



Interviewing Tip Sheet

“That’s a good question.”

Candidates for public office have always stalled for time by responding to a question with a flattering “that’s a good question” response. But what is a good question for Advisory Committee members to ask of candidates? Here are three rules and some sample questions for consideration.

Rule #1

Organize your questions using the 5 STAR categories (see article)

Sample Question

On Governance: “We have 23 members on our Board currently, the Bylaws allow for minimum of 15 and a maximum of 25 members. We are aware that independent school boards are getting smaller nationally, mostly because, we are told, of the pressure on Board members to be well informed about the workings of the school. How would you keep such a large group informed? What is your experience working on communications with Board members and committees?”

Rule #2

Educate before you inquire

As you can see from the question above, it helps to educate the candidate before you inquire. In a short introduction, set the context for your question and share your perspective. This approach will more sharply focus the answer and ensure the candidate doesn’t wander off into an unproductive area.

Rule #3

Contextualize Experience

Asking candidates about their experience is always helpful. However, it is important to allow the candidate to bridge the gap between what he has done and what she would do at your school. For example, in the School Culture category, a candidate who is coming from a boarding school may have successfully related to students in a way that is just impossible in a day school setting. It is important to frame a question in such a way that you find out both about the candidate’s experience as well as what the candidate would do in your school’s setting.

Sample Question

On Culture: “We understand that you have maintained very positive relationships with students at your current school. Could you tell us a little about your daily contact with the students? And, because you are at a boarding school and we are a day school, I was wondering if you could also address how you would approach staying involved in the daily life of students here?”

In the case of “rising star” candidates, ones who have been very successful where they are, but who have not been Head of School before, it is important to give the candidates a chance introduce an approach to an area of responsibility that they may not have used, but one they have seen used.

Sample Question

On Finances: “As the Academic Dean at your current school (or whatever the person’s job is), I assume you have not had responsibility for developing the operating budget of the school. Could you tell us how you would go about the task of developing a budget and about anything you have observed in the area of finances that you would bring to our school?”

Question Etiquette

1. Introduce yourself (title and responsibility, if any. Relationship to the school and years of association)
2. Someone should assume the role of moderator to ensure questions in a number of different categories are covered. Assign a member to initiate a category of questioning. (One person be assigned to ask a question about the candidate’s approach to, say, fundraising. Then anyone should be free to ask a follow-on question. This way most of the categories are sure to be covered.)
3. Allow time for the candidate’s questions: the questions of the candidate may be as revealing as the answers s/he gives to yours.
4. Make the time frame clear, the Moderator should allow time for questions and a summary statement from the Candidate
5. **No silent members (candidates have reported that they find advisory committee members who do not speak during a meeting to at best, unnerving; and at worst, rude. Everyone should ask question or a follow-on question, or at least be prepared to make a thoughtful comment.)**
6. **Avoid direct personal questions like “how old are you?” It is OK to ask how long the individual would like to serve as our Head of School, but not to ask about plans for retirement. Areas to avoid are religious and political affiliation. Also don’t ask about a spouse or children. A candidate ought to be free to place children in the best school for them.**