

MAXIMIZE RECRUITMENT INTERVIEWS

Whether an organization is a small not-for-profit health or social service centre or a sports team, there is perhaps no more important function than the recruitment and selection of employees. Organizations succeed or fail on the basis of their talent pool, yet the hiring practices and processes for many organizations remains their weakest link.

Regardless of the size or complexity of an organization, hiring the most qualified and talented employees remains critical to its long-term success. Managers who fail to recognize this point are left with the difficulty of attempting to correct a poor hire. Organizations that are clear in their needs, expectations and obligations are well positioned to attract, hire and retain the strongest employees.

The recruitment interview plays a critical role in making an effective hire. Getting the most from the interview process involves preparation, format selection, and execution. If time and attention is given to these three areas the likelihood of selecting the right individual increases significantly.

Step One: Preparation

In preparing to hire there are a number of key questions that need to be asked and answered. They will form the basis for guiding the hiring process. The questions include:

1. Do I have a current job description?
The job description details duties, responsibilities, reporting relationship, qualifications, skills and attributes. It will be a key tool in communicating the position to prospective candidates.
2. Is the organization chart current?
The organization chart will give candidates a sense of their place in the organization and demonstrate the respective working and reporting relationships.
3. Are the qualifications and skills required clearly set out?
In developing qualifications it is important to ensure that they are “bona fide”. The most meaningful measure of qualifications are those that look at experience in terms of knowledge, skills and abilities. For example, “the successful candidate will have the knowledge, skills and abilities typically associated with a degree in nursing and five years experience in community based health promotion”, then go on to describe the actual qualifications, skills and abilities required.
4. Do I know where candidates will come from?
Knowing where candidates come from will influence the area of search. This should include as many techniques as possible — within the bounds of time and budget — and can include recruiting through word of mouth, newspaper, professional journals, internet recruitment sites, community job boards, and schools. Remember that the broadest approach is often preferred, and be watchful for creating unintended recruitment barriers for disadvantaged groups.
5. Do I look at internal candidates or should I go immediately to external sources?
If there are qualified internal candidates, you may wish to promote from within. This presumes that the internal candidate meets or exceeds your selection criteria. The decision to weigh an internal candidate against outside candidates should take into account the organizations philosophy, culture, formal hiring policy, and equity considerations.

6. Do I have selection criteria established?
Selection criteria for all candidates should be objective and clearly laid out at the beginning of the process. It is not uncommon to set minimum requirements that prospective candidates must meet in order to be considered for an interview. For example, this could be a requirement for specific skills and experience associated with a particular setting. Ensure that your selection criteria is “bona fide” and watch for potential recruitment barriers.

Step Two: Selecting An Interview Format

The interview format defines the approach to be used during the recruitment interview. In particular, it will determine how the interview is structured, the questions asked and the way it is conducted. The format may vary depending on the type of position being recruited for as well as the hiring policies of the organization.

There are a wide variety of interview formats to choose from such as non-directive, situational, and behavioural, all of which can be used independently or in combination. In addition, interviews can be conducted using a one-on-one or panel approach. Whatever approach is taken the interview format should provide:

- A framework for establishing the quality of the response;
- Fairness and equity; and
- Bias free standards and measurements.

Step Three: Executing the Interview

Develop your interview plan in advance of the actual interview. Typically this consists of clarifying the purpose of the interview, determining the areas of focus, and developing the interview questions based on the interview format selected. As well, it is helpful to review the resume, job description and other relevant information.

When conducting the interview keep the following in mind:

1. Establish and maintain rapport with the candidate.
Remember your greeting sets the tone. Discuss briefly the process of the interview and the ensuing steps. Both you and the candidate want to get the most from the interview.
2. Be an active listener.
Take the time to hear what the candidate is saying. Gain insight into what is suggested and implied.
3. Be careful with nonverbal cues.
Facial expressions and gestures can provide additional information, however they can also be misinterpreted based on the social, gender, and cultural background of the applicant. The key is to be aware and sensitive to such issues and view non-verbal cues in context.
4. Provide information as freely and honestly as possible.
Present a realistic picture of the job and organization. Be prepared to answer why a job is vacant especially if the previous candidate was terminated. You may not have to go into every detail as there are privacy considerations, but a response such as “we had differing views on program direction” as opposed to “Bill left to pursue other opportunities” is more candid and truthful.

5. Use questions effectively.
Questions should be put in as objective a manner as possible to obtain open and truthful answers.
6. Separate facts from inferences.
Simply record facts offered and keep the interpretations of them separate. There will be ample opportunity to have discussions with the hiring team after the interview.
7. Recognize biases and stereotypes.
Coming into an interview with preconceived ideas of how a person of a given gender, race or ethnic background appears, thinks, feels or acts could lead to poor outcomes and possible Human Rights complaints. If you haven't already, consider taking a workshop in Bias Free Hiring.
8. Control the course of the interview.
Keep to your interview plan. It is your tool for getting the most out of the interview. Remember that interviews are two-way so allow time in the plan for the candidate to ask questions.
9. Standardize questions.
A "best practice" is to ask all candidates common questions. This builds in transparency and consistency and makes it easier to compare responses between candidates. It's also a wise move in light of Human Rights legislation and its impact on the recruitment process.

The job is not over once the interviewing process is complete. There is still the work of selecting your winning candidate, negotiating the terms of employment (if applicable), conducting references checks, drafting the offer of employment and developing your onboarding plan. However, focusing on the front-end preparation and using time in the interview wisely can go a long way to making a successful hire.

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