**Cases for Small-Group Discussion**

Case 14-1. Conducting Interviews and Technology

Stacy Rollins was pensive as she waited for her interview with an investment banking firm. She felt well prepared because she had summarized all of her critical information into her résumé, which had been reviewed by her business communication professor prior to sending it to the recruiter. She felt well qualified for the position and wanted to make a good impression. She had been through three other interviews for different positions and had developed the ability to respond to questions that all of the recruiters seemed to have in common. Unlike the first three, however, this interview was going to be conducted as a teleconference. The recruiter placed the phone call, introduced herself, and added that she was placing Stacy on speakerphone, although she did not describe who else was in the room, listening in.

The recruiter began the interview by saying, “Stacy, we have the résumé you e-mailed yesterday. It looks good. You are familiar with the job requirements, I suppose. We are seeking a candidate with superb analytical skills, demonstrated ability to work in team settings, and the ability to communicate and to manage communication effectively.”

“Oh, yes!” Stacy replied. “I think I am a good match for your criteria.”

The recruiter was silent for a moment. “So . . .” she said finally. A prolonged pause ensued. The recruiter said nothing further, though the phone line was apparently still open.

Stacy was perplexed. She had not experienced this in other interviews. She did not know what to do.

Case 14-1 Questions

1. *Place yourself in Stacy’s shoes; knowing what you do about interviews, what would you do at this point?*

Stacy needs to take control of the situation, remain calm, and begin to talk about her qualifications and how they match the position requirements. She should also ask questions of the interviewer. As the chapter points out, the more the interviewer talks, the more likely the interviewee will get an offer.

1. *What could the recruiter’s objective be for posing the non-question and then saying nothing further?*

Interviewers have been known to use stress tests to determine how a potential new hire would react in high-tension situations. Here, it is possible that Stacy’s ability to communicate during non-optimal conditions is being measured. Traits such as independence, quick thinking, assertiveness, and fluency might be bona fide occupational qualifications for the position.

*3. What advantages and disadvantages of conducting interviews by teleconference does* *this case demonstrate?*

As students learned in Chapter 3, technology can be a barrier as well as an enabler to communication. Teleconference costs are far less than travel costs when conducting interviews, but the narrow bandwidth of this channel limits participants’ ability to interpret nonverbal signals. Vocal cues must be relied on exclusively.

**Case 14-2. Kern and the Quiet Nurse**

Kay Kern is the director of the corporate safety department for a large, multiplant manufacturing company in the Midwest. The company has six major manufacturing plants, and each has its own industrial nurses.

Twice a year, Kern has individual formal interviews with the nurses to find out if they have any major concerns or if Kern can help in any way. Since these nurses report to the personnel manager of each plant and not to Kern, this is not a performance review. Kern gets a lot of valuable information from the nurses through the interviews and seems to have developed a positive relationship with them. There is only one nurse, Joe James, who does not really open up to Kern and say much. On several occasions, Kern has tried to get information from James, but generally when Kern asks a question, all she gets is a one-word or superficial response. For instance, several months ago all the plants instituted a new program for monitoring the number and types of visits to the nurses’ offices. Kern asked James if everything was all right with the new program. James merely shrugged and said, “Yes.”

This worries Kern because James is a young nurse with only two years of experience and he probably has questions and could use some help. Kern has even asked some of the other employees in the plant if James was naturally quiet, but everyone said he was rather outgoing and easy to get to know. Kern is getting frustrated, because in her 25 years of experience she has never had this much trouble getting someone to open up.

#### **Case 14-2 Questions**

1. *What are some possible incorrect interview strategies that Kay Kern may be using?*

One possibility is that Kern could be “talking down” to James because she believes he is too new in the field to be well versed at his job. However, with a more recent education, James may, in fact, be better educated than Kern.

Another possibility is that James is uncomfortable with the gender difference in their manager-subordinate relationship.

1. *What would you recommend to Kern?*

Kern should try to discover if James resents what he may see as her interference. If this is not the case, then Kern needs to ask James directly why he has difficulty answering her questions and getting along with her when she attempts to interview him about his work experiences. She can also use nonverbal cues to make him feel like an equal, and not like someone inferior to her. Many people do not welcome unsolicited advice. James may be one of these people.

**Case 14-3. Is It Harassment?**

Jack Simpson, newly appointed human resources director for Geridan Contracting Corporation (GCC), had had an unusual morning. First on his agenda was an exit interview with Maria Johnson, the company president’s executive secretary. Johnson had simply informed Simpson she was quitting, giving no reason. Judging from her performance reviews over the last few years, Simpson believed her to be a competent, enthusiastic, and dedicated employee. Even though Simpson had little knowledge of her workload, he could see no obvious reason for the resignation. He had set up this exit interview hoping to find out why she had quit.

Next on Simpson’s agenda was an interview with Ryan Ross, the president of GCC, who wanted to talk to Simpson before Simpson began interviewing later in the day for the secretary’s replacement. Simpson had never conducted an interview for a president’s secretary before, but he had planned on getting a good idea of what to look for during his talk with Johnson. He believed Ross would also advise him on what he expected from the secretary’s replacement.

However, when Simpson and the resigning executive secretary, Johnson, sat down in a quiet conference room at 8:30 a.m., the HR director's ears began to burn. Johnson explained that for the last six months she was being sexually harassed by Ross and that she was considering suing GCC (and Ross in particular).

Simpson needs to know more about this accusation in case it does develop into a more serious situation. Also, the more facts he has, the better prepared he will be to discuss the situation with the president. What interview strategy should Simpson use with the secretary?

