in some cases may demand a creative input without altering the guide being used. Without such creative inputs, the interview becomes dry and unrevealing. In extreme cases, the interviewee may even become bored in the process.

Creative skills therefore need to be cultivated by interviewers to enable them put life into the interview. Interviewers need to possess good observation skills. This attribute would enable them to interpret accurately body language. Furthermore, these skills would give them the ability to see in detail what is happening and steer the course of the interview accordingly. When the interviewer is able to accurately observe and interpret the turn of events, he is better positioned to tailor his questions to draw information from the interviewee.

Without good observation skills, the interviewer may stick rigidly to the interviewing guide when the turn of events demand that some creative changes be introduced to save the interview. Interviewers also need to be objective. This attribute would enable them to set aside their personal ideas

and feelings and remain open to ideas and feelings of others. Objectivity on the part of the interviewer enables the wider interest of the interview to be placed higher above personal ideas, interests, whims and caprices.

At the end of the day, what the interviewer seeks would be what would enable the goals of the interview to be achieved. Interviewers should also have the ability to have a flexible outlook on the turn of events. This would enable them to allow interesting digressions. As it has already been pointed out, it is not always that the interview would stay on course as planned. Unexpected developments may occur. However, if the interviewer is flexible, he would be able to steer the interview on course. The ability of flexibility enables useful information to be panned out of unplanned developments or unintended digressions.

It needs to be stressed that bringing digressing interviews into focus is sometimes not easy. A great deal of skill is required to keep an interview in on course. For example, unintended digressions call for the interviewer to think on his feet and make fast decisions. He should also have the ability to live with uncertainty. Interviewers also need to be patient. It is not uncommon for negative emotions to be expressed by interviewees, especially when the information being sought from them is considered to be sensitive.

In such instances, if the negative emotions are met by the interviewer with similar ones, it is likely to disrupt the interview. On the other hand, if the interviewer keeps his cool and patiently keeps the interview on course, it is

likely that a more productive outcome would be achieved. It takes a great of patience to tolerate negative emotions and also new information that is not consistent with what one espouses. Interviewers also need to accept and appreciate the differences in people, especially those whose lives greatly differ from their own.

McDaniel and Gates (1999) call this attribute an “ unconditional positive regard”. Interviewees differ remarkably in their upbringing, thought patterns, values and norms. These differences need to be taken into account when people are being interviewed. Having an unconditional positive regard would enable interviewers listen intently to their interviewees, irrespective of their background and are able to learn new information from them. Interviewers should be good record keepers. This would enable them to recall information easily in the course of an interview.

Being able to recall information, positions the interviewer better to follow the conversation or discussion and to ask intelligent questions. On the hand, interviewers who are easily forgetful are unlikely to be successful at interviewing. This is because they cannot trade information well.

Interviewers also need to be polite to their respondents. When interviewers show politeness to their respondents it keeps the door open for them to be contacted once again if it becomes necessary in future. Interviewers should thank respondents for their time after the interview.