

Must-Ask Church Staff Job Interview Questions

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A well-planned job interview is the first step in finding the best pastor or staff person for your church. First impressions are important; and the first impression you give the perspective employee is just as important as the first impression they give you. It is vital that you and the members of your committee be well-prepared for the interview and to determine, in advance, the right questions to ask. This month, we'll take a look at some great suggestions to making your next job interview a success.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Before the interview begins, make sure that you have a comfortable place to meet. Try to make the setting as relaxing as possible. For example, sit around a small table rather than asking questions from behind a desk. Interviews are always a stressful time for both sides, so try to make everyone involved comfortable. Be sure each person involved in the interviewing process comes to the interview with the questions they'd like answered already in hand. Be sure to take good notes and listen intently. It's always best to ask open-ended questions so that you'll allow the candidate to do most of the talking. And don't be afraid to follow-up their answers with one simple word, "Why?". Most candidates can give a good answer, but asking "why?" will many times give you more in-depth and candid answers that will show you their real feelings.

ICE BREAKER QUESTIONS

To start the interview, be sure to welcome the candidate and thank them for taking time to go through the interview process. As you make all the proper introductions, be sure to tell a little about each person sitting in on the interview. After introductions are made, feel free to get the interview going by asking some open-ended 'ice breaker' questions, such as:

- Can you tell us a little about yourself?
- What do you know about our church?
- Why would you like to work here?

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE/EMPLOYMENT

After you've asked some initial questions, and everyone is feeling a little more comfortable with each other, move to the topic of the candidate's previous experience and job background. You should have already read the person's resume, and now is your chance to ask any questions or clarify anything you've read relating to their job experience. You might want to ask:

- What type of practical experience do you have for this position?
- What have you learned at your current church that will help you be an even better leader here?
- Name something you love doing at your present job.
- Name something you hate doing at your present job.
- Why are you leaving your present job?
- What did you like/dislike about your current job?
- What would your current employer say about you?

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

You'll also want to get a good feel for the candidate's educational background. Most of this information will already be a part of their resume, but you can use this time to ask a few more open-ended questions to find out more relevant information. Here are some ideas to follow-up on:

- ⦿ What was the most valuable aspect of your college education?
- ⦿ Have you taken any other special training?
- ⦿ Have you attended any specific conferences or seminars?
- ⦿ What are a couple of books related to your field that you've read in the past year?

MINISTRY PHILOSOPHY & GOALS

Previous experience and educational background, as good of indicators as they may be, do not tell the whole story. It is imperative that you find out whether this person is a good fit for your individual church. You need to determine as best you can during the initial interview how well this person fits your church's mission, vision, and values. It is entirely possible that a person with a tremendous amount of job experience and a fantastic educational background could prove to be a miserable failure at *your* church. Ask specific questions to find out how the applicant feels about and personally conducts their ministry. Here are some sample questions to help you determine a good ministry fit in the area of philosophy and goals:

- ⦿ Who is your ministry role model?
- ⦿ Name a couple churches that you think follow your philosophy of ministry. Why?
- ⦿ What does your ideal church look like?
- ⦿ Tell us about one thing that has happened at your current job that is a good example of your philosophy of ministry.
- ⦿ Every church has conflicts. Give an example of a recent conflict in your church and ask the applicant how they would deal with the situation.
- ⦿ What excites you? What makes you extremely happy in your ministry?
- ⦿ What drains you? What part of ministry do you find most stressful?

TAKE A BREAK!

Before you start the next part of the interview, I would recommend taking a short break. By this time, you should have a pretty good idea as to whether or not this person is a great match for your position or not. Limit yourself to five or ten minutes with your committee (without the candidate in the room) to quickly assess the first half of the interview. What was everyone's first impression? See if everyone on your committee is on the same page at this point. Here are the questions to ask:

"So far, does this person look he/she would be a good fit for the job? Does this person match the person we've set out to find for this position?"

There are three possible scenarios at this early stage of the game:

1. Everyone on your committee could feel that this person **IS** a good possible match. If this is the case, give thanks to God and continue the interview and go through the next set of questions on work style and personality. Go forward as if this person could be the one you hire, finding out as much as you can.
2. Everyone on your committee could feel that this person **IS NOT** a good match for your church or the job description. If this happens, and it is unanimous, give thanks to God and re-convene the interview and tell the candidate your concerns. While no one like rejection, most candidates would rather have immediate feedback than wait to find out later that you're not interested. Describe your reasons for why the person isn't exactly what you're looking for. Be sure to thank them for their time and their interest.
3. It could be that member of your committee members are split: some might really like the candidate, while others remain unimpressed. If there are differences in your committee

(there often are), then take time to give thanks to God (yes, even then!) and then go back into the interview and continue to find out some additional information that will help everyone make a good decision.

WORK STYLE AND PERSONALITY

The goal of the last half of the interview is to better understand the personality and work style of the applicant. How do they work with others? Are they aggressive or passive in their communication style? How well do they manage conflict? These are all things that you'll want to discover during this part of the interview. Here are some sample questions:

- ⦿ Can you work under pressure?
- ⦿ How do you handle conflict?
- ⦿ What would you like to be doing in five years?
- ⦿ What has been your biggest ministry failure?
- ⦿ What would your references say about you?
- ⦿ What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?
- ⦿ Tell us about your family.
- ⦿ What salary are you seeking?

QUESTIONS FOR US

Close out the interview with a time where you offer to answer any questions the candidate might have about your church or the position. Here you can ask questions like:

- ⦿ Do you have any questions for us?
- ⦿ What questions do you have about our Church?
- ⦿ Do you have any questions about the position?

When you are finished, thank the applicant again for his/her time and travel for the interview. Share with them your timeline for filling the position. It is common courtesy to contact the candidate back with a status report on the interview within a week. Tell the applicant they can expect to hear from you soon; and be absolutely sure you *do* follow-up in the timeframe promised.

Follow these simple guidelines and your next staff interview will gather the information you desire and help you to make a great hiring decision!