November 2019

General Employment: The Responsibility of an Employment Interviewer

Janet I. Pinner
Director, Special Placement Services New York State Department of Labor Division of Employment, New York, New York

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.wcsu.edu/jadara

Recommended Citation
GENERAL EMPLOYMENT: THE RESPONSIBILITY OF AN EMPLOYMENT INTERVIEWER

JANET I. PINNER
Director, Special Placement Services
New York State Department of Labor
Division of Employment
New York, New York

Anyone who has even gotten a job for a friend may have become convinced there’s nothing very difficult about job placement. And, in a way, this is true. Today anybody can get anyone “a job”—but the catch is, is it “the job”—the job at which he will produce at his maximum and be happiest?

If a man is to be satisfactorily placed, there are five criteria that must be met. They are as follows:

1. The mental demands of the job should be neither much higher nor much lower than the level of his intelligence and his general educational development.

2. The physical demands of the work should be consistent with his capabilities.

3. The job should make use of any special aptitudes that he may have and should not require abilities that he does not have.

4. The job should engage his deeper and more abiding interests, that is, the worker should be strongly motivated by the nature of the work itself, rather than the extrinsic rewards such as pay, working conditions, or fringe benefits.

5. The work situation should be in keeping with the worker’s temperament.

Providing qualitative job placement service is the responsibility of an employment interviewer. The Dictionary of Oc-
cupational Titles (the Bible of the Employment Service) summarizes the job of the employment interviewer in these terms: "Interviews job applicants in employment agency and refers them to prospective employers for consideration." While describing what he does, however, the summary in no way reflects how he should do it." In order to do a professional placement job, the interviewer must know the job market and must know how to obtain and how to record pertinent information about the job seeker. Then, in order to make a suitable placement, he must either have a request from an employer for assistance in filling his labor needs or must know how to develop job openings. Here too, he must have adequate and accurate information from the employer so he knows what the job is and what is required of the worker needed to fill the job.

Some Facets of the Employment Interviewer's Job. The employment interviewer works in a placement operation that may vary in size from a complex public or private agency to a one-desk office. He may work either with special groups of job-seekers such as older workers, the handicapped, the disadvantaged, those in certain ethnic, racial or occupational groups, or the sphere of his activity may include all workers in the community who are seeking employment.

The employment interviewer is in a highly competitive business. After all, no employer is obliged to use an employment agency and many do not. Most jobs are secured through friends' or employees' recommendations, self-referral or newspaper want-ads. Even if the employer calls an employment office, it does not mean he is using it as his sole recruitment agency, and it is not uncommon for an employer to call more than one agency and make his selection from the candidates he receives. This means the employment interviewer not only must make a selection that matches the employer's requirements, but it must be made with speed. No matter how fine your selection may be, if the employer has already hired someone before your applicant gets there, your man will not get the job.

The placement worker finds himself, regardless of the job market, in the unenviable position of always being in the middle between the worker and the employer. He has an obligation to both—for the worker he must try to find not any job, but the job which will best utilize his total capacities; for the employer he must find not just a body, but a person who can work well and produce enough to justify his salary.

Therefore, in order to meet these obligations to both the worker and the employer, the placement interviewer must
have knowledge about the worker who is seeking a job, about
the employer who lists the job opening, and about the job it-
self.

Assessing the Individual. Knowledge about the applicant
can range from knowing as little as his name and address to
having detailed information from an interview, test scores
and recommendations.

Here is what the Dictionary of Occupational Titles tells
us the employment interviewer must do by way of obtaining
pertinent information. He “records and evaluates such infor-
mation as job experience, education and training, skills, know-
ledge and abilities, physical and personal qualifications and
other data pertinent to classification, selection and referral.”
It sounds simple, but do you do it?

In the public employment service, employment inter-
viewers are trained to assess workers’ qualifications in order
to identify the kinds of jobs they should be considered for.
Based on this assessment, each worker is occupationally clas-
sified. The range of information on which one’s assessment is
built is identified by the acronym SKAPATI.

In SKAPATI, the letters represent the following:

S—Skills—the applicant’s use of knowledge to execute or
perform effectively and readily.
K—Knowledge—his background, adequacy of job related
information, “know-how.”
A—Ability—his proficiency in any kind of work or ac-
tivity.
P—Physical—his physical and emotional capacity to do
the job.
A—Aptitudes—his potential or undeveloped abilities.
T—Traits—his personal characteristics, which primarily
include appearance, attitude, manner.
I—Interests—choice of vocation, the kind of work he is
interested in doing.

