

School Counselor Interview Guide

By Glen Hughins

Introduction

You can find several eBooks that advise people how to ace an interview for a position of a School Principal, or a Teacher. **But you won't find a single book that helps future school counselors to succeed in their interviews.**

I decided to write one.

You will find two sections in the eBook:

1. **Six principles of succeeding in a school counselor job interview** (these will help you to understand how to act to make a best possible impression on the interviewing panel.). Some of them concern general interviewing skills, since I often experienced great educators and administrators failing in their interviews, just because they didn't understand the **art of acing an interview** in general (for any job). Other principles are specific for the role of a school counselor.
2. **25 common interview questions for school counselors**, with sample answers to each question.

Do not expect fancy pictures or info-graphics on the following pages. Secondary content is stripped to minimum. Pictures and other nice things may grab your attention, but they won't help you to get the job.

They would actually **take your attention away** from the things that really matter.

Job interview is not a rocket science. You do not need superior intelligence or powers to learn how to ace the meeting with the hiring committee. You are now one step away from your new job contract. I will help you to make the final step. Enjoy the book!

Glen Hughins

Part one: Six principles of acing an interview for a school counselor job

One: Everyone is in the committee for a good reason

You will typically interview in front of a panel consisting in representatives of various stakeholders at the school district.

Someone will be there for the **district** (typically a superintendant assistant), someone for the **teachers** (one of the veteran teachers from the school), one or two **assistant principals/principals**, or even **administrators** from other schools in the district, and typically also a **parent**, someone representing the interests of students (and especially their parents) will sit in the room.

Other people may be present, and everyone will introduce themselves at the start of the interview. The bigger the school and district, the more people will sit in the committee. It can be two but also seven people.

It may seem logical to think that your goal is to please the superintendant or their assistant— simply the highest ranked person in the room. Or the principal, the one leading the school where you apply for the job.

But this is **not how it works**.

Everyone in the committee can say NO to your application, and unless all approve your application, you won't be hired.

What is more, **formal hierarchy and real leadership are two different things**.

Like in every other committee in the world (or team), there will be an informal leader. This person will speak first and last once the interviews are over and the committee discusses your application.

It can be the superintendant, but also one of the administrators, teachers, or even the parent.

You simply cannot tell in advance.

Therefore it is crucial to **show the value you can bring to all stakeholders**—the teachers, the students, the school, the parents, the local community, and the district.

What typically happens is that each person in a committee will ask you some questions (they won't just passively sit and listen).

Before answering, **think briefly about their position, and whose interest they represent. Show them that you have their well-being on your mind**, that you see the complexity of a role of a school counsellor.

It is a panel interview, but you should approach each question **as if it was asked in an interview with one person only**. And answer to their best interest.

Two: Interviewers are only people

They will follow a template in the interview, they will plan the questions in advance.

But they won't ask you **questions with yes-no answers**, and the answers of the candidates will vary a lot (if there are more candidates for the job).

In most cases it won't be **possible to compare the answers**, saying, for example, that answer of candidate A was better than answer of candidate B, and that the answer of candidate C was the worst one from the three.

The answers will be different. **And all may be good (or bad)!**

How will they choose the winner then?

Their decision will be from 90% emotional, and just from 10% rational. Sorry to say that, but it's true. How they **feel about your answers, and about YOU**, matter the most.

Do they feel that you are **genuinely interested in them** (in each member of the committee and the group of people they represent)?

Do they feel good about you? *Can they imagine sharing the same building with you? Can they imagine you intervening in the conflicts they have with the students? Can they imagine going for a lunch with you? Do they trust you? Will the students trust you?*

We are people. We **all have the same desires when it comes to other human beings**. We want to feel respected; we want others to recognize our dreams, strengths and achievements.

We want to cooperate with people who think on “the same wavelength”, people we feel good around, people who listen to us.

It is absolutely important to keep this on your mind when you interview for this job.

- Keep an eye contact with the people in the committee.
- Ask questions.
- Listen to their answers, and elaborate on them with to-the-point questions, questions that show them that you really care.
- Show enthusiasm; bring some positive energy to the room.
- Show them that it is pleasure to be around you, that you have a lot to offer to the people who share the workplace with you—and not only to the students.

And most importantly, have the right mindset when it comes to your opinion about the people in the committee.

I have experienced people doing this one wrong countless times.

They didn’t like me. Or they didn’t like someone else in the interviewing panel. Many times it happened. They considered me a guy who wanted to catch them off-guard, who wanted to put them under pressure, who wanted to uncover their weaknesses and mistakes, who wanted to break them.

They thought I was eager to find a reason to send them home, to say NO to their application.

But was it really true? *Is the interviewer a bad guy?*

We want to hire people. That’s why we organize interviews at first place. It’s not easy to get five busy people to the same room on the same day to lead interviews.

Believe it or not, **we are as interested in you doing well as you are.** Perhaps even more. **We need a good new counselor for the school.** That’s why we organize the entire circus...

But we have emotions. And we are only people, and we struggle to get over our emotions.

When we feel that someone doesn’t like us, it is not easy to consider their job application with a cool head.

We want you to do well, to pass the interviews. We may sometimes be hard on you—we have to play our roles after all, and put you under pressure in an interview, with some tough questions. But that’s just the part of the game—**it is nothing personal**.

You should always consider each interviewer your friend. **Think nicely about them.** *Are they too old, or too young to lead an interview? Do they look like they don’t know what they are doing?*

Get these thoughts out of your head immediately. If you do not get them out of your mind, you can forget about succeeding.

Think nicely about your interviewers, and focus on what you do in an interview, not what they are doing, and whether they are qualified to consider your job application.

This way of thinking, this mindset, will **reflect in your non-verbal communication. They will feel good with you.** They will know that you like them.

Job candidates who fail to connect with the interviewers will be **screened out** first. The reasons won’t always be clarified. People in the committee will simply agree that they “*didn’t feel right*” about the candidate.

