



Best Practices for Skills-First Interviewing

MassSkills Coalition 2025 Learning Community –Session Three

June 2025



Your Grads of Life Facilitation Team



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Coalition Goals



Convene

Lead by example to bring together Massachusetts employers of all sizes and industries, and learn from peers, experts, and best practices in skills-first talent management.



Educate

Inform Massachusetts employers of tools and resources available to utilize skills-first talent management strategies to meet their workforce needs.



Diversify

A holistic learning and development strategy should be inclusive and personalized to benefit as many workers as possible

Skills-First Practices Span the Entire Talent Journey



Skills-First Practices Span the Entire Talent Journey



Our focus in this community

Arc of Topics



Session One

**Introduction to Skills-First
Hiring Practices**

Session 1: Feb 26th

Session Two

**Recredentialing
Jobs**

Session 2: April 23rd

Session Three

**Skills-First
Interviewing**

Session 3: June 25th

Session Four

**Skills-First Approach
to Onboarding**

Session 4: September 10th

Our Learning Community Norms



Be an active contributor to the session



Practice both/and thinking during the session



Safeguard stories, take the learnings with you



Name your needs throughout the session

Today's Learning Objectives



Understand efforts by Springfield WORKS to support talent in adapting to the skills-first landscape



Recognize how to optimize job descriptions using skills profiles, unbiased language, and skills-first inclusion statements



Explore best practices for skills-first interviewing using behavioral questions and a skills-first rubric

Today's Agenda

- Welcome and Impact Reminder
- **Spotlight Speaker Presentation**
- **Spotlight Q&A Session**
- Optimizing Skills-First Job Descriptions
- Best Practices for Skills-First Interviewing
- **Peer Learning Activity & Reflection**
- Closing and Next Steps



Celebrating Progress

Instructions:

Please share any recent efforts to advance your organization to the next milestone.

Milestone 1: Just getting started (*Learning phase*)

Milestone 2: Implementing practices in recruiting talent

Milestone 3: Implementing practices in hiring of talent

Milestone 4: Leveraging skills-first practices for retention and mobility

Milestone 5: Actively scaling our efforts in all areas of skills-first



Scan Here





Impact Reminder: Traditional vs. Skills-First Job Descriptions

When We Use Traditional Job Descriptions

61%

Job descriptions contained unrealistic expectations or vague requirements.

72%

Job seekers reported feeling misled by a job description.

59%

Employees left their jobs within the first 18 months, citing misalignment.



When We Switch to a Skills-First Job Description

93%

Job seekers were extremely clear or very clear on the stated qualifications.

82%

Job seekers were extremely likely or very likely to apply.

83%

Job seekers perceived likelihood to obtain job.





Spotlight Speaker Presentation

Spotlight on Springfield WORKS



Anne Kandilis

Director
Springfield WORKS
Working Cities Challenge

Springfield WORKS is a *Convener*

WesternMass
Economic Development Council



**Working Together to
Create Pathways to
Economic Opportunity**

 **Vision:** *A thriving community with equitable access to economic opportunity, growth, and resilience.*

 **Mission:** *Collaborating to remove systemic and racial barriers to economic opportunity and well-being.*

Springfield WORKS *Priorities*

**Our
Strategies:**



Community Empowerment

Improve the effectiveness of community resources.



Economic Mobility

Influence employer hiring and worker advancement practices.



Policy Improvement

Creating the conditions for economic mobility and success.









**Target
population:**

**“Outside In” for:
Justice-Involved,
Persons Of Color
(POC), target
neighborhoods**

**“Inside Up” access to
“Living wage” Career
Pathways for
POC, Women,
Underemployed, target
neighborhoods**

**Cliff effect pilot in
Springfield,
Worcester, and
Boston**

Recruitment Challenges by Industry

<p>Industries most likely to report that candidates don't have the needed credentials / certifications <i>(versus 19% across all industries)</i></p>	<p>Healthcare & Social Assistance</p> <p> 31%</p>	<p>Government & Education</p> <p> 26%</p>	
<p>Industries most likely to report candidates don't have the right technical skills <i>(versus 37% across all industries)</i></p>	<p>Manufacturing</p> <p> 53%</p>	<p>Professional, Scientific, & Technical Services</p> <p> 49%</p>	<p>Construction, Utilities, Agriculture, & Mining</p> <p> 47%</p>
<p>Industries most likely to report an increase in candidate "ghosting" <i>(versus 46% across all industries)</i></p>	<p>Healthcare & Social Assistance</p> <p> 60%</p>	<p>Wholesale/Retail Trade, Transport & Warehousing</p> <p> 60%</p>	<p>Manufacturing</p> <p> 56%</p>

Source: SHRM 2024 Talent Pool Report

How do you know?

