

Seeing Beyond...

Continued from previous page

the question, the second step that will take you beneath the surface of the "job interview question" to reveal the employee that they were.

The best interview questions aren't the mini-essays we've come to rely on like "What are your goals," or "Who do you work best with?" The best are open questions that lead you to a story. In fact, that's how I like to phrase them. "Tell me about a time ..." they begin, when you had to meet a deadline, when you had a conflict with a co-worker, when you couldn't make a customer happy. Now, here's the key: their story – their response to your "interview question" – may or may not be the truth. The truth will be found in the follow-up question, the probe you make based on a detail of their response.

Examples of probes are questions such as "how did management respond to that?" or "what happened the next time you found yourself in that situation?" or "what did you learn from that?" or "why do you think they responded that way?" or "what did you do to prevent that from happening again?" Think of the initial question as the set-up. The probe is the punch-line.

The Five Minute Interview is only a part of your hiring process. When combined with your application form it becomes the gateway for a second, more extensive interview that allows you to learn more about the applicant. A job-related test of basic cashiering math, geography (I include geography because of the embarrassment I suffered one Christmas when I had to settle an argument between a temporary employee and a customer about whether New Mexico required customs documents or not), packaging geometry, and address recognition for mail sorting is appropriate, and invaluable as an objective tool. We're always surprised at how well some do – and some don't – on the test.

Just do yourself the favor of meeting personally with job applicants for a Five Minute Interview. Don't let the shallow, one dimension impression you get from your application form or their resume keep you from finding those diamonds in the rough you'll discover when you take a few minutes to look beyond the surface to see the attitude below.

(©2002 Business Solutions. David Shappee is a co-owner of two Shipping Depot[®] stores in Missoula, MT and is a business consultant. He may be reached at bussols@montana.com.) ✉