Ensure that it won’t happen to you. Come in with the right mindset!

Three: Do your homework

People sitting in the hiring committee will know a lot about the school. They will know a lot about the entire district, and the problems educational institutions face locally.

But you know what? They expect a good candidate for the position of a school counselor to know as much as they do—or even more!

You should do your homework. Try to research particularly about the following:

- The vision and goals of the educational institution where you will work.
- Former school counselor and their career, why they left the place.
- Major achievements of the institution (recognition of teachers, students, prizes and awards the school received in the recent years).
- Things that make the institution unique, reasons why students should choose it instead of other, competing institutions.

- Problems and challenges the school faces (there will always be some problems), especially problems that relate to the job of school counselor.
- History of the school.
- Expectations of local community, and the collaboration of the school with other public institutions.

Luckily we live in 21st century, and you won't have to consult dozens of people to find the answers. *FaceBook groups, online reviews, local news articles, social networks such as LinkedIn*—all these tools, and obviously *Google* and *the website of the school*, will help you a lot with your research.

Make notes, print them, and read them before the start of your interview.

Good research will help you in many ways.

It will help you **to find good answers to particular interview questions** (questions that relate to the school), to **calm down before your interview** (since it is always easier if we feel somehow familiar with the place and the people we will meet), and to **come up with a good question**, once there's an opportunity to ask a good question.

When you know a lot about the school, or even about the people in the committee, you will always find something interesting to point out, or discuss with them.

Ignorant candidates who rely only on their qualifications and interviewing skills, and do not even look at the website of the educational institution before their interview, are rarely hired, for any job at school.

Do not make the same mistake. Spend enough time researching about the school. **Make the unfamiliar familiar**. It will help you immensely in your interview.

Four: Ask right questions, at a right time

The typical school interview is very organized. It can't be the other way around, since there are always (or nearly always) more people in the hiring committee.

Unless each of them knows their role, and what questions they are supposed to ask, and when they are supposed to ask them, **the whole experience will become confusing for everyone**. It will become one big mess.

Therefore they will follow a template, asking one question after another. You need to wait for your chance to ask them something. When this chance comes, however, a good question can **win you a lot of points**.

Here is what I suggest: Take a sheet of paper with you. **During the first fifteen minutes** do not interrupt the course of an interview with your questions. Any questions.

But **mark down** anything you'd like to ask anyone in the committee.

Doing that, you will not only remember the questions for future reference. It also shows that you are an organized and diligent person, and **take the interview seriously**.

After the first fifteen-twenty minutes they already got a basic grasp of your personality and skills. They are ready to hear your questions, and won't consider them an interruption anymore.

But you should **avoid some questions**. Do not inquire about something you could find easily while doing your homework, while researching about the school.

The right questions spring from the discussion in the room. For example they ask you "*How important is paperwork for you?*"

And you start speaking about importance of paperwork and how it helps you to stay organized, and how you plan to create a folder for each student you'll work with, to keep track of your conversations and of progress you will achieve together in your counseling.

In this situation, the right question will follow right after your great answer:

Can I ask you if a former counselor kept such a folder for each student? It would be great to have access to it, since it would help me a lot in the beginning, at least with identifying the students who face issues and need counseling.

Another good time to ask a question is at the end of an interview. Their last question will often be: *After everything that has been said, do you have any questions?*

When you **follow my advice and make notes**, you will typically have something to inquire about.

But try to avoid any question that may lead into an argument, or put them in an uncomfortable position.

Questions such as “*Why has this school had three different principals in past seven years?*” or “*How it is possible that your dropout rate in tenth grade is the highest in the entire district?*” will put them in an uncomfortable position...

People in the committee are aware of their mistakes, and things they could have done better. Maybe that’s the reason why they are looking for a new school counselor.

There is no need to remind them their mistakes.

An opposite scenario, a good one, is mentioning **something great they achieved.** For example:

Your school is attracting more applicants each year. That’s very impressive considering the competition in this district. How do you manage to build such a good name for your institution?

Such a question would make them feel good. **They would enjoy answering it.** And that’s exactly where you want to have them at the end of your interview.

Everyone prefers talking to listening. **Give them a chance to talk, to show off.** A right question at a right time is another way of making them feel good about you, and about your job application.

Five: Try to get rid of stress

Stress is a strange thing, and it works differently with everyone. I saw job candidates who were sweating like racehorses in an air-conditioned room, just to **let go everything with my first question.** They simply calmed down once the thing started.

But I also experienced people who didn’t stress as much—they felt only a mild level of stress (which affected their answers), but they did not get rid of it during the course of our interview (though I tried my best to act friendly, and help them to relax, and other members of the hiring committee also showed some effort to help them relax).

The truth is that you need to be **your very best on a big day,** and that’s tough when you experience pressure, and can’t let go. Try one of the following two techniques to get rid of stress:

The outcome doesn't matter.

Keep telling yourself that it doesn't matter.

You fail? And what? You will get another chance. Your life is not at stake in this interview...

There will be other interviews, other job opportunities. Some schools always look for new counselors, and with your education you can apply even for other jobs.

There will always be another chance, and you will get better with every next interview.

7.5 billion people live on Earth. 800 million starve. If you read this book, at least 6 billion out of those 7.5 billion have less money and comfort than you have.

You should try your very best to succeed in your interview, but if it doesn't pan out, you will still be okay.

It doesn't matter. The outcome doesn't matter.

This mantra will help you relax—at least it worked with many people I coached. Repeat it and make your mind believe in it. It can do wonders for you in an interview. We always deliver our very best when we are relaxed.

Inhale, exhale, inhale, exhale

Basic breathing techniques will help you to alleviate stress.

Focus on your breath. Take a deep breath in, and then slowly exhale. Repeat. **Listen to your breathing. Feel it. Let other thoughts go.**

Inhale, exhale, inhale, exhale, inhale, exhale.