Technology Helps Connect Our Community to Training and Careers

Don't have your resume handy?

You can add your work, life, and education experiences here.

[TAKE ME THERE](#)

2

CLICK HERE FOR FREE JOB TRAININGS THAT ARE CONNECTED TO REAL JOBS!

Featured Opportunities

Springfield, MA
Springfield Public Schools

Para Educator (Assistant Teacher) ▼

Amherst
UMass

Electrician ▼

Amherst
UMass

Food Services ▼

Holyoke
Holyoke Public Schools

Para Educator (Assistant Teacher) ▼

- **Free Job Training Programs**
- + Clean Energy & Green Jobs Training
- ESOL Culinary Arts
- Hotel & Front Desk Training
- + Jump Start
- Free Line Cook Training
- Medical Interpreting
- Nurse Aide/Home Health Aide/ESOL
- Para Educator Training
- SNAP Path to Work

Build a Skills Profile – See How Experiences Translate to Skills



Springfield, MA
Springfield Public Schools

Para Educator (Assistant Teacher) ^

Top Skills

- Comply with Company Policies
- Digital Literacy
- Effective Communication
- Implement Curriculum
- Professional Communication
- Youth Development

Prerequisite

- Associate's Degree
- High School Diploma, G.E.D. or HISET
- Work Keys Scores - Math
- Work Keys Scores - Reading
- Work Keys Scores - Writing

[VIEW MORE](#)



Amherst
UMass

Electrician ^

Top Skills

- Basic Math
- Electrical Repair
- Electrical Testing Devices

Prerequisite

- Career Readiness
- Flexible Schedule
- Work Environment

[VIEW MORE](#)



Amherst
UMass

Food Services ^

Top Skills

- Food and Beverage Concepts
- Food and Drink Orders
- Food Safety and Handling

Prerequisite

- Career Readiness
- English Fluency
- Flexible Schedule
- GED & HSED
- ServSafe
- Work Environment

[VIEW MORE](#)

Jobseekers Receive a Skills Score to Understand How They Match Up

APPLICANT

Anne Kandilis
ashec00@yahoo.com

APPLYING FOR

Para Educator (Assistant Teacher)
Springfield Public Schools Springfield, MA



- Prerequisites**
- ✓ Associate's Degree
 - ✓ High School Diploma, G.E.D. or HiSET
 - ✓ Work Keys Scores - Math
 - ✗ Work Keys Scores - Reading
 - ✗ Work Keys Scores - Writing

- REQ: Comply with Company Policies
- REQ: Cultural Competencies
- REQ: Digital Literacy
- REQ: Effective Communication
- REQ: Implement Curriculum
- REQ: Professional Communication
- REQ: Teamwork
- REQ: Youth Development
- Special Education

	Comply with Company Policies	Cultural Competencies	Digital Literacy	Effective Communication	Implement Curriculum	Professional Communication	Teamwork	Youth Development	Special Education
Initiative Director - Springfield WORK... 1/2017 - Present	✓		✓			✓			
State of Massachusetts - Certified Pub...									
- 3/2012 - 3/2019									
Salesperson - St. Anthony's Church 1/2011 - 1/2018									
Kitchen volunteer - Friends of the Hom... 1/2010 - 1/2016									
Outreach Chair - Bay Path Advisory Boa... 9/2010 - 9/2015									
Northeastern University / Rennie Cente...									
Vice President - MassMutual Financial ... 8/2000 - 3/2013	✓		✓			✓			

A Better Match of Skills

81
Skill Score

My Saved Opportunities



Assistant Manager



Automotive Sales Consultant



Enrollment Representative

Employers Can Receive Skills Profiles to Find a Good Match

Skills-first hiring doesn't mean rejecting college

That could include a four-year degree, a community college credential, military training, or years of relevant experience. It's not about lowering the bar — it's about *getting clearer on what the bar actually is*.

