

Behavioral Interviewing: Discovering a Candidate's Strengths By Dick Gahl

This article is from the December 2004 New Harvest newsletter from the Center for U.S. Missions. Permission is given to copy this article for distribution within your own congregation. Please credit the author and the Center for U.S. Missions in Irvine, California, www.centerforusmissions.org. For more information, contact the Center at 949-854-8002 x1780.

Finding the right people for a particular ministry role has long been a challenge in the church. But that search process has taken a significant step forward with the introduction of behavioral interviewing techniques.

Behavioral interviewing is based on the premise that past performance is the best predictor of future performance. In general, what has made a person successful in the past will likely carry through into future endeavors. The interview process seeks to identify experiences or behaviors in past situations that relate to the needs of a new position.

Previous screening of professional church work candidates has frequently included the question: What would you do if “this” happens? This question takes the discussion to the realm of the hypothetical and the responses are, at best, hypothetical. Disappointment reigns when, having been installed into a ministry situation, the now called professional church worker doesn't act according to the hypothetical.

When he was in California, Dr. Charles Ridley brought behavioral interviewing into the realm of church planting. In research conducted when he was in California, he identified thirteen areas relating to successful church planting: Visioning Capacity, Intrinsic Motivation, Creating Ownership of Ministry, Reaching the Unchurched, Spousal Cooperation, Relationship Building, Commitment to Missions/Evangelism, Responsiveness to Community, Uses Giftedness of Others, Flexibility, Building Cohesive Groups, Resilience, and Exercises Faith.

Ridley, now at Indiana University, has conducted introductory and extensive training workshops in many church bodies, including the LCMS. In the 90's he gave a four hour introduction to the process to the Mission Executives of the LCMS districts, followed by a three day training event in New Mexico. More recently, through the Center for U S Missions, he has led regional workshops in Ohio and California, to train interviewers.

An interview with a candidate, using the behavioral interview process, takes approximately four hours to conduct and an equal amount of time for comparing results with national norms and for writing up of a four or more page report.

Since January of 2004, this writer has conducted 12 behavioral interviews for potential mission planters. It is almost amazing to see the depth of information that emerges to assist a calling entity to make candidate decisions.

The principles of behavioral interviewing are readily expandable to various pastoral roles including redevelopment and administrative ministries. A next step will be to work with the Synod's educators to bring this tool into the many educational ministry roles.

The Center for US Missions has named Richard Gahl, who has served the Ohio District as its Executive Director since 1981, as an Associate Director for Behavioral Interviewing. With his retirement scheduled for January 2005, the Center will make his services available to district and other entities on a fee basis. Contact the Center for US Missions for additional information.