Try to do this right before the start of your interview. Stress? It doesn't exist anymore.

Six: Do not overdo it with memorizing the answers

There's nothing wrong with preparing for the questions you will face in your School Counselor job interview. At the end of the day, that's one of the reasons why you bought this eBook.

But **you should not try to memorize the answers word to word**, despite the fact that many interview coaches would tell you to do so.

The truth is that **you can never tell with 100% certainty which questions you will face in your interview.** You may get seven questions from this book, and ten other questions.

If someone claims to know (and wants to sell you) the exact list of questions you will get in any interview (in any institution, private or public), **that person is telling lies to you.**

Unless they will lead the interview with you, they can't know. But I suppose you do not have such a contact at your disposal...

Questions do change every day. What is more, they will also change on the go, with the things you will say in an interview.

Bearing it all in mind, **trying to memorize word to word answers to dozens of possible questions is a fools' game.** And it will only add to your stress, because trying to memorize things is always stressful.

Focus on **attitudes**, and **principles** contained in each answer, not on the exact word-to-word answers.

In the next section I will show you multiple great answers to twenty-five questions, all commonly used in interviews for school counselor job.

Go through them, find the sample answer that **resonates with you**, for each question, and read it a few times. But do not try to memorize it word to word.

It's enough reading the answers, getting the attitudes reflected in them into your subconscious mind.

Once this happens, **you will come up with great answers in your interview.** You will know what to say, even when they ask you a question which you don't expect at all.

You will know it, because you will subconsciously understand the right attitudes to present with each answer.

And that should be your goal—to be ready for every question, and to come up with a genuine answer each time.

Part Two: Twenty-Five Common School Counselor Interview Questions and Answers

Q 1: Why do you want to become a school counselor?

Hint: Two key points to remember when answering this question. First, you should **speak about things you want to achieve for students**, and not only things you want for yourself. Second, **you should not refer to the past**, saying that you want to become a school counselor because you have earned a degree in school counseling. That would indicate a must, but **you want to show a desire**.

You should also talk with enthusiasm in your voice, so they feel that you really want to become a counselor, and look forward to doing your job.

Sample answers

I believe to have good understanding of the problems children face nowadays, their world and how they perceive things that happen to them at school. In my experience, I can be a good advisor to them, counselor, and also someone they trust. This I learned in my short teaching career, and I really believe that combined with my education, I have all it takes to become a great counselor.

Children do not have it easy nowadays at middle schools. Lack of true relationships, social media chicane, and struggle to orientate in the complicated world, often strengthen by the struggles they experience in their family life, makes it really difficult for them to progress in life. I see it as my mission to try to help them, though I know it won't be easy. But I am motivated to try my best, and that's why I decided to pursue a career of a school counselor.

Q 2: What do you want to accomplish on this position?

Hint: You should again focus on the perspective of school leaders, and the students. Tell the hiring committee how you want to improve the position of the students at school, their access to opportunities, the relationships between them and the teachers, how you want to help decrease the dropout rate, etc.

Great employees (in any employment) do not go to work just because they have to earn money to survive. **They try to accomplish something, to bring value.** And that's exactly the impression you should make when answering this question.

Sample answers

I want to try to make a positive difference in life of students. I want to help build relationships of trust at school, I want to show them that we at school do our best to help them succeed in life. Hopefully I can assist in improving the relationships of students, teachers, and school administrators, and help this school to become even a better place for everyone.

I understand there is a lot of work to do at this educational institution. The high drop-out rate you experience and the common problems of discipline have to be addressed promptly. I know it is not easy, and you are certainly trying to address the issues. But I believe that with my education, motivation, and experience, I can gradually integrate into this process, and help to make things better for everyone, especially for the students.

Q 3: What did you like the most on your studies?

Hint: Anything you pick, **you should talk with enthusiasm about the courses.**

In an ideal case you should find a **connection of theory and praxis.** You can even say that you did not like certain subjects, but emphasize that you understand the importance of theory, and therefore **tried your best even when you did not enjoy the course.**

To good picks definitely belong: *Theories of Personality, Psychological Tests and Measurements, Family School Collaboration, Introduction to Behavior Disorders and Intervention, Leadership, etc.*

Sample answers:

I enjoyed most courses, and believe that we had a great combination of theory and praxis. I especially enjoyed courses on Leadership and Theories of Personality, since they helped me to understand how to do my job well, when it comes to real talks with students who experience real problems and severe emotional issues. I was lucky to have great teachers at the University.

I enjoyed my internship, a chance to apply in practice everything I'd learned to that point. I also affirmed to myself that counseling is something I want to do, for many years to come. I also enjoyed most of the theoretical courses, and even when I did not enjoy some of them, I learned and passed the exams. All in all, I believe that my education has prepared me for the role of a School Counselor.

Q 4: Why counseling, and not teaching?

Hint: You can say that you believe your **strengths and skills will be more useful in a position of a counselor**, or give any other reason (personal, educational) why you went for counseling instead of teaching.

Generally speaking, **counselors do not earn more than teachers** (at many schools they actually earn less), while **their education is more difficult**.

The question makes sense, and your goal is to convince us that you know what you are doing.

Sample answers

For sure I can imagine myself being a teacher. But honestly, with my skill set, and the ability to connect with children in a special way, and to understand the problems they face from their perspective, it would be a wasted talent if I went for teaching career. On top of that, I enjoy counseling more than teaching, and we should not forget that each counselor is also a teacher, in some way.

I am motivated by personal experience. When I was young, I had a hard time at school. My parents divorced, and I did not have the best relationship with my classmates. I felt lonely and isolated, my results were poor and I was on the edge of dropping out. But we had a wonderful counselor. She showed me the value in me; she listened carefully to my problems, and led me out of my crisis. Without her I wouldn't sit here in front of you today, since I'd not even finish the high school. This life changing experience motivated me to pursue a career of a counselor, and I hope to also change life of children to better. I have never thought about teaching career. I always wanted to become a counselor.

