



Webinar D8 – Interviewing Strategies to Hire Relationship Ready Staff

Question and Answer

Question 1 - Aside from general interview "comfort level," isn't it possible that an applicant might better "relate" - express their relationships - in non-verbal ways? Also, is it possible for an interviewee to be "well practiced" in interviewing and verbalizing their relating skill set - but in actual situations, not be as skilled?

Answer: It is very important to pay attention to nonverbal aspects of communicating as a way of assessing an applicant's relationship-readiness. Behaviors such as eye contact and body posture are important to look at throughout the interview but especially during the part of the interview when the applicant is talking about relationships with a child or with a prior boss or colleague.

There are certainly individuals who are quite verbally skilled in answering questions in an interview. They might look quite good in many interviews but, when asked about specific past relationships, research has shown that their verbal fluency will decrease if they are not relationship-ready or they will be quite superficial in their descriptions of the child or their supervisor. They may also try to not answer the question about a specific person and talk more generally about relationships. In that case, it would be important to bring them back to discussing a specific relationship.

Question 2 – What if a program hires someone who is Relationship-Ready Staff but over time they get burnt out and lose this quality. What can programs do to try to get it back?

Answer: Relationship-based strategies, such as reflective supervision, are your best bet in combating burn-out. Within reflective supervision, an atmosphere of safety can be created in which the employee can share about motivational struggles and not feel worried about being criticized or shamed. Job redesign possibilities can then be discussed. The supervisor can also take these issues to the management team to look systemically at what changes may need to be made. We have found that the addition of mental health consultation to the reflective supervision model provides another level of support and a safe place to share vulnerabilities and develop strategies to respond to situations that feel particularly stuck or challenging to staff. We have identified internal system issues and community collaboration needs through this process that managers have responded to in order to improve systems and collaborative partnerships.

Question 3 - What do programs do to foster a relationship between the long-term employees and the new hire to facilitate a positive environment?

Answer: Hiring relationship-ready staff provides a great start towards this goal in multiple ways. First, and most obviously, new relationship-ready staff is more likely to get along well with long term staff. Secondly, the more relationship-ready staff you have, the more the atmosphere of the organization will be social and friendly. Thirdly, hiring relationship-ready staff reduces staff turnover and gives long-term staff more incentive to invest in a relationship with new hires.

Bringing on a new staff person should be celebrated. Other staff will be able to tell how important it really is by how much time is devoted to it in a staff meeting and using that time to genuinely and meaningfully welcome the new employee. Established staff can also be assigned as mentors to new staff to build relationships.

Taking the time for staff to share the meaning of their work and importance and purpose of EHS in a thoughtful discussion with a new employee helps the new staff person resonate with the values and culture of a program. It is a time to celebrate a new staff member to the team through conversations, mentoring, inviting their ideas and valuing their contributions. A new job at EHS has a huge learning curve, and it is important to create a culture where staff reaches out to help new staff in their centers. As this is promoted, one can ensure that every new staff sees his or her unique role in supporting the values and mission of EHS, from cooks to teaching staff.

Question 4 – Where can programs advertise for relationship-ready staff, are there particular places to post ads that you have found successful in reaching possible candidates?

Answer: Programs may advertise in the usual venues (newspaper ads, internet, etc.), but important vehicles are community partners. You can let them know you are looking for educated, experienced, relational applicants. Local community college contacts can also be included as well as word of mouth through staff. For bilingual staff recruitment, there may be local cultural groups that you reach out to depending on what populations your programs serve.

Question 5 – Just as EHS staff tries to respect, reflect, and attempt to be sensitive to individual child and parent difference in relating, should EHS programs when interviewing be flexible and accommodating to diverse ways candidates may relate?

Answer: There is a multitude of ways for people to successfully relate to others. In striving to hire relationship-ready staff, we are not looking for staff with a particular way of relating. Rather, we are looking for people who enjoy relating, value the differences and talents of the staff on their team and put energy into it. Relationship-ready staff also seem to have this quality of being genuine, and are generally comfortable with whom they are as a person.

Question 6 – Are there strategies or suggestions on how to convince agency management why hiring relationship ready staff is so important?

Answer: Hiring relationship-ready staff can improve outcomes that management would value, such as reduced staff turnover (which costs the program money), fewer staff sick days, reduced number of complaints from parents, lower risk of lawsuits, improved staff morale, and better communication between staff and management.

Current staff may be surveyed anonymously about what keeps them in their job; whether it is pay, service to clients, relationships with the people they work with, the importance of EHS, amongst others. In such surveys, relationships with the people they work with often ranks very high.

Relationship-ready staff are also more likely to pitch in and help out when needed without complaining, more likely to refrain from gossip and contribute to a negative work culture, and more likely to collaborate with other staff to solve a problem or improve a system to work better for the program. They show initiative and creativity as well.

Question 7 – How long does it take a program to put procedures for hiring relationship ready staff into practice?

Answer: The first step is creating a culture that values relationship-based organizations. How long this might take would depend upon where your program is in the process. For some programs, this could be a big shift, for others, less so. You may involve your mental health consultant, as well as Human Resources, in a planning process to develop these procedures and help train the staff that will be doing the hiring. Another factor is assessing your existing staff and asking whether the majority are relationship-ready or not? The supervisory system is a very important part of implementing successful procedures. Ensuring you have managers on board who are well trained in reflective supervision is vital to supporting the growth of a relationship-based organization. They are the ones who will be supporting your new relationship-ready hires.