You don't have to overhaul your entire system to start seeing results. Small shifts — like updating one job description or trying a skills-based interview — can lead to stronger hires and better retention.

Takeaway for Your Business and Call to Action:

Start with one job. Define it by what someone needs to *do*, not what they need to *have*. You'll likely find qualified candidates — and might make better long-term hires.

Partner with an organization like Springfield WORKS to test it.

New Routes to a Living Wage Career for Non-traditional Students

Financial Services - Partnership with *Support to Succeed* and Holyoke Community College (HCC) to offer **Securities Industry Essentials** credential. Targets population for first steps for people in unlicensed positions working in: Banking, Financial Advisory Services, Internal Sales, Insurance Customer Service. (“Inside Up”)

“**Leap into Law**” - Proposal Hampden County Bar Association and law firms to create access to law through an administrative pathway. Skills: Phone, customer service, calendaring, document support, multi-lingual, etc.. Digital credentials: Workkeys, Software apps/tools (i.e., Microsoft). (“Outside In”)

Accounting partnership with HCC and retiring Babson professor to create a stackable credentialed pathway to accounting. Upskilling bookkeepers, quickbook/software data entry, people who like to work with numbers.... (both “outside in and inside up”)





Optimizing Skills-First Job Descriptions

Key Steps to Writing Skills-First Job Descriptions

I. Use a skills profile to clearly articulate applicable skills



III. Leverage a skills-first inclusion statement

II. Use bias-free language to engage all applicants





I. Use Skills Profiles to Clearly Articulate Applicable Skills

Leverage the Skills Profile in the Job Description

01

Replace proxies with the precise skills needed.

02

Organize the job skills into required and preferred.

03

Prioritize 10 skills or fewer to include in the job description.

Example Review: Skills Profile of a Healthcare Analyst

Analytical Skills

- **Data Analysis:** Proficient in analyzing large datasets to inform healthcare decisions.
- **Statistical Methods:** Skilled in applying statistical techniques to improve patient care.

Technical Skills

- **Healthcare IT Systems:** Knowledgeable in using Electronic Health Records (EHR) systems.
- **Data Visualization Tools:** Proficient in using tools like Tableau and Excel to create visual reports.

Problem-Solving Skills

- **Critical Thinking:** Approaches complex healthcare problems with a logical and systematic mindset.
- **Decision Making:** Capable of making informed decisions based on data analysis and research findings.

Communication Skills

- **Interpersonal Communication:** Strong ability to communicate effectively with healthcare professionals, patients, and stakeholders.
- **Report Writing:** Proficient in writing detailed and clear reports that convey complex information in an understandable manner.

Healthcare Knowledge/Expertise

- **Healthcare Regulations:** Knowledgeable about healthcare terminology, laws, and regulations.
- **Patient Care:** Understanding of patient care principles and practices.



