



10 critical hiring questions

by

Teresa Schmedding

News Editor

Daily Herald, suburban Chicago

© 2004 by the National Newspaper Association

NNA National
Newspaper
Association

Newspaper Management Handbook



The NNA Management Handbook

Welcome to the National Newspaper Association Management Handbook. Published in cooperation with the Missouri School of Journalism, the handbook is a series of PowerPoint “recipe cards” designed to help you through newspaper management challenges.

For information on becoming an NNA Management Handbook author, contact:

Clyde H. Bentley, editor
National Newspaper Association
P.O. Box 7540
Columbia, MO 65205-7540



About the author



Teresa Schmedding, news editor of the Daily Herald in suburban Chicago, oversees a copy desk staff of 40 and supervises local news postings at night on dailyherald.com. Schmedding also is on the executive committee of the American Copy Editors Society and has conducted training sessions around the country. A 1989 graduate of the University of Missouri School of Journalism, she currently is enrolled in Mizzou's newspaper management master's program.



10 hiring questions

by

Teresa Schmedding

News editor

Daily Herald

Work clips and tests are only half of the hiring equation. How can you tell the difference between a self-motivator who has leadership potential and a follower who will perform at minimum levels? These 10 questions will help you hire the future leaders of your newsroom.



Long-term commitment

Ask a question that reveals an applicant's genuine interest in newspapers.

- 1) What newspapers do you currently read?
What do you like about them?
What do you dislike?





What to look for

If the applicant admits being a non-newspaper reader, then you'll know the potential for long-term retention or leadership is slight. Non-reading applicants tend to pick journalism as a default career.

How the applicant answers this question also will help reveal his or her evaluative skills and the depth of thought he or she puts into newspapers.



Self-evaluation, relationship skills

As a question about a previous supervisor.

- 2) If I met your current boss at a social function and asked to hear just one sentence about you, what would he or she say?**





What to look for

The level of honesty in applicants answers will reveal their ability to evaluate how others view them.

In addition, you want to hire employees who are knowledgeable about management goals. The answer can help reveal which applicants view themselves as partners with supervisors versus combatants.



Achievement, team skills

Ask a question about a high-light
of the applicant's career.

**3) What project have
you worked on in
the past year or two
that you are proud
of and why?**





What to look for

If applicants discuss something recent, it tells you they are a consistent performer. Someone who focuses on a project from several years ago may have lost his or her spark.

Probe deeper in the answer and look for an ability to work within a team and share credit. Applicants that focus on the “we” rather than “I” have greater leadership skills and confidence, rather than a weak applicant trying to pump himself or herself up.

The logo of the National Newspaper Association is circular, featuring a silhouette of a person sitting at a desk with a typewriter. The text "NATIONAL NEWSPAPER ASSOCIATION" is written around the perimeter of the circle. The logo is set against a background of a globe's grid lines.

Knowledge of your product

Ask a question about your newspaper.

- 4) “Did you see today's main page 1 package?
What did you think of it?” “What do you think
is the strength of my newspaper? Weakness?”**



What to look for

You want to hire someone who wants to work for your newspaper rather than a weak applicant who is looking for any job anywhere.

The depth of answer will reveal the level of initiative and thought the applicant has put into applying for the job. Even if the applicant comes from a distance, they should have taken the time to research your paper.



Critical-thinking skills

Get the applicant to discuss a failure.

5) What was your greatest failure? What would you do to avoid failing again?





What to look for

Avoid hiring people who blame all their mistakes on other people. You want someone who can learn from their mistakes.

The answer can reveal if the applicant has strong critical-thinking skills, a positive outlook and temerity, rather than someone who accepts defeat and lays blame at the feet of others.



Vision, leadership skills

Ask a question to see if the applicant has the potential to lead.

6) If you were promoted to executive editor at your paper tomorrow, what's the first thing you would do?





What to look for

Weak applicants will often say they'd fire a set of people or revamp a department other than their own. A future leader will discuss strategic initiatives or constructive change. A narrow answer reveals an employee who gets hung up on small things and cannot focus on the big picture

Outside interests, curiosity

Ask a non-newspaper question.

7) If you couldn't be a journalist, what would you be? How do you spend most of your free time? If you could solve one riddle of the universe, what would it be?





What to look for

You want employees with outside interests and a life independent of the paper. Natural curiosity is a critical skill for all journalists; the lowest performers tend to have no curiosity or enthusiasm for life.

Questions such as these also are likely to catch an applicant off-guard and offer an ability to evaluate how well he or she thinks on their feet.



Knowledge of news

Ask a current events question.

**8) “When do you think the United States will withdraw from Iraq?”
“Who do you think will be the next governor?”**





What to look for

The question should not be obscure or designed to trip up the applicant. Rather the question is designed to test knowledge of events outside the applicants world. You want an employee who can speak authoritatively on current events and has a general interest in the news.



Ethics

As a question involving an ethical dilemma with no obvious answer.

9) If you saw a co-worker drinking a beer while covering a festival, what would you do?





What to look for

Since there is no simple yes or no answer, you are looking for information on how the applicant would react as a potential manager to react. You also want to hire someone with an ethical core that you can trust.




Industry knowledge, initiative

Ask a “current events” newspaper industry question.

**10) What is one trend
in journalism you despise?
What do you love?**





What to look for

You want an employee who is knowledgeable about trends in your industry and demonstrates initiative to tackle the problem. Avoid employees who respond that "someone" should fix it. Look for applicants who can see themselves as affecting constructive change.



More Handbook Topics

For Handbook cards on these topics, contact the NNA

- ◆ Front page design
- ◆ Motivating the newsroom
- ◆ Libel
- ◆ Covering meetings
- ◆ Special sections
- ◆ Advertising commissions
- ◆ Pressroom safety
- ◆ Returning injured workers