Q 5: Do you plan to become a school psychologist later in your career?

Hint: Jobs of school counselor and school psychologist overlap in more than one way. In my experience, **some members of the hiring committee may not even know the difference** between the two roles.

In my opinion, however, when we speak about job interview, **you should stay in the present.** Ensure us that you see the meaningful purpose of the counseling job, and want to focus on delivering your best each day in work, not thinking much about the future, or the options for promotion.

You can also say that you hope to have a good cooperation with the school psychologist (if the district/school employs one).

Sample answers

To be honest, I have never thought about it. All I want at the moment is to work as a counselor, with everything that belongs to the job, especially the individual meetings with the students.

We do not know what the future will bring, and I do not rule out a possibility of becoming a psychologist in later stages of my career. At this point, however, it is not on my mind.

I do not plan to become a psychologist. In my opinion, both roles require slightly different abilities and mindset. I see my strengths as a counselor, cooperating with teachers and parents,

trying to promote academic and social development of each individual student. That's my idea of my professional career.

Q 6: Why do you want to work as a counselor at our school? Why not some other institution?

Hint: Most people in the hiring committee **are proud of “their” educational institution.** Therefore the best possible answer is to **praise them for something**—good reputation, excellent management, good cooperation of staff members, great environment for student development, etc.

However, it can happen that you apply for a job at school that isn't doing well at all—experiencing problems at all fronts.

If that's the case, you can **embrace the challenge** in your answer, saying that you decided to apply exactly for that reason—since you see a lot of work to be done with students.

One way or another, do not forget to research about the school prior to your interview, to understand what makes them special (in either good or bad way).

Sample answers

I know a few teachers and parents here. I have heard great things about this school, about innovative teaching methods you apply, and great atmosphere in the staffroom. You seem to be a well organized place, people cooperate together here, and I will be very happy and grateful to belong to your team.

According to my research, and talks with the people from local community, I see this school experiences lot of problems. Students do not trust teachers, the drop our rates are high in each grade, and problems with discipline form a daily bread. I am sure you all try your best to address these issues, though it is far from easy to address them. I decided to apply with you because I am looking for such a challenge, and I hope to bring new ideas to the table, ideas that will help to make this school a better place.

To be honest, I apply mostly because I live nearby, just ten minutes walk away. This is generally a good school, I know some teachers, and it will be convenient for me to work here. What is more, since I know people, I believe it will be easier to understand the problems students face, and address them effectively.

Q7: What is it that you like about working with (grade level) students?

Hint: Refer to personal reasons and experience, in order to explain your choice. You can talk about your friends/children/classmates with special needs and how you always felt for them. Or you can say that you feel very natural with children of certain age, e.g. from six to ten years, and that you believe your skills and attitudes suit them perfectly, and can bring the most value to them. Remember, anytime possible, **talk about children and school (and what you can do for the particular grade level), not about your own goals and desires.**

Sample answers

I decided for high school education, because I feel I can offer the biggest value here. We have good understanding for each other; I naturally get along well with this age group. Maybe it's because of the hobbies I have, maybe because I still feel very young, or because I also experienced some problems as a high school student, and I needed counseling. One way or another, this is my choice.

I love to work with elementary school children, since I believe we can have the biggest impact at this stage of their life. Children are still young, receptive to people, they are just forming their opinions and perspective of life, looking for role models. I also like to have a close cooperation with parents. I understand that job of an elementary school counselor has its challenges, but I believe that I have the right personality and skills for this role.

Q 8: How would you gain trust of the students?

Hint: In me experience, **integrity and one-on-one meetings foster trust**. Students should be sure that **what happens in your office stays in your office**, and you won't talk to their parents about any sensitive issues (or at least not before you informed them about your plans to contact the parents).

To ensure them that you'd always advocate for their rights (and to **actively do so in your job**) is also a way of wining their trust.

At the same time, however, it is not an easy feat to achieve. Bad news spread ten times faster, and one mistake on your side can ruin your trust (or even reputation) in the eyes of students. Nevertheless, we should at least try to gain (or regain) their trust. Sometimes **attitude and effort matter more than the actual results we achieve in job**.

Sample answers

I'd be very transparent with them, in everything I do. If I planned to consult their parents, I'd tell them. If I did like something about their behavior (or didn't like), I'd tell them, of course with right words.

I want them to see that I really care, that I advocate for them as a group, but also for each individual.

I believe that action beats words. When they see that I really try my best to help them, both academically and emotionally, they will trust me (at least most of them will).

My primary strategy consists in one-on-one meetings with the students. I prefer not to invite other people, or create excessive pressure on the student. I will also try my best to understand their individual situation, see the world through their eyes, and talk with them in the language they understand. I hope it will help me to gain their trust, though I know trust is fragile. It takes time to gain it, and one can lose it with a single mistake.

Q 9: How do you handle criticism?

Hint: School counselors often face criticism, from both students and teachers. Tell the hiring committee that you are ready to face constructive criticism, as you believe it helps you to become better in what you do.

You can also emphasize that you do not take criticism personally, and it won't affect your relationship with the colleagues, or the students. It is simply a part of your job.

Sample answers

I try to do my job well, and I care about the results. Logically it sometimes hurts when someone criticizes my work—though they may be right. But I am aware that counselors are often criticized, and I count with criticism. I will try to understand each negative comment, and learn from it.

Look, I am just starting in this job. I've graduated from college, I've been through internship, but I understand there's still much to learn, and improve in the way I do my job. I am not afraid of criticism, just the opposite—I am happy to hear it, and I believe that feedback should flow freely at school, in all directions. Each critical remark helps me to reevaluate my work, and to become better in what I do. And I plan to keep this attitude in my entire career, since things always evolve, students always change, and what works great with them today may not work in ten years time.