II. Use Bias-Free Language to Engage All Applicants

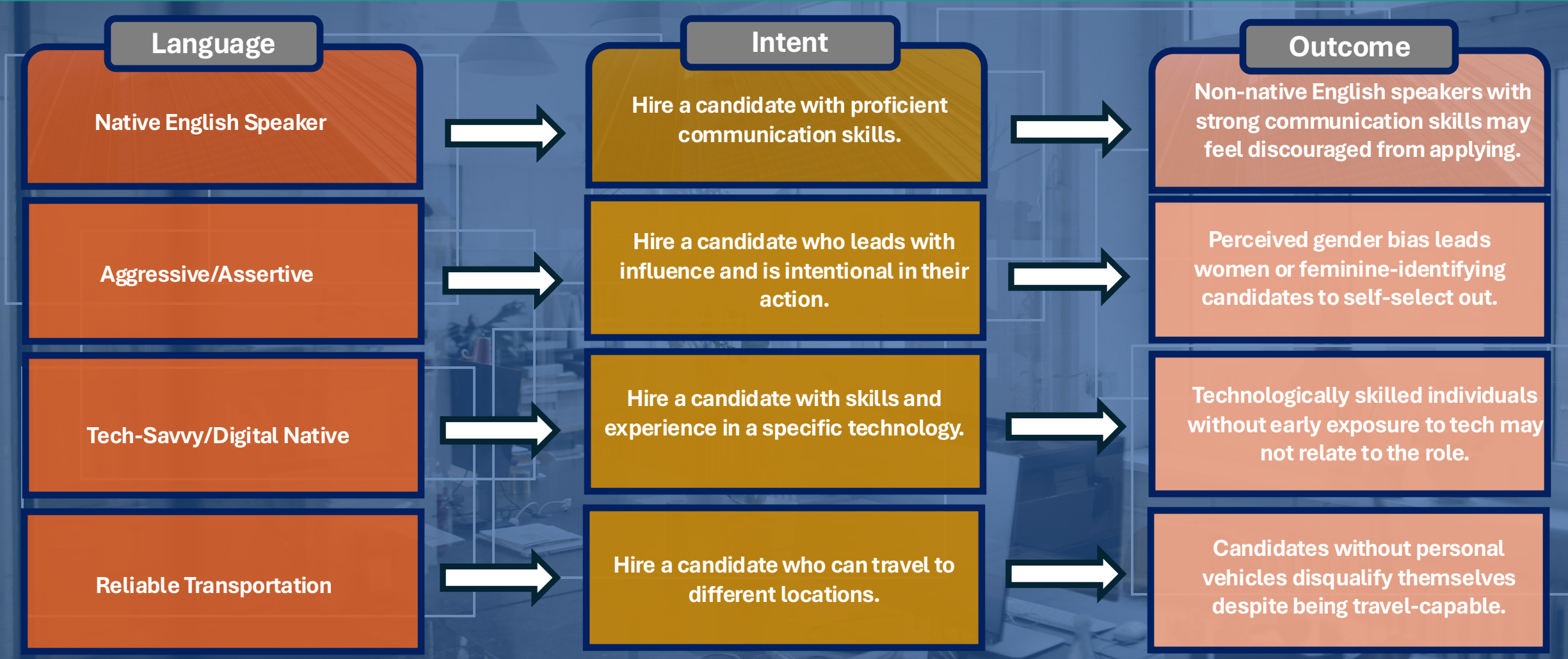
A Closer Look at Biased Language

Which language-based bias impacts job descriptions?

- **Gender**
- **Age**
- **Ability**
- **Affinity**
- **Place of Origin**



The Intent and Outcomes of Biased Language





III. Leverage a Skills-First Inclusion Statement

What an Inclusion Statement Says About Your Company



- **Job Seekers** want to work for companies with actionable strategies and a visible commitment to inclusive practices.
- **Employees** value measurable progress and support for skill-building that promotes equity and belonging.
- **Consumers** trust brands that are transparent and accountable in their inclusion efforts, favoring those that show consistent progress and impact.

Writing a Skills-First Inclusion Statement

Key Components

- **Express** the organization's commitment to inclusive hiring and fostering an inclusive culture.
- **Elevate** your existing inclusion statements by recognizing the value of STARs and inviting them to apply for opportunities.
- **Encourage** candidates to view your organization as a place to experience professional growth.





Skills-First Job Posting Sample

Skills-First Job Posting: Healthcare Data Analyst

About Us:

Healthcare XYZ is committed to transforming patient care through innovative, data-driven solutions that enhance patient outcomes and streamline processes. We foster a collaborative and inclusive environment, dedicated to quality, compliance, and ethical practices.

Job Summary:

We seek a skilled Healthcare Data Analyst to join our team. The ideal candidate will possess strong analytical, statistical, problem-solving, communication, and healthcare expertise to support our mission of improving patient care through data-driven insights.

