



## A Successful Employment Relationship Starts With A Good Interview

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Let's face it, if you have conducted any number of interviews, you know that all things being equal on paper, the face-to-face meeting with an applicant can be invaluable. For years, I advised job seekers on how to achieve the "fit-in factor" with an employer during an interview. Like it or not, this is often the ultimate hiring criteria. Will this applicant fit in with the corporate culture? Will this person enhance the cohesiveness of our "team" atmosphere? Will this individual grow with the company and contribute towards its goals and success? The fit-in factor! Or, from the applicant's perspective, the most important response to the question: "Why should I hire you?"

But how do you find that perfect match? Looking for the right employee is just like any other relationship; it takes commitment, creativity, an open mind, and time. Although the economy has forced many talented and capable individuals into the job-hunting pool, recruiting is still very much a mutual selection process. A good applicant is also sizing up your company for the "fit-in factor."

A strong interview not only provides you the insight into a potential employee, but affords you the opportunity to make a good impression, market your company, and set the tone for a possible employer-employee relationship. In the grand scheme, you do not want someone to take a job out of desperation only to leave you high and dry when the economy improves. Turnover is costly. While interviewing may at times feel like a chore, it can be a positive and rewarding task when you find that perfect match.

Here are some important considerations before you conduct that next interview.

## **Has The Job Changed Since You Last Recruited For The Position?**

Before you open a job posting, review the current position description to determine whether the duties, qualifications, and other requirements of the job have changed over time. An exit interview with the employee who last held the job can be very useful in determining how the position may have evolved. In fact, if your company does not have a routine practice of reviewing job descriptions, then the ideal time to perform this task is prior to recruiting a new employee.

Position descriptions should always include the essential functions of the job so that an applicant may appropriately consider their abilities in light of these functions. This can be critical for applicants with disabilities as they must be able to perform the essential functions of the job with or without a "reasonable accommodation." In this same regard, carefully consider what tasks and qualifications are essential, and which are merely desirable.

## **Know Your Applicant Pool**

The unemployment rate remains high. With the influx of job seekers, now is a great time to fine tune your company's hiring practices. Here are some ideas on how to do that.

First, unless your business is in a constant recruiting mode for specific positions, you should not accept applications on an open basis. Provide applications only when there is an actual vacancy. Second, if there is more than one opening with varied job descriptions, require applicants to submit separate applications for each position. Finally, applicants are always tempted to complete one general application and write "see resume" throughout. Require a complete application.

My own practice as a manager was to interview all applicants who applied within the prescribed timeframe, I also strictly enforced that applicants would not be considered for an interview without previously submitting a COMPLETED application packet. This included not submitting a resume in lieu of completing a formal application. There are lots of good reasons for this. An application creates a sworn record of the individual's stated background, qualifications and abilities for a specific job, and prior experience. A resume is just a selection of highlights, sometimes cleverly worded, and always unsigned. When appropriate, ask applicants to submit references and work samples along with their application. This should be completed prior to an interview so that you have time to review each individual's credentials and prepare for the actual meeting.

## **The Wrong Questions Can Cost You!**

Even if you are in a hurry to hire someone, take the time to cover more than the basics. Remember that state, federal, and local anti-discrimination laws cover applicants, as well as employees. While you don't need a canned checklist of questions, it's important to determine what you need to learn about each interviewee. Generally, a list of topics relevant to the position will suffice. This should include a review of qualifications, previous employment, and reasons

for leaving. A good practice is to apply the 80/20 rule, i.e. you listen, while they do most of the talking.

If you really want to be prepared, as you review application packets jot down specific questions for the individual to supplement your general topics. This is helpful for you as an interviewer to know your applicants and will also show the interviewee that you are looking closely at the information submitted and are interested in what they have to offer.

Remember there are certain questions you cannot ask without running afoul of anti-discrimination laws. Here are some questions that could lead to trouble, and that should be avoided in an interview:

- Does your religion prevent you from working weekends and holidays?
- Are you married?
- Do you live with your parents?
- What year did you graduate high school or college?
- Are you pregnant?
- Do you have childcare responsibilities?

Additionally, the Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits questions such as those relating to an individual's past medical history or present medical condition and those related to an individual's health asked prior to a contingent offer of employment.

Finally, allow time at the end of the interview for the applicant to ask questions. If they have prepared properly, they will have at least one or two probing questions. If all they want to know about is salary and benefits, this may signal someone who is focused only on the short term job prospect. Be observant: if applicants have done their homework, they will appear at the interview ready to start work, i.e. dressed appropriately, knowledgeable about the position for which they applied and how their skills and abilities fit, and exhibiting a positive attitude. Sometimes it is the non-verbal statements that are the most telling.

### **The Interview Is Over, Now What?**

Depending on the caliber of the position you are attempting to fill, one interview may not be enough. A second, or even third, interview with a different interviewer or a panel of interviewers may well be appropriate, particularly when considering an individual for a supervisory or executive position.

You cannot spend too much time interviewing, it is a skill that develops with time and experience. 95% of employee problems are often caused by 5% of the employees. A good interviewer can spot these potential problem employees before a job offer is made.

Once you have found your ideal candidate and made a conditional offer of employment, it is a good idea to do some post-interview investigation. For example, checking references, running a criminal background check, or drug testing. You should always consult your local counsel when

developing post-interviewing investigations, as many states have specific policy and procedural requirements.

Finally, once you have concluded the hiring process, it's a good idea to notify those who received an interview that the position was filled by someone else and advise whether their application will be kept on file for a specified period of time or that they must reapply for future openings.

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