Q 10: What goals would you set for yourself in this job?

Hint: First of all, **you should have some goals, since each responsible employee have goals.** And you should not rely on the administrators to set the goals for you, for two reasons:

- They do not understand your work as well as you do (it's not their specialization)
- The **motivation to attain a goal is always stronger when we set it** (it's called inner vs. external motivation).

In terms of particular goals, however, you can either try to address challenges they face at school, one by one (such as lowering the drop-out rate, eliminating chicane, improving results

of students, helping outsiders to integrate into collective in the classroom, etc), or you can simply say that your goal is to do your best for every student, within the scope of your job and position.

Sample answers

According to the research I've done about your school and students (please correct me if I'm wrong), your drop out rate is 20% higher than the average in this school district. I believe that as a school counselor I can help to address this issue, and to get us to the district average (or do even better). This will be the goal I'd set for the first three years.

I have also read about instances of severe chicane at your school, and I do believe to have a capacity to help addressing this also this sensitive issue.

My goals are very simple: To try my very best in each meeting with either student, or teacher. To be fully present in each meeting, to approach it responsibly, and to do my best... I know that I will experience some low days in work, just like everyone else, and things won't always pan out the way we'd like them to. Nevertheless, my goal will be to try my very best.

Q 11: How would you approach individual student planning?

Hint: The Individual Student Planning (ISP) assists students with educational/career planning, educational transitioning, and self-appraisal for decision making, on a yearly basis.

While originally developed as Missouri Comprehensive School Counseling Program (MSCP), **the concept is now widely used in different states and even countries around the world** (with various modifications).

The basic principle is that **a student devises the plan while cooperating with the counselor**, the later advising them how to proceed, and which goals to set, according to their academic results, dreams and long term goals, as well as predispositions and abilities.

Without having goals and plans, our life is mostly chaotic. Therefore you should say that you support all individual student planning activities, and are ready to help students with creating and evaluating their yearly plans.

Mention practical experience with the activity, if you have any.

Sample answers

I'm a firm believer in planning, especially at Middle School. When children decide about their next steps in education, they should know what they want to achieve in long run, what they want to learn and do later in life. They should choose their subjects, courses, and high school accordingly. Even though I have no on-hands experience with the concept of individual student planning, I believe that I will be able to help each student devise and evaluate their plans. I am eager to learn more about this concept.

In my opinion, individual student planning is very effective. Since students participate on creating their plans and setting their goals, their motivation is much stronger when they try to attain these goals. It is also an excellent tool to measure student performance for everyone involved.

A good counselor should know their students. They should be able to point them to right direction, and help them with their yearly plans.

Q 12: How important is the paperwork for you?

Hint: We live in bureaucratic times. Working at school, you can't avoid paper work. Tell the interviewers that you understand the importance of paperwork (*though most of it isn't really important, at least in my view*), and will approach it responsibly.

At the same time, though, you may say that **the actual work and talks with the students are your main focus, and you don't want to get lost in paperwork**. Paperwork should always remain secondary.

Sample answers

Well, the real value of our job is not in paper work. It is in listening to students, trying to understand them, trying to advocate for them, and help them on their career journey. I always try to keep this on my mind, since it is easy to get lost in paperwork.

At the same time, however, I understand there are some rules and we are obliged to do a lot of paperwork. Honestly, it is not my favorite part of the job, but it is an obligation, and therefore I do not mind taking care of it.

In my opinion, effectiveness is the key. You have several hundreds students at your school, and it is certainly not easy to remember everyone, every talk you have, every meeting you lead. Having a solid and organized documentation can help, and it will be especially important if new counselor comes onboard, or if school psychologist asks for advice. I believe that I can take care of paperwork in an effective way, and it won't restrain me from doing my real job, and helping the students. On the contrary, it can actually help me in job.

Q 13: How do you imagine a typical day in work as a counselor?

Hint: Reading newspapers in the morning, drinking good coffee, and waiting for someone to knock on your door... Is this a typical day in your work? Do you imagine it as such?

You will have to show a different attitude, if you want to succeed in your interview. **Show us that you like to be busy, that you always look for things to do, for things to improve.** Show us that you actually plan to make the first move.

Alternatively you can say that a **typical day doesn't exist in a job of a school counselor**, since every day brings new challenges and problems one has to cope with, new meetings with students and staff members.

It is also good to show them that you like to be **organized in work** and follow a plan, and you can even say that you plan to dedicate part of your day to paperwork.

You can go also for a more in-detail answer, listing duties from the job description.

Sample answers

Making the first step is crucial in this job. I plan to consult teachers and other staff members, to help me identify students who face problems, whether social, personal, emotional, or

academic, and approach these students, trying to build relationships of trust, trying to help them.

Of course every day is different, and I will be ready to intervene in a conflict of student and teacher, or any other conflict at school. In the afternoon, when students are already on their way home, I will take care of paperwork.

I imagine taking care of the following duties:

- Listen to students' concerns about academic, emotional or social problems, and actively approach them and ask about their concerns.
- Help students process their problems and plan goals and action, doing individual student plans with them.
- Mediate conflicts between students and teachers.
- Assist with college applications, jobs and scholarships (if applicable in a given grade).
- Facilitate drug and alcohol prevention programs.
- Organize peer counseling programs.
- Refer students to school psychologist, or external psychologist, if situation requires that.
- Work on academic boards to improve learning conditions for students.
- Take care of all necessary paperwork.

Q 14: How will you evaluate your school counseling program?

Hint: Skilled school administrators know that in school counseling, **effort counts more than the results we achieve**. Counselor is just one person in a life of each student, and the most they can hope for is having a positive impact on them, and helping them to deal with the issues they face.

Whether this actually happens or not, however, is **outside our control**.

Parents, peers, teachers, media, role models—**all of them play their part, and have an impact on the social, academic, psychological** and even physical well-being of the student.