Key Responsibilities:

- **Data Analysis:** Analyze large datasets to identify healthcare trends and improve patient outcomes.
- **Statistical Techniques:** Apply statistical techniques to patient care and healthcare research.
- **Healthcare IT Systems:** Utilize Electronic Health Records (EHR) to manage and analyze patient data.
- **Data Visualization:** Create visual reports using tools like Tableau and Excel to communicate effectively.
- **Critical Thinking:** Approach complex healthcare problems logically and systematically.
- **Decision Making:** Make informed decisions based on data analysis and research findings.
- **Communication:** Communicate effectively with healthcare professionals, patients, and stakeholders.
- **Report Writing:** Write clear and proficient reports that concisely convey information.
- **Healthcare Regulations:** Stay updated on healthcare terminology, laws, and regulations.
- **Patient Care:** Understand and apply patient care principles and practices.

Qualifications:

- Proven experience in data analysis and statistical methods.
- Proficiency in healthcare IT systems and data visualization tools.
- Strong critical thinking and decision-making skills.
- Excellent interpersonal communication and report writing abilities.
- In-depth knowledge of healthcare regulations and patient care practices.

Preferred Skills:

- Experience with Tableau and Excel
- Knowledge of healthcare regulations and practices

Why You Should Join Us: At Healthcare XYZ, we prioritize skills and expertise, recognizing diverse paths to skill attainment, including degrees, military experience, apprenticeships, and internships. We foster a collaborative and inclusive environment where your unique skills and valued and can make a meaningful **impact on patient care and healthcare innovation.**

Skills First Job Posting: Healthcare Analyst

Job Title: Healthcare Data Analyst

Location: Remote, USA

About Us: Healthcare XYZ is committed to transforming patient care through innovative, data-driven solutions that enhance patient outcomes and streamline processes. We foster a collaborative and inclusive environment, dedicated to quality, compliance, and ethical practices.

Job Summary: We seek a skilled Healthcare Data Analyst to join our team. The ideal candidate will possess strong analytical, technical, problem-solving, communication, and healthcare expertise skills to support our mission of improving patient care through data-driven insights.

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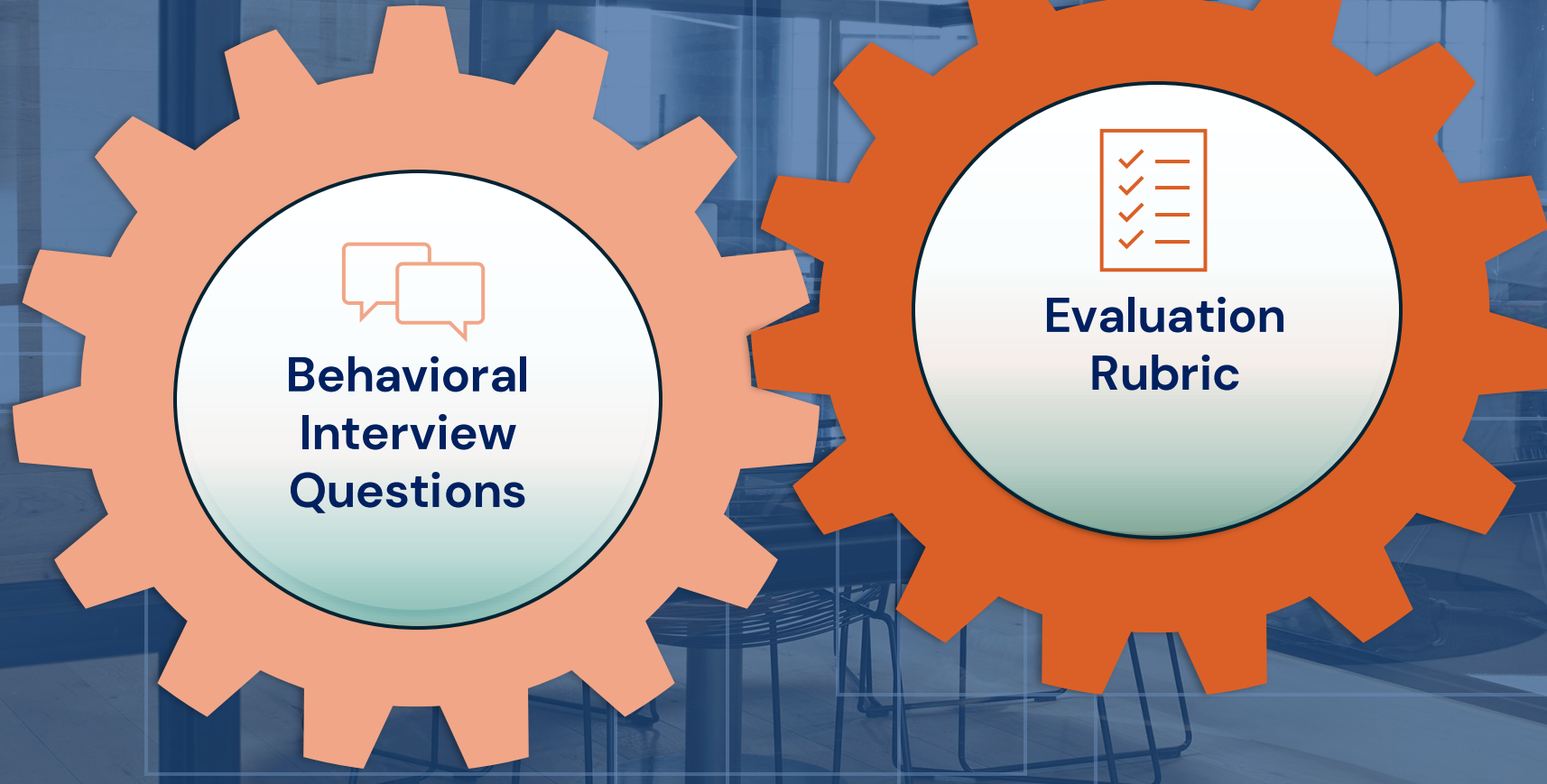
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- Familiarity with Electronic Health Records (EHR) systems.
- Background in healthcare research and data analysis.


