

Sample Interview Protocol from Manufacturing

NORTH AMERICAN STEEL, INC. *LEARNING FROM 40 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE*

Introduction

Thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed for the organization study we are conducting in preparation for North American Steel's 40th year celebration. As you may know, the majority of organizations in our society die before they reach the age of forty (40). This is a cold fact. But there are exceptions. North American Steel is one of them. Even more important, North American Steel is stronger than ever. Over the years, North American has proven itself resilient. In good times and bad it has provided a stable base of employment for many people. It has adapted, changed and grown with the times. And its future looks positive and promising. The question is: "why"?

What are the core factors that give life to this organization? What can we learn from our history, especially if we examine closely those moments when we have been our best? What are North American Steel's most effective practices, strengths, or best qualities -- things that we should try to preserve about our organization even as we change? What important lessons can we draw from our history? Building on all this, what kind of organization do we want to be in the future? What is our potential? Can our positive past, the best in our past, help us become more daring as we think about true potential as an organization? What is your dream for North American Steel? What ideas do you have for helping us move to a whole new level as a business?

The information you provide will be used to help accelerate our continuous improvement as an organization and will be used to help us prepare for our 40th year anniversary celebration in September 1994. The important thing is learning from your and everybody's experience. The collected comments will provide the basis for a report to be reviewed by all. Your comments will be put together with other's anonymously. Your name will not be attached to any of the stories, suggestions, examples or comments you make. The interview takes about 30 to 45 minutes.

A. **EXPERIENCE WITH NORTH AMERICAN STEEL, INC.**

1. To start, I'd like to learn about your beginnings at NAS.
 - a. When did you start at NAS and what were your first impressions?
 - b. Why have you stayed with NAS?
2. What was one of the most rewarding experiences you have had at NAS - something that was a real high point? Can you tell me about a time when you felt best, most alive, most effective, proud, etc.
3. Let's talk a moment about some things you value most - - specifically about (1) yourself and (2) the organization.
 - a. What do you feel is the strongest, most important asset you offer to NAS? What are your best qualities?
 - b. What is it about NAS as an organization that you value the most?
4. Brief history of NAS: From what you have experienced or heard of NAS's history since 1954, name two or three key events, decisions, innovations, achievements, or challenges that were **important turning points in the life of the organization.**

B. **EXPLORING BEST QUALITIES AND HOPES FOR THE FUTURE**

5. Team Mindset: Organizations work best when the team spirit and enthusiasm is high and everyone is a valued member of a group where their ideas are heard. To be effective over time, organizations need cooperation within groups and also between groups which cross department lines, jobs and levels in the hierarchy. Teamwork requires trust, open channels of communication, appropriate business information, responsiveness to others' needs, good training and interpersonal skills.
 - a. Think of an example of the most effective team or group effort you have been part of at NAS. Tell the story of what happened. Who was involved? What made the teamwork effective? Important lessons?
6. Customer Satisfaction and Market Responsiveness: Central to the vision statement of NAS is an organization that is market driven and totally

responsive to customer satisfaction, time and time again, is the lifeblood of the business.

- a. Think of a time when NAS was most effective in terms of customer responsiveness or market innovation? Tell me a story of what happened. What was most noteworthy?
- b. Possibilities for the Future: What things could NAS do that would improve or even revolutionize its responsiveness and connection to its customers?

7. Continuous Learning: In a changing world, the competitive edge goes to the company that is able to change, grow, or to learn faster than any of its competitors. When at its best, NAS is a “learning organization” in which people are continuously challenging themselves to move out of their comfort zone, think in new ways, to acquire new knowledge and skills, and experiment with new management and production methods.

- a. Describe a time at NAS when you felt you were really learning something new, meaningful and helpful to the business. More importantly, what lessons can be drawn from your example? What does NAS do best as it relates to building good learning opportunities or strengthening the learning spirit of the whole company?
- b. As you look to the future, describe one thing you think NAS could or should do more of to strengthen the learning capacity of the company.

8. Shared Vision and Ownership: Organizations work best when everyone thinks, acts, and feels like they are an owner of the business. That sense of ownership is highest when there is a shared vision for where the business is heading in the future, when people are involved in major decisions that are relevant to them and their work, when appropriate information about the business is shared openly, when people know the whole picture in terms of other’s tasks or jobs, and when people feel they are at the center of things rather than on the outside.

- a. Describe a time when you felt most involved in the “big picture” of the organization, a time when you felt most like a partner or even owner of the business. What can we all learn from this experience?

- b. Think about the future, what could NAS do more of to create a shared vision of the future and a heightened sense of ownership at all levels?

9. Resiliency and Managing Change: Over the years, NAS has proven its resiliency and its ability to manage change when small and large challenges have confronted the organization. Many of the changes introduced (for example in the early 1990's) were positive, healthy, successful.

- a. Thinking of all the changes you have seen, what changes have most positively affected you, your work or the company?
- b. What can/should NAS do more of, less of, or the same in the future in order to become more resilient, more flexible, more able to manage change?

