

MERNA SKINNER

Effective Interviews



You need to probe beyond the resume to know if the candidate interviewing for the position is right for the job and company.

INTerviewing and evaluating future employees requires careful planning. The financial and emotional consequences of hiring the wrong person justify a strategic approach. Sadly, many managers fail to plan interviewing strategies, leaving them without accurate information for making an informed decision about the candidate.

Successful interviewing starts with a human resources manager who ensures that all interviewers communicate with candidates consistently and accurately, giving them honest, timely, and specific feedback on their interview performance.

For every position, a job description should detail the functional requirements, desired professional and educational background, and required skills. Interviewers need to determine if the candidate has experience using the necessary skills and is a "good match" with the company and culture.

Managers need to use language that accurately describes their culture and values to attract like-minded candidates. If a company values innovative problem solving and teamwork, interviewers need to construct open-ended questions; asking how a past business problem was solved will determine if a candidate can "think outside the box."

In a one-hour interview, spend two-thirds of the time getting to know the candidate. Engage candidates in "life storytelling" conversations. Asking "What has been your favorite position and why?" will glean more information. Questions like "How does this position fit into your career objectives?" will determine if the candidate is a match.

Many interviewers risk not getting qualified employees because of narrowly defined expectations. Focus more on finding out about candidates' accomplishments and how they achieved them.

To ascertain leadership abilities, you might say: "I see you managed a multi-functional team. What were your responsibilities and how did you manage?" Depending on the response, your follow-up probe might be: "What was your thinking behind such a decision?" Another tactic is to set up "problem/solution" scenarios. Allow candidates to tell of a successful project they managed. Then, probe for what decisions they made, why they made them, what the outcomes were, and what they learned.

Once you decide to hire the candidate, tell prospective employees exactly what your organization can offer them and why they should accept your offer. Sum up in a few words what the benefit of joining the firm is and communicate this message consistently to candidates.

Knowing what is important to the candidate is crucial in formulating and communicating the final offer. Asking "What is important to you in a job?" will uncover what they value. When selling your company, address these "wish list"



items. Using phrases such as "What if we were to offer you...?" helps determine their level of interest.

Think of bargaining as a balance of "currencies" and "concessions." Currencies refer to things you can offer, such as salary, stock options, signing bonuses, and vacations. Concessions refer to what candidates will concede, such as starting earlier. Your future employees need to know that you will do every reasonable thing to "bring them to yes."

What happens in face-to-face interviews is important, and yet many firms do not approach interviews systematically. By using a strategic approach, interviewers communicate the value of their firm to candidates, know what questions to ask and how to ask them properly to evaluate people, and recognize how to position their company to persuade candidates to choose their company over a competitive employer. **EE**

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