Can-Do Factors. We view the first three, the “S-K-A 
Skills, Knowledge, Abilities” as the things the worker “can
do”; in other words, what the person has done, has learned
to do, or can readily do. These factors can be evaluated by ex-
ploring the man’s experience, training, leisure time activities,
especially those which he carries over into jobs, by review-
ing employer references and by administering tests of pro-
ficiency, trade, etc. The major tool for acquiring information on SKA is by having the applicant complete an application card before he is interviewed, or if he is unable to complete an application form, through the interviewing process. We try to concentrate during the interview on uncovering facts which had been omitted on the application, and most important, on exploring how the applicant feels about his experience, training and the like.

Evidence of an applicant's SKAPATI may be found in his work experience, (his training and his personal characteristics). When we examine and evaluate work experience, we consider three factors:

1. Content. We analyze what the man did on the job, the actual tasks he performed and the skills, knowledge and ability he possesses.

2. Duration. The length of time he did that kind of work is important. Did he stay on long enough to acquire the skills, knowledge and ability to warrant his being considered an experienced worker?

3. Recency. How long ago did he do the work? It is important to know if he still possesses the skills, knowledge and abilities or if they have been lost through disuse or due to technological changes in the field.

We examine and evaluate the applicant's training, considering the same three factors as we did in work experience.

1. Content. This is significant to the extent that through practice and study it has added to the applicant's SKA in the performance of a particular job or type of work. We examine and evaluate training by asking questions such as: Was the training adequate in terms of what the given job calls for? Was training received in an accredited institution? Did the applicant complete the training? Was the grade or level of training adequate?

2. Duration. Did the applicant have sufficient time in which to develop, by practice and study, his SKA?

3. Recency. When did the training take place? Does he still possess the skills, knowledge and abilities he acquired in training?

Will-Do Factors. It is more difficult to evaluate the "will-do" factors. These are the less tangible but frequently the more important factors in referral for suitable employment. Those factors are really descriptive of the applicant as a per-
son. These are the personal traits which include physical condition, aptitude, personality factors, and vocational interests. The most difficult evaluation by the placement interviewer is to determine whether those who can, will perform. Thus we can move to the “PATI”—Physical, Aptitudes, Traits and Interests.”

1. Physical condition. With many disabled persons, we accept the applicant’s appraisal of his capacities and send for medical reports only when necessary. Medical information is obtained to determine how the applicant’s physical condition will affect his ability to do the job and whether his health would be adversely affected by the work. Most important of all, we train our people to examine the kinds of jobs the disabled person held since the onset of his disability. This gives us the length of time the condition has existed, indicates whether the condition is chronic, and how the condition relates to his previous work experience. This is the most realistic way of appraising a person’s physical condition and his limitations.

2. Aptitudes. Aptitudes are potential or undeveloped abilities. They cannot be evaluated in any precise manner during an interview but can only be estimated. There are other gauges of aptitudes, for example:
   —Test results may be used to determine the probability of an applicant’s having the capacity to perform a job successfully.
   —Success achieved in a specific phase of the applicant’s previous training or work experience provides clues to the presence of certain aptitudes.
   —Leisure time activities involving skills, knowledge and abilities similar to those required in the occupation for which the applicant applies may provide a source of evidence as to the individual’s aptitude in that field.

3. Personal Traits. For the purpose of our discussion, personal traits include appearance, attitude and manner. Appearance should be considered and evaluated only when it is of importance on the job. Appearance and manner are of little significance in the performance of a good many jobs. And the employment interviewer should weigh them accordingly. Attitude or motivation is a prime importance on any job.

4. Interest. In evaluating interest, we are referring to
"vocational interest." Many applicants will evince a vocational interest or choice. It is important not to accept the statement without reviewing how serious he is about this interest or choice. This is measured by exploring the following areas:

—The elective courses he chose while in school.
—Leisure time activity as it relates to applicant choice.
—Work experience as it substantiates vocational choice.
—Knowledge of tools and equipment owned and used in the field of interest.
—Greater than casual knowledge of duties, pay, hours and other conditions of work relating to the chosen job.

On the basis of his SKAPATI, the applicant may be occupationally classified. This consists of assigning him one or more Dictionary of Occupational Titles codes and titles which represent work he is capable of doing.

Assessing the Job. Once you have interviewed and registered the worker and have arrived at the kind of job for which he is qualified, you must then find the job which matches his qualifications. How do you do this? What do you have to know about jobs? What do you have to know about employers?

