



TALK!

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Avoiding the Pitfalls



We want the PEP experience to be a great one for candidates and managers alike! It's been our experience that candidates who are well prepared for PEP screening are more self-confident individuals and as a result, tend to do better with screening. Please consider sharing the following helpful hints with your candidate:

1. If you're referring a candidate to PEP for screening, be sure to provide him/her with your full name along with the job posting number. Certain positions have different testing requirements and if we have a job posting number, we'll be sure to administer the appropriate assessments!
2. Remind your candidate to be five to ten minutes early for his/her PEP appointment. If s/he is unfamiliar with our location, suggest a test run before the appointment date. We have found that when a candidate arrives late, s/he tends to have concentration problems during skill testing which often carries over to the Competency Interview.
3. We do our best to remind candidates to bring along a resume and to dress professionally for the PEP appointment, however a reminder from you might also help.

Warning Signs: candidate red flags



Picture this: a candidate is referred to PEP after completing a lengthy department interview. During the PEP Telephone Interview we learn that he was let go from his most recent position due to attendance problems. When we ask what he disclosed about the discharge during the department interview, he says, "No one asked about it until now!"

Interested in saving yourself time and aggravation? If you're speaking with a candidate who has yet to complete PEP screening, you might ask very basic questions pertaining to his/her two most recent positions/employers before inviting him/her in for a formal department interview. If a 'red flag' is revealed in your candidate's work history, please let us know the name of the applicant and what was disclosed so that we can follow up. You can then simply move on to the next candidate. Some questions you might ask include:

Warning Signs: candidate red flags—continued

1. "Why did you leave your last employer?" "Was your departure voluntary?" or "Why are you looking to leave your current employer?"

Some applicants are crafty with their responses. A **lay-off** response could actually mean discharge. Were others within the company were laid off as well, or if the lay-off was due to attendance or job performance? A **mutual agreement** response may really mean that the separation from the company wasn't a choice, but rather s/he was offered the option "to quit or be fired" which isn't really a good thing! A **difficult supervisor** response often prompts us to ask for examples about why the supervisor was difficult. A **misunderstanding/disagreement** response may indicate that s/he quit without notice, walked off the job or even had a yelling match with his/her boss or coworker, resulting in a discharge. Don't hesitate to probe for more details! I **couldn't keep up with the work quota** might actually reveal that the former employee had poor attendance leading to an inability to meet quota guidelines resulting in a discharge. A **schedule conflict**, perhaps due to school or the work schedule of another job held elsewhere, can result in the employee quitting without notice or being terminated/discharged for not showing up for his/her shift. Again, probe for those details!

2. "How much notice did you give before you left?" or "How much notice are you required to give before you leave?"

For most companies, including U-M, the universal standard is a two-week notice. Some companies require only one week and yet others require 30 days. What's more, is that upon learning that an employee has given—or intends to give—notice, some companies will make that day his/her last. If a candidate indicates anything less than two weeks, we ask follow-up questions in an effort to determine if s/he really left the former employer on good terms. We will often ask, **"What was the company's policy on giving notice?"** If the candidate indicates a two-week requirement, but has disclosed that s/he only provided one week, that's a problem.

3. "Did you complete the full notice before you left?"

If an employee gives a two-week notice and then s/he fails to report to work on the last two days of her two-week notice, chances are good that you would not recommend him/her for rehire at U-M. Most companies follow the same pattern, although employers might allow the departing employee to only work out the remainder of the current schedule for scheduling purposes. If there's lingering doubt, we will often pursue an employment reference first from that particular employer before we move ahead with screening.

4. "Did you leave on good terms?" or "When we call your former employer/manager, will we receive a good reference?"

Most candidates will respond yes, but we listen for a pause or hesitation in his/her voice. A **with my Supervisor, yes...but not with the Manager** or a **no** response requires additional probing.

Warning Signs: candidate red flags—continued

Unexplained gaps in time between previous employers:

If the resume fails to provide them, we ask the applicant for the month and year that s/he started and ended with each employer so we can better identify and ask about employment gaps.

Inconsistencies with employment dates and/or self employment:

We watch for—and question—any overlapping employment. It's not unusual for individuals to hold two jobs, it is possible that a mistake was made with reporting accurate employment dates.

Self-employment work history may be a clever and convenient way to camouflage unflattering work history including terminations/discharges.

Previous supervisors with the same last name, or references with the same telephone number as the candidate:

Unfortunately deceptive applicants often provide misleading reference contact information such as names of people who have never supervised his/her work, in an attempt to secure a “glowing” employment reference. For example, at PEP, we avoid cellular numbers because we cannot authenticate the reference. If a candidate provides us with a telephone number with an unusual area code which doesn't match the area where s/he last worked, we investigate it.

When the reason for leaving the last job fails to relate to the next job:

"I left for better wages or benefits" or "I left for more hours" when it's clear that the candidate didn't start his/her new job until three months later—we question it—because the next job doesn't support the reason as to why s/he left the last job.

Resume information:

Skills that are highlighted on the resume where there are no obvious reasons in prior employment or education to support learning the skill. If the candidate indicates that s/he has phlebotomy training, but fails to indicate where s/he learned the skill, it's ok to ask!

Instability in job history “job hopping”:

While sometimes candidates leave positions without having a choice (i.e. lay-off), we inquire about his/her reasons for leaving employers and we assess whether it ‘makes sense.’

In the next issue of PEP Talk!

Effective Reference Checking

Have an idea or suggestion for a newsletter topic? Email it to umhs-hr-PEP@med.umich.edu