

TIPS: EFFECTIVE INTERVIEWS

1. Conduct interviews in private, comfortable environments that are free of interruptions. Opt for a neutral space instead of, for example, a supervisor's office.
2. Prepare for the interview by observing (formally or informally) the respondents and gathering preliminary information. What are the specific opportunities or problems that are apparent? How frequently do they occur?
3. Determine the number of interviews required. Experts suggest conducting four to six interviews when studying a homogeneous group.
4. Skillful interviewing techniques and a plan for conducting the interview are necessities. Decide whether you want the interview to be structured or to be flexible and open-ended.
5. Prepare respondents, and anticipate their anxieties, by fully explaining the purpose of the interview and the process. Inform the respondents that you have been asked by management to prepare a training program based on information derived from the interviews.
6. Set the climate for the interview and put respondents at ease with general questions that can be answered easily, such as: "What does your job entail? What schedule do you follow?" Gradually incorporate more specific inquiries about problems, such as: "If you had the authority, what changes would you make in the organization, and why?"
7. Ask respondents if note-taking and/or audio- or video-taping during the interview will make them uncomfortable. If they do not feel self-conscious about recording, proceed.
8. If you audio- or video-tape the interview, use a counter so that later you can easily access key information.
9. Create a positive environment for communication. Active listening skills will help you gather detailed and accurate information.

10. Stay on track. To prevent the interview from becoming a counselling session, maintain a friendly distance from respondents' personal problems by suggesting that they speak with qualified professionals such as personnel specialists, counsellors, etc.
11. Never make interviews mandatory. If respondents feel threatened, the collected data will reflect their self-consciousness and half-hearted co-operation.
12. Conduct group interviews when group behaviour determines job performance. Although individual interviews may be more efficient, they may be viewed by respondents as an attempt to divide the group.
13. Make the necessary provisions for group interviews with workers who have interdependent jobs. Provide assistance such as rescheduling the extra work load or obtaining temporary help.
14. Anticipate and deal with misunderstandings that may occur about interviews scheduled after work hours. Assumptions that management does not think the process warrants company time may reduce the validity of data obtained. Determine whether to compensate respondents for off-the-clock interviews.
15. Remember to get the entire, accurate story and all the facts. If a respondent asks that information be kept off-the-record, comply with the request.
16. In a needs assessment or evaluation that targets just one individual, interview at least three respondents who can offer useful information about the individual in question. Supervisors, subordinates, and customers should be able to provide valuable insights into the subject's behaviour.
17. Never betray a respondent's trust. Confidentiality is crucial for a successful analysis; it also is the basis of your credibility as a data collector.
18. End the interview in a comfortable, polite manner.
19. Report the analysis of the data. Follow a confidential reporting procedure that is comfortable for respondents. (See *Needs Assessment Report* in this reading.)