1. Composition of Jobs. In order to do placement, the employment interviewer must know the composition of jobs. A "job" is defined as a collection of tasks performed by one worker in a single establishment. A "task" is defined as one activity which requires exertion of human effort, mental or physical, for a specific purpose. The purpose may be to change or maintain material - tangible or intangible. An "occupation" is defined as a group of similar jobs found in various establishments.

2. Job Variables. A job with the same title may vary from firm to firm in terms of what tasks are expected by the employer. These important job differences are called "employment variables." In the Employment Service, we call them the 4 M's and the 4 S's: The 4 M's are: Variable Methods, Materials, Machines, Measurements.
By "Variable Methods" we delineate the methods by which a task or a group of tasks in a job is performed. A job performed by hand in one plant may be performed by machine in another. For example, dishwashing - machine versus hand.

"Variable Materials". The material with which or on which a worker performs his duties may also vary. In many instances this may affect his ability to perform successfully in a job with a specific employer. For example, sewing machine operator - silk versus canvas.

"Variable Machines". The make of machine, tool, or equipment by which a task is performed may be significant. For example, printing machine - a small hand job press versus a large automatic press.

"Variable Measurement". This refers to the amount or degree of speed or accuracy, or other work output required on the job. Different work requires different degrees of precision. For example, precision work versus gross work.

The four S’s are: Variable Specializations, Surroundings, Special Assignments, Selected Tasks.

"Variable Specializations" refers to the fact that, in small establishments, workers are expected to do everything whereas in larger plants they are expected to specialize. For example, automobile mechanic - one-man shop versus plant.

"Variable Surroundings." The surroundings in which a worker is employed frequently vary to the extent that his skill in the occupation is affected, or his physical capacities become a factor for consideration. For example, carpenter - inside (finish) versus outside (construction.)

"Variable Special Assignments." Frequently a worker performs duties not commonly associated with an occupation and which are over and above the range of job elements presented in a Dictionary of Occupational Titles definition. These so-called job combinations are peculiar to individual establishments. For example, stenographer and switchboard operator.

"Variable Selected Tasks." These involve a variation in the number or combination of the tasks performed by individual workers. For example, clerk-typist.

**Job Analysis Formulas.** The Dictionary of Occupational Titles defines 35,550 job titles. It is impossible for an employment interviewer to have knowledge of all the jobs in the...
world of work. Knowledge about jobs is not acquired through reading books on the subject. If you want information about a job, it is best to go and see it; interviewers are trained to analyze jobs on employer sites. When you observe the worker doing the job, be certain you are analyzing the job and not the worker. The worker may have reason for performing the job a certain way because of his need and not the job’s. For example, if you were to observe a person teaching, and he stood during the whole presentation, “standing” might not be a requirement of the job. If he were unable to stand, he could probably perform the job just as well from a sitting position.

In order to arrive at the basic structure of jobs, the job analysis formula is used. By applying the job analysis formula to each task in a job, you can learn more about the duties of that job. The job analysis formula asks:

—What does the worker do?
—Why does he do it?
—How does he do it?
—What is involved in doing it?

Matching the Job and the Worker. Let us go back to our definition of employment interviewer as it refers to placement. It reads “searches application files, notifies selected applicants of openings and refers qualified applicants to prospective employers; contacts employers to verify results and records data.”

Before you can select applicants for an opening, however, you must have the opening. This means that the order must have been received by the employment interviewer. This is usually done by telephone and a discussion, in reality an interview, takes place between the employment interviewer and the employer. It is at this time that the employment interviewer usually records on an order blank the information about the job. This information should include:

—Qualifications required of the worker to perform the job satisfactorily.
—Other hiring requirements of the employer.
—Full details of the job offer.
—Instruction for the employment interview between the employer and the applicants selected for referral.
—Identification of any problems in selection and referral.
Care must be taken by the employment interviewer not to accept an order which is in violation of labor laws, federal, state or local, or which may violate regulations or policies of the agency for which he works. Once the order is received and recorded, the interviewer must then develop a plan for selection. He must determine from the order, the specific worker qualifications and characteristics required, the most productive source of applicants and the selection or referral limitations, if any.

The activities involved in selection or matching break down into three phases: preliminary, intermediate and final. These three phases of selection may be carried on so closely together as to merge or to occur almost simultaneously, depending upon the order in which the employment interviewer is working.

The “preliminary selection” involves simply locating applicants potentially qualified by matching their qualifications with the major job requirements. It also includes screening the application cards against the more significant or essential requirements of a job opening and occurs when the employment interviewer searches the application file.

The “intermediate selection” is a further refinement of the selection process whereby a point by point comparison or appraisal of all the qualifications of each applicant chosen is made against all of the essential requirements of the job opening. The intermediate selection determines which applicants are to be called in for reinterview and for possible referral.