Bearing this in mind, it is hard to evaluate a school counseling program (at least in my opinion).

Nevertheless, you should say that you will set some goals, ideally tangible goals, and you will monitor your progress in achieving them.

You can also say that you **will ask students for regular feedback on your work** (anonymously), and use it for evaluating your program, and for setting new goals.

Sample answers

When I start the job I will consult the principal and some teachers, as well as the psychologist, trying to understand the problems student face at school, and how these problems translate to results they achieve, and to general atmosphere in the classroom.

Based on it I will quantify some goals. For example, such a goal can be decreasing the drop out rate by ten percent each year, or decreasing the number of students who need psychologist by twenty percent each year.

And then, each year, I will compare the actual results with my goals, and evaluate the program accordingly.

To be honest, I think that I am not the person to evaluate my program. The school leaders, teachers, and especially students should evaluate my work, and tell whether I am actually helping them.

I plan to conduct regular anonymous survey (online) with the students I work with, and ask them for their feedback, and what I could do better in my counseling program.

In my opinion this is the only true way of evaluating and improving the school counseling program over time.

Q 15: What do you expect from teachers, parents, school administrators, and other counselors?

Hint: I suggest you to say that you don't have many expectations, **and focus mostly on doing your own job well**. After all, it's not your duty to watch their work, as there are other people to watch and evaluate the work of teachers, assistant principals, and other school employees.

On the other hand, however, it's not a bad idea to show that you are a team player, simply someone willing to **cooperate with other people at school, trying to achieve a mutual goal**—a well-being of every student, and a great school environment where everyone can thrive.

Sample answers

I do not have any special expectations for the principal, or for other staff members. This institution has a good reputation, and I am sure that people know what they are supposed to do. I want to turn my focus on my job, my role, on what I can do every day in every meeting with students. Of course, I expect other people to act professionally and take care of their jobs. If everyone focuses on doing their work, following the same vision and goals we set for the institution, the school will prosper in a long run.

I think a better question would be what they expect from me. Every school has certain values and goals and I hope to hear about them from the administrators. We should cooperate together, utilizing our strengths in order to achieve the best possible result for the students. But day in, day out, I try to focus on my own job, and I do not think much about jobs of other people, and whether they could do something better.

Q 16: How would you work with angry/ passive parent?

Hint: This is a **tricky question for a school counselor**, and the right answer depends on whether a representative of parents sits in the hiring committee.

If they have a place, you should stress that you'd take feedback from every parent seriously, and plan to have a **close cooperation with parents**, including motivating them and offering advice on how they should involve in the education of their children.

You should also say that you **understand that parents may get angry**, because they care, or passive, because they are too busy to be actively involved in their child's education, and that such behavior won't affect you negatively in job. Emphasize that you always try to stay professional, and have your emotions under control.

In the opposite scenario—when a parent(s) isn't present in the hiring committee, you can simply say that you do not rely on their help (in case they are passive) and will do your best to help the student develop both academically and personally, regardless of the level of involvement of their parents (which is often non-existent).

In this 2nd scenario (parent not present in the committee), you can even say that it is difficult to talk to angry parents, since they do not know all details of the problem, and may actually make a situation worse with their intervention. If they call just to complain, however, the right answer is similar to 1st scenario—that you'd take their feedback seriously, since you understand that they care...

Sample answers

I am actually happy to hear a parent complaining about something, because first and foremost—it means that they care, and wish for the best education for their children. I'd listen to what they have to say, try to explain my point of view, and hopefully we can come to a conclusion that's best for their child.

In my experience, many parents are passive. Then it is a question of understanding how much they care about their children, and whether they want to get involved in their education. If they do, my doors are always open, and I will regularly encourage them to participate.

Though I wished to have a good cooperation with parents, it typically doesn't work that way. Some of them are passive, simply because they don't care, and do not have time. But I prefer to not involve them in my job. I am the counselor, I have my perspective, I see how the child acts in school, and may even know the reasons behind their (unfavorable) behavior. I think it is not best practice for trust building, if the first thing we do is calling parents. We should try to resolve the problem with children, and only when that doesn't work, opt for calling parents or involving a school psychologist in the process.

Q 17: How would you work with children from orphanage?

Hint: Statistics show us that our job is much tougher with orphans. They struggle with discipline, and they typically **carry scars on their hearts which are hard (or impossible) to**

heal... These wounds often transpire in all forms of unfavorable behavior, which poses a serious challenge for everyone at school, including the counselor.

However, you should not wear pink glasses in an interview. Job of a counselor is beautiful, but not easy. Show us that you are **ready to step in as a role model for orphans**, that you have a plan how to work with them effectively, and are ready for setbacks.

Alternatively you can say that you do not like to make differences between children, and will address them as you'd address any other child in a need of a helping hand.

Sample answers

I have experience working with orphans. They are often introverted, and it is hard to have a real conversation with them. But they need a good counselor more than anyone else at school, since they do not have parents who'd they confine to, who'd lead them.

I am ready to step in the role, to give them special attention, and to do my best to help them progress in their education and career. More than anything, they need to feel that someone cares for their well-being. That is a message I'd try to convey in each meeting with an orphan.

Personally I do not like to make differences between children. It is true that, statistically, orphans experience more problems in school, and drop out more often. At the same time, however, some children from orphanage are extremely clever. When pointed in a right direction, the struggles they experienced can help them to find extra motivation, and to overcome adversity. So I plan to approach them without prejudice, and simply try my best in every session, just like in meetings with any other students.

Q 18: What would you do if one the students told you she was pregnant?

Hint: When students face difficult situations, and decide to confide in you, **your job is to offer them emotional support, and rational counseling**. If they tell you before any other adult, it means that they trust you, and hope for your help—perhaps **even to get the message over to their parents**.

