



## **FSIS SUPERVISORY SUMMARIES**

*A series of "on target" supervisory selection guidance*

### **TOPIC #1: THE "SCOOP" ON BEI INTERVIEWS....**

**Question: In any interview, sometimes the selecting official may need to clarify some of the information provided in an individual's application. Is this allowed?**

- Yes. One of the purposes of any interview (BEI or traditional) is to *clarify* any information in an individual's application, when needed. This may not be necessary to do for all the applicants. Once application information is clarified, all applicants must then be asked the same basic interview questions, although questions concerning prior work experience will vary from candidate to candidate.

In panel situations where the selecting official chooses not participate, he/she may provide questions for the panel to ask regarding the application. Some of these questions may also be asked when the selecting official conducts supervisory reference checks, another source of applicant information.

**Question: In a recent study, selecting officials felt that BEI interviews did not allow for the option to ask "technical questions" or that questions which address technical experience are not allowed. Is that true?**

- No, during the interview, you ***can ask technical questions*** to determine if the candidate has a particular knowledge or skill required in the job. The interview can include a mix of BEI as well as technical or traditional questions.

As some of you may recall, during the BEI training, it was noted that there is room for questions regarding an applicant's experience, personal assessments, etc. Personnel Decisions Inc, (PDI) our interview vendor, suggests that up to 20% of your questions may include questions of this nature with 80% of the questions being behaviorally based. PDI recognizes the importance of a mix of traditional and behavioral questions because oftentimes, it provides additional information about a candidate's experience that may not be noted in the application. In addition, the selecting official can probe further for information if the answers conflict with the information in the application. These responses can also provide good background information for your behavioral questions.

Ultimately, because behavioral questions are designed to determine how well the applicant actually performs on the job, they are the most revealing interview questions. For example, the applicant may have excellent technical knowledge and a broad educational background, but if he/she has difficulty getting work done in a timely manner, the applicant may not be the best candidate for the job.

**Question: Should you rate technical questions?**

- No. When asking technical questions, you are trying to determine whether or not an applicant has a particular skill or knowledge. Based on the answers received, you would simply need to document their response (e.g. what their level of knowledge or skill is).

For example, say, you were trying to find out whether a candidate has experience with a particular software package (e.g. *Excel*) and how they have used it. You *would not rate* the answer against the BEI benchmarks or evaluation criteria. Instead you would document whether the applicant had the needed experience and/or what skills they may be lacking (e.g. your documentation could say, "took Intro level training on *Excel* but applicant has not applied skills in the office").

The responses to the technical questions can be used in making a selection decision.

**Question: In a BEI question there are a number of probe questions listed under the question. Do all the probes need to be asked in the same manner and order as they are written?**

- No. Every interview question includes a number of probes to help identify the Situation, Behavior and Outcome (or, SBO) of a particular response given. Although the question itself must be the same, the probes are simply designed as a guide to help ensure that the full SBO is addressed for a particular work example. Therefore the probes may be modified if necessary. Sometimes, this may require that the interviewer rephrase or ask a different probe if the applicant has difficulty answering the question. It does not however, change the nature of the question being asked or the information sought. In addition, if the interviewee has already provided the information on a part of the SBO before you asked the particular probe (e.g. what is the outcome?), you don't have to ask the probe, unless you feel clarification is needed.

**Question: If an interviewee fails to answer a question, what do you do?**

- You can rephrase the question, ask a different probe, or ask him/her to think back on a previous job or an answer given to a previous question. If the applicant still can't answer it, tell them you will come back to it later and give them another opportunity to answer the question before the end of the interview.

If the question goes unanswered, it cannot be rated. A rating of zero ("0") is not valid.

**Question: How should feedback be given to non-selectees regarding their interview?**

- Since the interview is only one piece of information in the selection process, the

discussion should be broader than simply addressing how well the applicant did in the interview. In addition to the interview, the selecting official must consider the application, performance appraisal, supervisory reference checks, etc. when making a selection decision. While the interview may serve to provide additional insights to the candidates, the selecting official must weigh **all** the information on that candidate.

Any feedback offered to the non-selectee should be constructive and center around the requirements of the job and where the applicant may have fallen short of those requirements (based on all of the information received), or where experience was limited. Certainly, any feedback can also include suggestions on ways to improve their application, or possible career development activities (e.g. details, training, etc) which they may wish to pursue to enhance their competitiveness.

Finally, it is suggested that if an applicant wishes to discuss the interview or the selection, and drops by or calls unexpectedly, it is best to try and schedule an appointment with the applicant for a date in the near future instead. This will allow time to gather your thoughts and also provide the applicant with sufficient time to discuss their concerns. An honest discussion will help promote the perception that merit promotion is a fair and open process.

Revised 9/03