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Best Practices for Skills-First Interviewing

Creating a Skills-First Interview Process





I. Utilize Behavioral Based Interview Questions

What is Behavioral-Based Interviewing ?

Behavioral-Based Interviewing

Behavioral-based interviewing is a form of candidate assessment which assumes that an individual's past behavior in the workplace serves as a reliable indicator of their future performance. By focusing on real-life examples, interviewers can gain insights into how candidates have applied their skills and competencies in previous roles.



Traditional vs. Behavioral Interviewing



10%

Traditional interviewing is only 10% predictive of future job behavior

Behavioral interviewing is 55% predictive

55%

Assessing Durable Skills with Behavioral Interviewing

Common Stems

Tell me about a time when...

Give me an example of a situation where...

Describe for me an example of when...

Situations to Assess Behavior

You were engaged in a conflict in the workplace.

You were confronted with an unexpected challenge.

You had to make a quick decision.

Leverage Follow-Up Questions to Further Probe for Skills

01

Ask follow-up questions to **further assess a critical skill.**



02

Probe with **additional questions to clarify** a candidate's specific role, action, and/or outcome.



03

Listen for the "we factor" and invite candidates to share their individual contributions.



04

Close out by **repeating your understanding** of the conversation if needed.



Example: Skills-First Interview Question + Follow-Up



Tell us about a time you managed a project from beginning to the end.

Follow Up Questions

- *Please tell me more about the situation.*
- *What steps did you take to address the challenges?*
- *What were the results?*
- *How did you specifically contribute to the results?*



Enhancing a Traditional Interview Question



Traditional Question

Can you tell me about a time you explained something technical to someone?

Skills-First Interview Question In Action



Skills-First Question

Describe when you had to explain a complex technical concept to a non-technical stakeholder. How did you ensure they understood?



II. Use a Skills-First Evaluation Rubric

What are Skills-First Interview Rubrics?

Skills-First Interview Rubrics

Skills-first interview rubrics provide a structured and consistent method for evaluating candidates based on the specific skills and competencies required for a role. These rubrics help ensure that all candidates are assessed fairly and objectively, focusing on their ability to perform the job rather than other factors such as educational background or previous job titles.



Components of a Skills-First Evaluation Rubric

01

Required skills are aligned to the interview questions.

02

Criteria for excellent responses are clearly defined.

03

A rating system is created and consistently used.

04

The candidate's total score is noted and used for evaluation.

05

Qualitative notes and comments are included.