In the “final selection,” a choice is made of the applicant best qualified for the job and for whom the job represents suitable employment.

Once the selection is made, the interviewer then discusses with the applicant such things as job duties in terms of the significant variables of the occupation involved, the factors influencing the applicant’s acceptance such as wages, hours and working conditions, the duration of employment, promotional opportunities, the general location of the place of employment and any special conditions of employment which must be met, such as possession of tools, union membership or licensing. If the applicant agrees that this is the job for him, the interviewer refers him to the employer.

Prior to the actual referral, the placement interviewer may verify that the job is still open by calling the employer and, at the same time, may prepare the employer for the interviewer by giving him some information about the applicant. After this is done, the interviewer provides an introductory card to the employer.

The placement is not recorded until the interviewer has
verified with the employer whether he has hired the worker and if he has the date on which the worker is to start. If it is some time in the future, the employer should be contacted on that day to confirm that the applicant has reported for work.

Job Development. As part of the employment interviewers tasks, as described in the Dictionary of Occupational Titles, we find: “. . . may visit employer establishments to solicit jobs orders and labor market information and to offer the agency’s services.” No placement can be made without suitable job openings. Job opportunities that you need do not come to you automatically. The ones you can use come after you have contacted employers and let them know your business and what labor supply you possess.

There are two ways of approaching an employer for job openings. One is called the “institutional approach” and occurs when you talk to the employer about utilizing the services of your agency. Here the dialogue is in generalities. You are really selling your total agency service rather than asking for any particular opening. The second approach is one of individual job development and is aimed toward discussing with the employer a particular applicant or a particular group of applicants, for whom you wish to develop jobs.

In the first instance, you are selling a concept and in the second instance, you are selling an individual or group of individuals. All publicity prior to the interviewer’s visit to the employer is usually based on the first medium and is popularly referred to as “institutional advertising.” There is no consensus in the field as to whether both approaches are necessary or whether one or the other is preferable. Institutional advertising is done on a broad base through either newspaper articles or mailing of pamphlets and circulars to employers, whereas individual job development takes more staff time and planning.

The following considerations are important before planning a visit to a potential employer.

1. Basic Knowledge of the Job Market. An employment interviewer, before field visiting, must have basic knowledge about the local, state and national job market. He must know what the labor supply is now and what is anticipated in the future. He must be aware of changing occupations, training facilities, and above all facts about the kinds of people for whom he is seeking jobs and facts about the kinds of service he is about to sell.
2. Appropriate Appearance, Attitude and Manner. The field visitor sets the stage for a successful visit by his appearance, attitude and manner. This means he or she must be suitably dressed - no long hair for males and no mini-skirts for the women. He must go with positive attitudes, be enthusiastic, believe in what he is doing, and believe in the agency for whom he is working. His manner should be straightforward and unafraid. He must have conviction that the visit not only benefits him and his client, but also the employer. He must be courteous and tactful; he should be aware of his speech and be flexible enough to adjust to the employer's level of conversation.

3. Planning the Employer Visit. The success of an employer contact depends a great deal on thorough planning. No visit should ever be made without a definite purpose. The primary objective of every employer is to obtain job openings. However, there may be other secondary reasons such as: to renew relations with employers whom he has known only through telephone contacts, to follow up on referrals or placements, to find out about worker utilization, job market trends, or the employers' personnel practices.

4. Know the Employer. Basic to offering service to an employer is the background of knowledge which the field visitor must have of this particular employer. Before visiting the interviewer should know such things as what the firm does, its products or services, the kinds of jobs it has and, if possible, the skill level of the jobs.

5. Sources of Information About Employers. Where can you get this information? There are many sources of information about employers. The most common are: the Yellow Pages of the phone book, chambers of commerce, service clubs, fraternal organizations, the public employment service, state apprenticeship councils, employer associations, newspaper ads, business and financial pages in the local newspapers, trade journals, labor unions, other workers in your agency and current and former clients who have worked for the employer.

6. Visiting a Potential Employer. After you have decided on the purpose of your visit, and have as many
facts as possible about the employer and his business, you are ready to plan for the visit. The things to consider now are: when should you go, whom should you see, and what should you say when you get there?

When you should go should be in terms of what is the best time for the employer. Your schedule should not take precedence over his. You have a choice of either writing or telephoning for an appointment or walking in without an appointment. There is no “best” way - much will depend upon you and your relationship with this employer whom you are about to visit.