Show empathy in your interview answer. Tell the hiring committee that you will support the student, keep the information confidential, and do your best to explain them the options they have (giving birth and interrupting their studies, studying distantly, going for abortion, etc). Your goal is to try to understand them, and **explain the options they have, and what each option means for their future**. But it is them who must make the final decision.

Sample answers

I would show emotional support, and try to help them get over initial shock. Then I would explain all options, and the consequences choosing each option would have for both their personal and professional life.

If I found them in a bad mental condition, I'd suggest visiting a school psychologist. Even in that case, however, I'd ensure them that the doors of my office are always open, and I am ready to give them advice anytime later, and I'd support them regardless of their choice.

I'd ensure them that I'd not spread the news. I'd outline the options they have, and besides my counseling I'd also offer them emotional support.

Such cases are common at high schools in this district, and I am definitely ready to lead a talk with a student who recently discovered that they were pregnant. It is not an easy situation for anyone, but that's what our job is about—to help students to cope with difficult situations, to give them advice in hard times.

Q 19: What would you do if a student shared with you their suicide plans?

Hint: Each job has some limits. Being pregnant is one thing, being suicidal another. You should **demonstrate that you understand the difference**.

Say that you'd involve psychologist and even other experts immediately. Contacting parents is also advisable in this case (unless you know that involving parents would make the situation worse).

While young people often “play” with the word suicide, and use it while trying to gain advantage (of teachers, of their boyfriends/girlfriends, etc) we can never (or almost never)

know whether they aren't serious this time. At school, we are not in a position to take their words lightly.

Sample answers

I'd try to gauge the seriousness of the situation, and whether the student is telling the truth. I'd also try to understand the reasons of their behavior, and why they are considering suicide. Then I'd pass this information to their parents and to school psychologist, or mental health counselor (if appointed at school). This is a serious situation and I believe that other people are better prepared to handle it.

I would talk to them, trying to show them that life can be great again, trying to convince them to not give up yet, trying to gain information and offer advice. The key is to show emotional support, to be someone they can rely on, at least in my opinion. Definitely I would not just blindly send them over to a psychologist or a psychiatrist. First I'd try to understand the situation, and how serious they are with their plans, and then I'd share this information with the most appropriate person at school.

Q 20: Imagine a student wanted to drop out of school. What would you do? What would you tell them?

Hint: The key is to show understanding for their situation—which may feel extremely difficult, at least from their perspective.

Tell the hiring committee that at first **you would only ask questions and listen**, trying to understand their reasons, and find the right way to address the situation. Then you would try to explain them the importance of education in life, the consequences their decision would have on their future life, and suggest a way out of the difficult situation.

Statistics show us that most students will drop out anyway—sooner, or later after their talks with the counselors. But we should not think about statistics in our job. **We should simply try our best in each meeting**, though the final outcome is uncertain, and beyond our control.

Sample answers

First of all, I'd ask them why they wanted to drop out. I would listen carefully, make notes, and try to understand their point of view. I'd not start arguing with them, and I'd try to show understanding for their situation, and for how they feel about school and life.

Next I would try to outline a simple plan, showing them, step by step, how they could get out of the situation, and continue their studies. This plan is different in each case, since each student (and their reasons for wanting to drop out) is different.

First of all I would thank them for coming, and for sharing their plans. It means a lot when students confide in you, and I always try to foster atmosphere of trust and friendship in my office.

Then I would ask them about their reasons, and I would explain the implications their decision to drop out would have on their entire life (less working opportunities, financial problems, life on the fringe of society, etc.).

After that, using targeted questions, I'd try to come up with a solution, with a plan that would keep them at school. Involvement of parents or teachers may, or may not be necessary—it depends on each individual case.

Q 21: If there was a conflict between a student and a teacher (or one of the school administrators), on which side would you stand?

Hint: This is a tricky question. As a counselor, **you should advocate for students**. At the same time, however, representatives of teachers and administrators sit in the hiring committee—and students do not. What to do in this case?

If you decided about a conflict without careful investigation, **you could lose the trust of the students—not just one, but all of them**. And that would jeopardize your job as a counselor. Therefore you should always approach conflicts **carefully, and address them individually**, listening to both conflict parties before suggesting an action the school leaders should take.

People in the interviews have a tendency to say that they would stand on the side of a teacher or a school leader (just because these people interview them for the job).

This is not a good answer, however, since teachers are only humans, and they make mistakes. You **should always try to find the truth, and you should not position yourself as a decision maker**. Your job is counseling, and giving advice. At the end of the day someone else will decide about the conflict.

Sample answers

School counselors should be involved in solving conflicts, since they can look at them without emotions of involved parties. I would stand on the side of truth in every conflict, letting both parties to tell me what happened, personally investigating the situation and suggesting the best course of action to the administrator.

Since I'd know the student, their position in a class and their family background, I'd be able to offer an important insight on the conflict.

I would approach each conflict individually. It is hard to say on which side I would stand. Generally speaking, teacher is more reliable than student. But at the same time, teachers are only human beings—they can make mistakes. And if a counselor did not advocate for the students, who would advocate for them in a conflict situation?

Q 22: Tell us about a time when you explained something difficult to someone. How did you get your message over?

Hint: You will talk to a variety of people in your job. Teachers, students, parents, administrators—each of these parties sees **the world through different optics**. And you will encounter all levels of intelligence and maturity in your meetings with the students (and sometimes also with the teachers...). A **language that works in one meeting may not work in another one**.

Can you handle that? Will students feel comfortable talking to you? Will they understand you?

People in the hiring committee are eager to find the answers.

You can talk about a time when you explained a technical issue to a colleague, or had to tell a child something that was **beyond their comprehension**.

Or you can talk about saying something difficult to a student, something they did not want to hear, but you still had to tell them.

The key is to show the hiring committee that you consider getting your message over a priority, and are **ready to adjust your language and method of communication to the recipient** and their abilities.