Example of a Skills-First Evaluation Rubric

Date				
Candidate Name				
Interviewer				
Total Score				
Recommendation	<input type="checkbox"/> Advance		<input type="checkbox"/> Do not advance	
SKILLS				
Problem Solving	LACKING (0 points) Does not demonstrate skill	APPROACHING (1 point) Training or hire-ready	MEETING (2 points) Meets on-the-job expectations	EXCEEDING (3 points) Promotion-ready
Communication	LACKING (0 points) Does not demonstrate skill	APPROACHING (1 point) Training or hire-ready	MEETING (2 points) Meets on-the-job expectations	EXCEEDING (3 points) Promotion-ready

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03 Rating system is created and consistently used

04 The candidate's total score is noted and used for evaluation

05 Qualitative notes and comments included

Peer Learning Reflections II

Instructions:

- You will listen to audio clips of two interview sessions.
- Independently, practice scoring using the Skills-First Evaluation Rubric.
- Each candidate was asked to answer, “Describe when you had to explain a complex technical concept to a non-technical stakeholder. How did you ensure they understood?”

Guiding Questions:

- What stood out to you as a strength?
- What follow-up questions might the hiring manager ask to further assess for the candidate’s communication skills?



Describe when you had to explain a complex technical concept to a non-technical stakeholder. How did you ensure they understood?

1

In my previous role as a Customer Service Representative for Comcast Internet and TV services, I often had to help customers with technical issues. One time, a customer called in because their internet wasn't working, and I had to help them reboot their wireless router. I told the customer to unplug the router and wait for a bit before plugging it back in. It wasn't necessary to explain why this would work as the additional details wouldn't assist the customer with resolving their issue. I kept it simple and just told them it would help fix the issue. The customer didn't seem confident in the instructions, so I repeated the instructions a few times until they understood. After they rebooted the router, their internet started working again. The customer was happy that their internet was back and thanked me for helping. When explaining technical issues, it is important to be patient and open to repeating the instructions until they are understood, or the issue is resolved.

SKILLS

Communication

LACKING

(0 points)

Does not demonstrate skill

APPROACHING

(1 point)

Training or hire-ready

MEETING

(2 points)

Meets on-the-job expectations

EXCEEDING

(3 points)

Promotion-ready

Describe when you had to explain a complex technical concept to a non-technical stakeholder. How did you ensure they understood?

2

In my previous role as a Wireless Retail Associate, I assisted a customer who came in with concerns about their smartphone's data usage. They were worried about exceeding their data limit and didn't understand how data consumption worked. To address their concerns, I began by asking a few questions about their typical smartphone activities and understanding of their phone settings. This helped me gauge their familiarity with the topic and identify any misconceptions. I then used a simple analogy to explain data usage. I compared data to a bucket of water, where each activity (like streaming videos or browsing the web) represented a different-sized scoops of water being taken from the bucket. I also showed them the data usage settings on their phone and provided an example of how streaming a one-hour video might use up a certain amount of data compared to sending a few text messages. To help address their concerns about overage, I also let the customer know that they can set up notifications that will send a text message if their data is approaching their plan limit. Throughout the conversation, I encouraged the customer to ask questions and repeated key points as needed. By the end of our discussion, the customer felt more confident in managing their data usage and appreciated the clear, jargon-free explanation.

SKILLS

Communication

LACKING
(0 points)

Does not demonstrate skill

APPROACHING
(1 point)

Training or hire-ready

MEETING
(2 points)

Meets on-the-job
expectations

EXCEEDING
(3 points)

Promotion-ready



Closing and Next Steps



Session Summary and Additional Resources

Developed Impactful Job Postings

- Leveraged skills profiles to highlight key competencies
- Eliminated biased language to promote inclusivity

Aligned Interviewing with Key Skills

- Defined essential role-specific skills
- Effectively assessed skills with behavior-based interview questions

Standardized Candidate Evaluation

- Applied a consistent, skills-based evaluation rubric
- Promoted fair and objective assessments across all candidates



Session Series



Session One

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Hiring Practices**

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A woman with short grey hair is smiling and looking towards a man whose back is to the camera. They are sitting at a table with a laptop and a glass of water. The background is a blurred office setting with a window.

Thank You!!!

Contact Us

www.GradsofLife.org

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