

Interviewing Tips

Much has been written about how ineffectual job interviews can be for employers who are looking to hire. Critics often point to the lack of forethought that goes into the questions, as well as too much focus on the candidate's physical appearance and too much reliance on the interviewer's "gut feeling" about a candidate.

We agree. When poorly constructed and conducted, traditional job interviews can certainly be ineffective for employers and can end up contributing to the wrong person being hired.

That said, when constructed correctly, job interviews can be a critical tool in selecting the absolutely right candidate for your job. Here are the five most important tips for conducting an effective interview:

Prepare in Advance – It is absolutely essential that, long before you are face-to-face with a candidate, you have a clear vision for what the job requires and what skills, abilities and behaviors are needed for the role. Outline clearly those factors and craft the interview questions that will be most effective in assessing whether your candidate is right for the position. Make sure you know exactly what information and feedback you need to get out of an interview before ever going into one.

Structure Your Panel Interview – We strongly recommend that all job interviews be conducted by a team of at least three interviewers. Panel interviews are critical because all panelists are able to witness the candidates' responses to questions asked. And when one interviewer is asking questions, the others can observe the candidates' body language, tone and, of course, response. And if each interviewer knows his or her role and has the questions prepared in advance, each will be able to be much more present during the interview. Finally, each interviewer should have a specific area of inquiry and set of questions and should ask the same questions of each candidate so that all facets of the job are covered and the panel can truly compare candidates based on their having answered the same questions. And make sure everyone is well-aware of the questions that are prohibited by law to ask during a job interview. If you're unsure, google "Prohibited Interview Questions."

Use Behavioral Interview Questions – Research shows that the most effective way to structure a question is to ask it in the form of a past experience. For example, start each question with, "Tell me about a time when you had to..." or "Describe for me a situation when you had to..." As in most things, the best predictor of how someone will act in the future is how they acted in the past. And try to avoid questions that can be answered with a "yes" or "no."

Remember the "Rule of Thirds" – As recruiters, we always recommend that our clients follow the "Rule of Thirds" which states that one-third of your hiring decision should be based on the experience and demonstrable skills that the candidate brings to the table, one-third should be based on how the candidate presented himself or herself during the interview process, and one-third should come from the results of a behavioral assessment test. We strongly recommend behavioral testing of all candidates because most employees fail in their jobs not because of aptitude, but rather because of their attitude. Testing gives you additional objective data with which to assess your candidate.

Deciding On Your Candidate – As your panel of interviewers reviews and debriefs their thoughts of the candidates interviewed, be mindful to stick to job-related considerations. Did the candidate answer the questions sufficiently? Was the candidate clear and articulate and present himself or herself well? Avoid areas of bias that can sway the hiring decision, such as the candidate's interests, hobbies, network of friends, cultural background or other non-job related issues. Be sure to check with the candidate's references and to ask behavioral questions of the references, specifically if there are any areas of concern or lingering doubts that you have about the candidate. And, most importantly, even if you are pressed for time or are anxious to fill the position, do not hire a candidate unless you are absolutely certain that he or she will be a great hire. If, after the interview process, you are stuck choosing among a pool of mediocre candidates, start over. If you're in doubt, it's almost always best to move on.

Job interviews are tricky. They are the part of the hiring process where there is the most legal risk (again, review those "prohibited interview question"), and where you are the most likely to wander off track into areas that will not aid you in making an effective hiring decision. With a solid interview process and a well prepared panel of interviewers, you will be certain to be better able to identify and hire the candidate best suited for your job.

By Claudia St. John, President – Affinity HR Group Inc.

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