The opening of the interviewer often spells success or failure. It should not be left to chance. Your initial remarks should be well planned. Your remarks should get the attention of the employer and arouse his interest. A good opening remark is one that is pertinent to this employer and which will focus his attention on the purpose of the visit. It should lead into or be part of the purpose of the visit.

Your remarks should be straightforward and sincere, but business-like and to the point. Do not have too long an opening; otherwise you will sound like a school boy reciting something he has memorized. Take your cue from the employer’s response and discuss with him those things he thinks are important. The employer visit is an interview and not a monologue. Good interviewing techniques apply here as well as in any other interviewing situation. There are many “Madison Avenue” approaches on how to sell. No matter how effective these techniques are, they will not sell quantities of goods or service that people do not need, nor for any length of time, commodities or services that are poor in quality.

When we train our employment interviewers, we stress three areas. The first one is to listen objectively and analytically. We tell them to look at the employer, give him all the attention. During the interview, think of the real meaning of what the employer is saying and listen for clues to anticipate the employer’s needs or problems. We also advise the interviewer to sit quietly and never interrupt. The second part of every interview is the giving of necessary information. Our staff is instructed to be factual and to the point. We use selling aids or gimmicks only if necessary. Thirdly, the interviewer must be able to see the employer’s point of view and be armed with facts to handle any objections. A good inter-
viewer anticipates the challenge of meeting them. Failure to rebut employer objections can only be interpreted by him as an indication the interviewer does not know his job and that the agency cannot produce.

It has been our experience that employers raise objections when they fail to understand what we are trying to do, when they disagree with something that they have read or heard about the agency, or when they are simply uninterested. The employment interviewer must be able to recognize the various types of objections and know how to handle them. For example, a minor objection may be raised. In this type of situation, it is best not to consider the objections. To reply may lead to arguments which could defeat the purpose of the visit.

Finally, some objections are valid. These should be acknowledged and not defended. We have learned that some of the following techniques work in refuting objections:

—the "indirect denial" technique when you reply "Yes . . . but . . ." and then give your reasons.

—the "reverse English" - when you use a specific objection as a reason why an employer should use your service.

—the stressing of compensating factors and superior features when your agency excels.

Another technique is to ask "Why?" when he expresses general resentment about using the agency's service. This is a tricky technique and should be used carefully. It may clarify objection and may force the employer to answer his own questions. But it may also make him defensive and result in an enemy rather than a friend.

And last, to be used only if the character or reputation of the agency or its personnel is involved, is the direct denial. If possible, you should find out in your visit such things as the seasonality of the business, the turnover rate, size and composition of labor force, location of plant, methods of transportation and recruitment practices. Employer's hiring practices vary and must be known. They may cover such things as sex and age preferences, provided they do not run counter to law or agency policy, education and experience requirements, apprenticeship and on-the-job training, medical examinations, aptitude or proficiency testing, work trial, tool requirements, etc.

The wage scale, whether it is based on hourly or piece work, must be known as well as union membership requirements and methods of joining unions. Hours of work as well
as shifts are extremely important. In today's job market, fringe benefits as well as pension rights are of prime interest to new employees. The lines of promotion and transfer within the organization as well as job rotation, separation and rehiring policies are significant. But most important of all is the climate of morale in the organization. No one can tell you this. There is something you will know only by visiting a company and being conscious of the atmosphere in which the workers do their jobs. And last, but not least, you should learn the name of the person responsible for hiring personnel.

The interviewer must know when to terminate the visit. The visit should be terminated when the purpose has been accomplished or when nothing more can be achieved. A visit should be terminated very early if the visitor finds it impossible to secure the attention of the employer. In this event, it is better to make an appointment for another time.

When there has been some productive discussion, it is always good technique to summarize or restate agreements reached and to leave pamphlets, profiles, etc. with the employer. Thank him for his cooperation and information, say goodbye and go. Do not waste time by dwelling.

Once a visit has been made, pertinent information obtained from the employer should be recorded for use by yourself and other staff members. This information should be used for telephone solicitation when and if you encounter someone you feel will fit into the employer's organization.

Remember, the effectiveness of your field visiting must be geared to your ability to satisfy the employer's need. Establishing good relationship, but being unable to supply the worker to the employer, will not help your clients or keep you in business.

Summarizing, we have talked about the job of an employment interviewer in assessing the applicant, analyzing jobs, matching the applicant with jobs, and job development techniques. In our field we can never forget that a worker's physical, mental and emotional outlook on life are vitally affected by his job. Charged with finding the right job for each person who comes to us for placement assistance, we are inevitably playing a profound part in his future. It is not a responsibility to be taken lightly.