Sample answers

I have experienced this situation several times during my internship. Children had their views, and they found it hard to hear anything else. But it did not discourage me. I always tried to use their language, to look at the problem from their perspective. I also used demonstrations, pictures, and told them stories of students who faced similar problems—and how they got out of them.

In my opinion, we should be humble, and we should always adjust our language to the intelligence and mental condition of the recipient. That is the only way of building trust, and getting our message over.

I remember a case when I had to discuss a sensitive issue with one of the veteran teachers. They applied excessive pressure on the students, which led to emotional strain and other problems. To make it easier, I firstly explained the issue to the principal, and asked them to join the meeting with the veteran teacher.

Before saying anything else, we praised the teacher for her loyalty, and the long years she spent teaching at our school. Then I explained the issue sensitively, and with a help of simple diagrams illustrated how her teaching methods applied excessive pressure on the students, and what consequences it had for everyone involved.

The teacher wasn't happy to hear my words, but I believe that as a counsellor I should advocate for the students, and I'd do it again in the same situation.

Q 23: Tell us about a time when you struggled with motivation in work. How did you overcome the crisis?

Hint: Everyone struggles with motivation sometimes, and you shouldn't say that you've never experienced any crisis.

Show the people in the hiring committee that **you are a human being**, that you have low days just like everyone else.

You can talk about problems in personal life that impacted your motivation in work, or about a time when you tried hard in job, but eventually failed to help the students, and lost your motivation temporarily.

You should stress your **understanding for the role and the meaningful purpose you have as a counselor at school**—and how your conviction helps you to overcome crisis of motivation.

Sample answers:

I experienced crisis of motivation in my last teaching job. I tried hard, prepared for each lesson, listened to the students and tried my best to make the lessons engaging and interesting for them. But I still struggled with discipline—just like everyone else at that school.

It was hard, and I sometimes felt empty and tired of everything.

In such moments I always tried to remind myself why I had the job, why I did it, what I tried to achieve. This helped me to continue trying hard, even though I rarely saw a positive reception from the students.

Job of a counselor can be hard, especially when we do not achieve our goals. This happened to me many times. But I always tried to remind myself that it is an effort that counts, and not whether we manage to change someone, or achieve a certain goal with a student. At the end of the day, final outcome is not in our hands.

This realization, and support from my colleagues, always helped me to get over the crisis rather quickly.

Q 24: Describe a goal you achieved in your counseling (teaching) practice, and who helped you with achieving the goal.

Hint: Every great result is a team effort, and you should show the hiring committee that you can **give credit to people who deserve it**.

You can talk about any goal you achieved—helping a student to overcome an emotional crisis, helping an outsider to integrate into social circles, motivating someone to reconsider their decision to drop out, etc.

Do not forget to **speak with enthusiasm**—the members of the interviewing panel should feel that you are enthusiastic about the job, and that **your work makes you happy**.

If this is your first application, however, you can talk about a goal you helped to achieve while doing your internship. And if you have no situation on your mind, you can simply say that **every meeting when you helped a student feel better**, secure, or certain of an action they wanted to take, was a goal achieved....

Sample answers

I remember a tricky situation with a twelve year old boy, Dominic. He had a speech disorder, and he was afraid to talk in classes. Some other boys made fun of him whenever he talked, and he was getting more and more isolated, and started to lose interest in his studies.

I decided to approach the problem complexly. I counseled him, but I also invited several good students from his class to my office. I explained them the situation, and devised a plan how to integrate him into the community. I encouraged them to talk to him during breaks, and to invite him to after school activities. I also suggested teachers to punish (verbally) children who mocked Dominic.

Eventually, with the help of both students and teachers, we managed to integrate Dominic to the classroom. He opened up, and even his disorder eventually improved, since it was partially mental. I'd never achieve this goal without help of other students and teachers. It was a teamwork.

This is my first job application, and I do not have much experience with teaching and counseling, except of my internship.

For me, however, the goal remains always the same—to help the students feel more secure, to find the right course of action, to feel better. I managed to do it many times in my internship, with the help of a leading counselor and other professionals. I am incredibly grateful for everything I've learned from them, and look forward to cooperate with teachers and other counselors at school in my new job, while trying to help the students.

Q 25: Is there anything else we did not cover that you would like us to know about you as we consider you as a candidate for the position of a school counselor?

Hint: In my experience from the interviews, it makes no sense to brag about your skills and experience at this point. **They have already made their decision, consciously or subconsciously.** Each member of the hiring committee knows whether they will vouch for you or not, once you leave the room and they discuss the interview together.

But there are a few things you can do at this point, trying to **make a final push towards a coveted job contract:**

1. Emphasize once again your motivation to have the job, and the value you plan to bring to school as a counselor.
2. If you have particular plan in your mind (regarding things you want to change and improve in their counseling program) and there wasn't time (or a right question) to discuss your plans, you can briefly introduce them at this point.
3. Thank the people for their time, praise them for a good job they do in the school district (or in the interview), and wish them best of luck. Simply make the ending a nice one.

Sample answers

I think that you have covered all important areas with your questions, and I hope that I answered them well. The one thing I want to stress is my motivation to have this particular position. I know the problems and challenges children face here, and I believe I have the capacity to address them, and make this school a better place for the students, cooperating with all of you in the process. I am strongly motivated to make that happen, and I hope I will get a chance to prove my abilities.

I think that we have discussed everything important. I want to thank you for your professionalism, and I hope you will make the best possible decision for the school, and for the students. Thank you for your time and for considering me for the position of a school counselor.

Final word from the author

To succeed in an interview for a job of a school counselor is not easy. Some questions are tricky, and the expectations of the hiring committee are always high.

But if you prepare for the questions, and **follow the principles outlined in this eBook, you should make it, and sign a new job contract.**

Focus on things that matter, and try to relax. It will be fine. You will make it!

Glen Hughins,

Your Personal Job Interview Coach