

The Interview Process -- How to Select the Right Person

How do you select the right person for your business? There is no perfect answer, but the interview process can be a tremendous help if you use it effectively. In other words, you must have completed all of the other steps in the hiring process in order to get the most out of the interview process.

Interviewing candidates for a position within your company is one of the final steps in the hiring process. Before you get to this step, you want to make sure that you've completed all of the preceding steps since each of these steps will have a direct impact on how effective the interview process will be. Below is a list of the steps involved in the hiring process. Note that after you have completed the interviewing process, there are still two additional key steps that you need to complete. In order to achieve the best hiring results possible, just remember that all of the steps are important.

In order, the key steps to finding the right person to fill a position in your company include:

- **Determining your need to hire a new employee.** Are you properly utilizing the skills and talents of your current employees? Do you know what needs to be done? Can your business growth support a new employee?
- **Conducting a thorough job analysis.** What are the job's essential functions and key performance criteria?
- **Writing a job description and job specification for the position based on the job analysis.**
- **Determining the salary for the position, based on internal and external equity.** Is the salary comparable and proportional with the salaries and responsibilities of other positions inside your company as well as similar positions out in the marketplace?
- **Deciding where and how to find qualified applicants.** What are the recruitment techniques to be used? What is the time frame for conducting your search? Remember, advertising is not the only, or necessarily the best, way to recruit.
- **Collecting and reviewing a fair amount of applications and resumes and then selecting the most qualified candidates for further consideration.**
- *Interviewing the most qualified candidates for the position, based on the job's description and specification.*
- **Checking references.**
- **Hiring the best person for the job.**

Hopefully, after reviewing all of the resumes, you will be able to pick and choose a select number of qualified applicants to be interviewed. (If not, you may want to expand your time frame and re-write any ad copy and/or look at another recruitment technique)

Now that you know where the interview process fits into the hiring process, let's take a look at the "do's" and "don'ts" of conducting a Successful interview.

Conducting the Successful Interview - What to DO

1. Prepare in Advance for the Interview

- **Know what you want in a candidate before you begin the interview.** Review the job specifications and requirements that have been prepared.
- **Know the job and its responsibilities.** Review the job description.
- **Prepare a list of standard questions** concerning the candidate's skills, abilities and past work performance that you want him/her to answer.
- **Prepare a list of prioritized and measurable criteria**, either in the form of a worksheet or other method, for analyzing and comparing the candidates.
- **Review the candidate's resume prior to the interview.**
- **Set specific appointment times and reasonable time limits.**
- **Be prepared to justify the use of any required employment test.** Typically, the most legally defensible tests are those that involve a "piece of the job."

2. Collect Pertinent Information During the Interview

- **Since past behavior predicts future behavior, look for the candidate's behavior "patterns" as you collect information.** For example, has the candidate enjoyed "big picture" work or detailed analysis more? Is he/she more of a generalist or more of a specialist? Oftentimes, by listening to how the candidate responds to your questions about previous jobs, you will be able to get a very good idea of what their behavior will be like in the future.
- **Try not to offer too much detailed information up front so that the candidate will be able to formulate answers that exactly fits your company's needs.** Don't put the right words in his/her mouth! Remember, the candidate (hopefully) wants the job and will be looking to say the right thing to impress you.
- **Ask questions that focus on the candidate's past performances.** For example, if the job, such as an office manager, demands an individual who is well-organized and handles paperwork easily, you may want to ask, "How do you keep track of your own schedules and desk work in your current position?"
- **Ask specific, structured questions in regards to specific problems that the job holder may face.** Focus on past behavior and the results of the candidate's actions in a particular situation. For example: "As the customer service representative, you may encounter a few unhappy campers who will yell and scream at you over the telephone or in person. Have you had any experience dealing with difficult customers? Who was the most difficult customer you had to deal with? What was the situation? How did you resolve the problem?"
- **Notice how well the candidate listens and responds to the questions asked.**

- **Note the candidate's choice of words and non-verbal behavior.** Are they answering your questions clearly?
- **Listen to the questions the candidate asks.** Clarify the reasons why the questions are being asked. Notice which questions he/she asks first as they may be his/her primary concerns.
- **Take detailed hand-written notes concerning job related topics that will help you distinguish the candidates from one another** (especially if you will be conducting several interviews). Help yourself remember each candidate and each interview clearly.
- **Record information pertaining to the set criteria that will help in the evaluation of candidates.**
- **Organize and analyze the information immediately after the interview when memory is fresh.** Don't try to remember everything, it's impossible. One idea is to "rate" each candidate on each of the criteria immediately following the interview.