#### **Case 14-3 Questions**

1. *What type of questions would you recommend? What sequence?*

To obtain the information he wants about the accusations, Simpson should ask open-ended questions first, then proceed with increasingly restricted questions. He should use the funnel sequence. For example, Simpson might ask “What exactly happened between Mr. Ross and you?” Later he might ask “What do *you* mean by sexual harassment?”

Simpson should also ask primary and secondary questions; for instance, “What do you intend to do under the circumstances, Ms. Johnson?” (primary). After her answer, he might ask “What do you mean?” (secondary). This second question should lead to more detailed information about Johnson’s intentions. Simpson can also use directed questions to get the factual information or to make her see the problem from another perspective; for instance, “Don’t you think you might have misunderstood Mr. Ross’s intentions?” (directed).

1. *What do you think will be the major barriers in this interview? Why?*

Responses should reflect the major barriers that could arise. Differing intentions could be present in this interview because Johnson might not disclose certain relevant information that could have worked against her interest. Simpson, on the other hand, must try to remain unbiased in his judgments about Johnson and must not let the halo effect influence his perceptions of the present problem.

1. *What can Simpson do to be sure he is getting the facts?*

Simpson should follow company policy in investigating a sexual harassment complaint. If no policy exists, he should contact the EEOC to obtain guidelines. Briefly, it is important to determine and document the facts of the complaint. Simpson should question Johnson, Ross, and any other employees who may have witnessed incidents relevant to the allegation. Simpson's questions should be comprehensive and supportive, since Johnson is probably feeling defensive and threatened. He is obligated to make a good faith effort to unearth all relevant information, even when the accused is his chief executive. The company is at increased risk if the court finds that Johnson's complaint was not taken seriously and policies for investigation of harassment were not followed.

#### **Case 14-4. Motivation and the Performance Appraisal**

Samuel Jones has worked diligently for his supervisor, Donnell, during the past three years in the accounting department of a local bank. During the period, he has never been reprimanded for any of the work he has done. In fact, only recently, he received his first, supposedly annual, performance review. Although he received a raise in each of the two prior years, this was the first time he was formally evaluated. The first year he received a memo from Donnell stating the amount of his raise. The next year, Donnell did not even inform him of a raise. Rather, Jones had to figure it out for himself from his paycheck stub.

After sitting through his first formal evaluation, Jones is stunned. Donnell informed him his work effort is just average and he does not always show enough motivation in the tasks he undertakes. This is the most Donnell has said to Jones concerning his work since Jones began working there over three years ago.

Donnell works on important matters alone in his office and shuts himself off from his employees’ activities. Some of Jones’s fellow workers see this as a sign the boss has faith in them to get the job done and to accept responsibilities on their own. But Jones believes Donnell is just avoiding responsibility and is not interested in involving himself with his employees. Jones believes his boss thinks “I’ve got my own problems, so don’t come to me with yours.”

Jones has healthy working relationships with several other supervisors in the bank, and they all have told him more than once that his performance is above average. Because of this, Jones feels hurt that Donnell called him “average.” As far as motivation goes, Jones does not see what there is to be motivated about. He never receives rewards, verbal or otherwise, at the time that he does good work. Consequently, he is confused about what levels of effort and performance will lead to the recognition he feels he deserves.

##### **Case 14-4 Questions**

1. *List some needs that Jones’s boss could fulfill for him to increase his work effort*.

Jones’s boss could have paid attention to Jones’s psychological needs by making him feel recognized and important. Donnell also neglected Jones’s social needs (affiliation) and his need to know the probability of obtaining potential rewards.

1. *List some elements of job performance that Donnell must make sure are present to get better performance from his employee.*

* The probability of obtaining a reward.
* Ability

1. *What can Donnell do to get the most out of his performance evaluations?*

Donnell can use positive statements and focus on the future; that is, on the specific actions his employee can take to eliminate deficiencies and improve performance.

1. *What, if anything, can Jones do to increase the flow of feedback from his supervisor?*

To increase the flow of feedback, Jones could encourage follow-up and request more frequent performance interviews.

**Bonus Case for Discussion**

*(The following case and case questions do not appear in the textbook. They were composed by Dr. Robert Stretcher, Professor of Finance, Sam Houston State University. The author gratefully acknowledges his contribution.)*

Heather was supremely confident as she waited in the lobby for her third interview to start. Her first two interviews, a telephone interview and a face-to-face interview with five managers that took half a business day, had gone very well. She was in the running for the operations management position she had applied for, along with nineteen others who had made the cut.

She heard her name called, and she stood and greeted the assistant to the president, who escorted her to a large room with data terminals. "Your interviews today will be based on reviews of your performance on an analytical problem. The details are presented in this summary. You can take as long as an hour and a half to complete the task and form a report in memo format to the vice president for marketing. Good luck!"

Heather read the case synopsis. To her horror, the task was to use software she had never even heard of: Microsoft Access.

She walked over to the assistant's desk. "I'm sorry. I am unfamiliar with Microsoft Access. Is there some other software I could use on these machines?"

The assistant gave her a puzzled look. "Uh, your résumé said that you are proficient in office software packages. . . ."

"Oh, yes," Heather replied. I know Microsoft Office."

"Microsoft Access is the data management software in Microsoft Office, dear," said the assistant. "So are you telling me you do not know this Office product?"

Heather flushed with embarrassment. "I'm afraid so," she said.

"Well, in that case, it is not really necessary for you to complete the exercise. I wish you the best in your job search!"

Heather was escorted to the lobby. The assistant turned and walked back to her station.

**Case Questions**

1. Although a resume should be designed to present you in a favorable light, why is it important to be careful with your claims concerning abilities?

2. How would you restate Heather's contention that she "knew Microsoft Office"?

3. Does possession of a college degree indicate particular competencies? Why do firms conduct multiple rounds of interviews when reviewing candidates for permanent managerial positions?