
Confidentiality interview questions and answers

Use these sample confidentiality interview questions during your hiring process to identify candidates who are discreet in the workplace and know how to protect employees' privacy and company's classified information.

Why you should evaluate candidates' confidentiality skills

Confidentiality in the workplace means keeping sensitive business and personnel matters private (e.g. medical histories, competitive data and salary information.) Good confidentiality skills are important for:

- **HR professionals** who handle sensitive data, from candidates' resumes to employees' contracts.
- **Finance staff** who manage compensation packages.
- **Legal staff** who compose and maintain classified documents and agreements.
- **IT staff** who store digital files and manage internal communications and data privacy.
- **Senior managers** who participate in strategic decisions and have access to sensitive corporate and employee information.
- **Executive assistants** who organize managers' schedules and take minutes during important meetings.

Here are some questions to ask during interviews to identify trustworthy potential hires:

Examples of confidentiality skills interview questions

- What's the best way to store historical employee records? (e.g. employment contracts and medical reports)
- During events and job fairs, when people approach you with questions about the company, how do you know what you are and are not allowed to say?
- How would you respond if one team member wanted to know their coworker's salary?
- How do you share confidential documents with your coworkers? What tools do you use if these documents are in digital formats?
- What would you do if there was a fire emergency and you had to leave documents with sensitive data on your desk?
- You're talking to a potential customer and they insist on learning your detailed roadmap (e.g. for new products and features.) How do you respond?
- During a group meeting, a senior manager asks you to disclose something confidential, like a coworker's salary information. What would you do if there were people in this meeting who were not supposed to know this information?

- What would you do if you accidentally received an email with confidential data addressed to the HR manager or the CEO?

How to assess candidates' confidentiality skills during interviews

A direct question “*Can you keep sensitive information confidential?*” will prompt an obvious “yes.” So instead, during interviews, use hypothetical scenarios, that are likely to occur on the job to test whether candidates are:

- **Professional:** Employees who steer clear of office gossip and respect other people's privacy are more likely to handle confidential data with care.
- **Ethical:** People with good judgement are able to assess what information is classified and who should have access to sensitive data.
- **Discreet:** Being careless with corporate or personal matters can put coworkers in very uncomfortable situations and raise legal risks for your company.

If necessary, include short assessments to understand how candidates approach situations that require good confidentiality skills. For example:

- If you're hiring executive assistants, ask them to organize an office. Pay attention to whether they will store classified documents and agendas in locked drawers.
- If you're hiring IT administrators, ask them to research and recommend cyber security applications. The best candidates will ask follow-up questions about your teams and specific requirements and will suggest data encryption, anti-virus and password management tools.
- If you're hiring HR managers, ask them to describe step-by-step the process they'd take responding to a sexual harassment complaint. Keep an eye out for candidates who not only explain how they'd investigate the matter, but also take measures to ensure the privacy of the coworker's claim.

Red flags

- **They don't understand what constitutes confidential information.** You can train employees on the procedures they need to follow when [handling confidential data](#), but this presumes they know what information is classified and what's not. Qualified candidates should be able to recognize when to keep information private.
- **They're secretive instead of discreet.** Being confidential doesn't mean not disclosing any information at all. Candidates and employees should be able to understand who can get access to which information and how to provide access to them.
- **They underestimate the importance of secure storage and transfer of confidential data.** While this mightn't be a red flag for all roles, candidates for IT positions should be able to provide specific examples of tools to share and store data safely.

- **They are unprofessional or impolite when declining data access requests.** Maintaining confidential information is one thing. But, being able to politely decline access to unauthorized personnel is also important. Senior managers and HR staff, in particular, should be able to gracefully explain that they can't reveal certain information.