

SOME SUGGESTED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Children's Reading Program Humboldt Municipal Library

The primary goal of this interview should be to determine the following:

- (a) *Does the employee seem to be who he/she purported to be in their employment application? Are the claims and credentials indicated in the application correct?*
- (b) *Does the applicant demonstrate a facility with the concepts associated with the job?*
- (c) *Does the applicant have the right temperament for the position?*
- (d) *Is the applicant properly motivated?*

The following types of questions should help the City of Humboldt hire the right person for the job:

1. Assessing the credibility of the applicant.

- ' Ask the employee to explain any discrepancies which may exist between his/her application (resume) and the results of the City's background check.
- ' Ask the applicant to review his/her job history and education. Does his/her answer generally follow the education and work history claims made in the application.
- ' If the applicant skips over any claims made in the application or resume, try to prompt him/her to explain. The omission may be accidental, but it may also be that the applicant wants to avoid talking about these claims for a particular reason.
- ' Ask the applicant to explain any significant gaps in their work history.
- ' Ask the employee whether he/she has ever been arrested. And know the answer to this question before you ask it.
- ' If you know any of the persons listed by the applicant as a reference, previous employer, etc., ask the applicant about that person. Compare the applicant's assessment of that person with your own assessment.
- ' Ask the employee to go into detail about their work and education histories. Encourage the applicant to talk. Does the applicant's discussion of their work and education history make any sense? Does he/she sound like a person who has experience with, or knowledge of, library operations, experience with children, etc.

2. Demonstrating a familiarity with the concepts associated with the job.

- ' If the job involves reading to children, ask the applicant to read a short paragraph from a children's story out loud to you – in the same manner he/she would read to a group of children. How does the applicant's delivery sound to you? Too fast or too slow? Too loud? Poor pronunciation? Would the applicant's reading hold the attention of a group of children?
- ' Ask the applicant to name several of his/her favorite children's books. Ask why these particular books are considered favorites.
- ' Ask the applicant to discuss current issues in the provision of library services in general and children's literature in particular. In particular, you should ask the applicant if there are any books or topics which, given the age of the children she will be tending, might be inappropriate. Have him/her explain why these topics would be inappropriate.
- ' Ask the applicant how she would handle a difficult or poorly-mannered child placed in her custody. Is the applicant's answer cause for concern? You may want to be a little sneaky here, such as: "Under what circumstances would you strike a child who was misbehaving?" Obviously, if the applicant says he/she would strike a child under any circumstances, you would not want to hire him/her.
- ' Ask the applicant to discuss what his/her goals will be if employed by the City in this position. You should then consider how consistent those goals are with those of the City Library.
- ' Ask the applicant what other positions he/she has currently applied for. Are these jobs similar to the job you are offering? If not, ask the applicant why they are considering such a wide array of job opportunities.
- ' You will have to be careful how you ask this question, but I would try to get the applicant to discuss the fact that the library's clients and employees include persons of all races, religions, nationalities and colors. The City should be careful about hiring an applicant who says he/she is uncomfortable with this fact.
- ' Ask the applicant if he/she will mind taking a pre-employment drug test to be provided by the City. Follow up. Make the applicant take the test on his/her first day of employment – with the understanding that a positive test will result in immediate termination.

3. Attitude and Temperament.

At least in my opinion, attitude and temperament are at least as important in hiring an employee as education and work history. Particularly for this job which involves children.

- ' Ask the applicant what attracted him/her to this particular job. "Why do you want to work for us?"
- ' Ask the applicant to explain why they quit their previous jobs. Be careful if they dwell too much on personal differences with their supervisors, clients, etc.
- ' Ask the applicant to discuss his/her salary and benefit expectations. If these expectations are higher than City policy allows, the applicant may not want to stay too long in the job.

- ' Is the applicant properly dressed and groomed for the interview? Sloppiness at this point can not be expected to improve once he/she is hired.
 - ' Ask the applicant to discuss why they like working with kids. Does the answer seem genuine?
4. Motivation.
- ' Ask the applicant what they expect to derive from the job. Obviously, everyone expects a paycheck from their jobs – and it is OK for the applicant to mention this. But look for something more – is the applicant looking for some personal fulfillment or satisfaction that the job might provide? Generally, an employee who is looking for more than a paycheck can be expected to do a better job and remain in the position longer. Does the primary motivation seem to be pay? Benefits? Or helping kids to read?
 - ' Ask the employee about his/her career goals. Where do they expect to be in 1 year? 5 years? Etc. Are these goals consistent with a person applying for the library job?

SOME QUESTIONS WHICH MUST NOT BE ASKED

The following types of questions should NEVER be asked at an interview:

1. What is your religion? (Or political affiliation, etc.) (*Unconstitutional*)
2. Why is a man (woman) applying for a woman's (man's) job? (*Gender discrimination*).
3. Do you have any medical problems we should know about? (*Discrimination against handicapped persons*).
4. Are you married? (*Gender discrimination*).
5. Does your husband (wife) have a job? (*Gender discrimination*).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

It would seem that the primary consideration in hiring for this position is the safety and well-being of the children involved. For this reason, I would place considerable emphasis on how well the applicant seems to answer those questions about how he/she would treat kids. ANY RED FLAGS in this area would suggest that the applicant is not a good match for this job. Simply stated, it is better to hire a kinder, gentler applicant with limited qualifications than to hire a highly qualified person who may hurt a child.

It is usually a good idea to get some help when interviewing candidates for an important job such as this. You may want to assemble a panel to assist you with the interviews, persons such as the Librarian (or

whomever will supervise the applicant after he/she is hired), an elementary school educator having experience working with small children, a pediatrician or nurse who works with kids, etc. The final decision would be yours, of course, but these “helpers” may see something in the applicant that you might otherwise miss.