3. Look and Act Professionally During the Interview

- **Dress appropriately.**
- **Avoid appearing bored and fatigued.**
- **Set a businesslike atmosphere.**
- **Structure the interview and inform the candidate of the structure.** Let the candidate know you will be focusing on past results and that you will be taking a lot of notes.
- **Provide information on the company and the job to each candidate.**

4. Treat All Candidates Fairly

- **Use your list of standard questions during each interview** so that you treat the applicants the same and so that you can compare apples to apples.
- **Refer to the criteria for analyzing candidates.** Ask questions in regards to the job criteria.
- **Keep all questions job-related.**
- **Do not ask discriminating questions.**
- **Show a genuine interest in every candidate you interview.**
- **If possible, have at least one other person meet and/or interview candidates who are "finalists."** They should also "rate" the candidates on each of the criteria; ultimately, all interviewers should compare their "ratings" and discuss any discrepancies. Having more than one interviewer helps control for personal biases.

5. Be Courteous and Respectful

- Conduct the interview in a private place away from distractions.
- Begin the interview on schedule.
- If possible, conduct the interview without interruptions.
- Allow sufficient time for the interview.
- Appreciate the candidate's accomplishments.
- Do not patronize the candidate.
- Do not argue with the candidate.
- Thank the candidate for his/her time and interest.

6) Facilitate Open Communication

- **Immediately attempt to establish a rapport with the candidate** by breaking the ice; for example, ask about their experiences in a particular industry or geographical location (refer to his/her resume).
- **Promote a relaxed environment with free-flowing conversation.**
- **Do not dominate the discussion by talking too much.** Many experts use a 80/20 rule - you talk 20% of the time and the candidate talks 80% of the time.
- **Politely probe the candidate for information** by asking open-ended questions that will provide insight into the candidate's values and traits.
- **Ask structured questions that will require some thought on the part of the candidate.**
- **Listen carefully to the candidate's answers.** If they do not provide you with specific results, probe until they do.
- **Explain the selection process to the candidate.** Offer realistic time frames and stick to your word!

The Successful Interview - What NOT to DO

The following list is comprised of subject matter that is widely regarded as "off-limits" for discussion in an interview by employment experts. Most of these subjects relate directly to federal and state employment laws. Legislation covering equal employment opportunity is extensive and complex. Check not only federal laws, but also your own state's laws and guidelines. Remember, state laws vary! Consult an attorney for legal advice (before you begin the search process for a new employee).

In an interview, or on an employment application, do not ask questions...

- **..concerning the age of the candidate.** Be careful using the words "over qualified" with older candidates.
- **..about their arrest record** (this is different from convictions - in most states, it is permissible to ask if the candidate has ever been convicted of a crime).
- **..about race or ethnicity**
- **..concerning the candidate's citizenship of the U.S. prior to hiring** (It is permissible to ask "Will you be able to provide proof of eligibility to work in the U.S. if hired?")
- **..concerning the candidate's ancestry, birthplace or native language** (it is permissible to ask about their ability to speak English or a foreign language if required for the job).
- **..about religion or religious customs or holidays.**
- **..concerning the candidate's height and weight if it does not affect their ability to perform the job.**
- **..concerning the names and addresses of relatives** (only those relatives employed by the organization are permitted).
- **..about whether or not the candidate owns or rents his/her home and who lives with them.** (asking for their address for future contact is acceptable).
- **..concerning the candidate's credit history or financial situation.** In some cases, credit history may be considered job-related, but proceed with extreme caution.
- **..concerning education or training that is not required to perform the job.**
- **..concerning their sex or gender.** Avoid any language or behavior that may be found inappropriate by the candidate. It's his/her standard of conduct that must be met.
- **..concerning pregnancy or medical history.** Attendance records at a previous employer may be discussed in most situations as long as you don't refer to illness or disability.
- **..concerning the candidate's family or marital status or child-care arrangements** (it is permissible to if the candidate will be able to work the required hours for the job).
- **..concerning the candidate's membership in a non-professional organization or club that is not related to the job.**
- **..concerning physical or mental disabilities** (asking whether the candidate can perform the essential job duties is permitted.) The ADA allows you to ask the applicant to describe or demonstrate how they would perform an essential function (s) when certain specific conditions are met . Check the law or consult with an attorney before moving forward.

Remember--When in doubt, ask yourself if the question is job-related; if not, don't ask!