

## *Interviewing Guide*

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The purpose of an interview is to elicit information from an applicant to determine his or her ability to perform the job. Successful interviewers learn how to ask the right kind questions, how to keep the applicant talking about relevant information, and how to listen.

Much of what is learned about applicants in an interview is based on their past experience. Past performance is our best indicator of future performance. This does not mean that someone who had performed poorly in the past cannot improve in skills and attitude. Generally, however, you can see a trend in performance through several jobs or assignments. Sometimes interviewers assume that a candidate who has done something has done it well or that longevity on a position is a sign of success. These are not well founded assumptions!

### *Things to consider when conducting the Interview*

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While conducting the interview and evaluating the candidate be sure you keep in mind the role the candidate will play in your organization. Good interviewing and presentation skills are critical for candidates whose role will require good interpersonal and presentation skills on the job. If you are interviewing for a technical position that does not require these same skills on the job, then you should adjust your expectations in the interview accordingly. The same is true for candidates who are just entering the workforce—you don't want to hold them to the same standards as they do not have enough business experience as yet.

Determine before the interview process begins what skills are trainable and what skills are not. You want to ensure you pay particular attention to those skills that are not trainable, such as managerial courage and other innate skills. You also want to keep in mind the length of time needed before a candidate is fully competent on the job. Pay attention to how long it will take the candidate to get up to speed on the job. In some circumstances, you will need to hire someone fully competent for the position day one.

In other circumstances, you may be able to hire someone that will need time to grow into the position. It is your job as the interviewer/ hiring manager to determine whether or not the candidate is ready day one for the responsibilities and if not, how realistic it is that they will receive the training/time necessary to reach competency.

Other considerations include:

#### **Frequent job changes (without career advancement)**

If frequent job changes are made for developmental reasons, the candidate should not be viewed negatively. However switching jobs every year or so throughout a career can be a sign of problem behavior, especially if the applicant is not making job changes that advance his/her career. Also, younger applicants with minimal experience will often have more job changes. Whether or not this is a problem depends on the explanation of the changes and what level of experience and stability the position requires.

### **Gaps in employment history**

Looking for this information is important but don't assume they are there for negative reasons. Gaps in employment may be there because of staff reductions, spouse being transferred, sabbatical, etc. Just be sure to explore any gaps thoroughly in the interview process. What is most important is that the gaps in employment can be satisfactorily explained.

### **Years of experience**

A candidate's years of experience are not necessarily an indicator of his/her potential. After ten years in a job some people are performing at the same level as they were at the time of hire while others will have grown in the job and expanded their responsibilities. During the screening process make sure to listen for examples of continued growth and development in the role.

### **Salary**

As a rule of thumb, don't eliminate a strong candidate who is asking for a little more than you can realistically offer. Be sure to clarify salary potential in a telephone screen before inviting him or her in for an interview. Also, clarify what the minimum salary is that the candidate can realistically accept—you don't want a good hire to leave because they can't live on the salary the job provides.

### ***Common Interview Mistakes***

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Below are some examples of common interview mistakes that get in the way of hiring the best people:

- Interviewers focus on only a few of the areas that are critical to job success, while overlooking other important information. The result is an incomplete picture of the candidate. Often, an interviewer focusing on the skill aspects fails to consider job and organizational fit, which are critical retention factors.
- Each interviewer covers the same aspects of the job and candidates answer the same questions repeatedly while other critical areas are overlooked.
- Candidates are turned off by the selection process when interviewers are late, do all the talking, and appear disorganized and/or redundant.
- Biases and stereotypes affect judgment. Studies claim that most interviewers make up their mind about a candidate within the first few minutes of an interview. Research indicates that organizations make better decisions when they delay final applicant decisions while continuing to collect information.
- Pressure to fill a position oftentimes affects judgment.
- Interviewers allow one characteristic to influence their decision—the “halo” effect.
- Interviewers ask illegal, non-job related questions that may expose the organization to legal action.

*Illegal Interview Topics*

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- Age
- Arrest record
- Association with present employer
- Bankruptcy and credit affairs
- Disability
- Driver's license
- Emergency contact info
- English language skills
- Height and weight
- Marital status, children
- Non-professional Organization Affiliation
- Protected class
- Veteran status

