

Conducting an Interview

Hiring and keeping good workers begins with the job interview. If you can ask the right questions, you're more likely to select a candidate who's right for the job. Without good interviewing skills, however, you could extend an offer to someone who's ultimately not the right fit for your company.

There will always be competition for skilled and talented workers. Hiring qualified employees is an art but also requires certain skills. You have to be a good listener; you need to know how to redirect a conversation; and you must be able to make a distinction between those who simply want the job and the perfect candidate who can get the job done.

Even with the ups and downs of the current market, knowing how to conduct a successful interview can help you land the best employees. Here are some tips to help you with the screening process:

- **Prepare.** This may seem obvious, but many hiring managers neglect to review a candidate's paperwork prior to the interview. With a little planning upfront the interview you conduct could be highly effective and efficient by allowing you to concentrate on specific areas of importance for this particular candidate. Additionally, it sends a clear message to the candidate that you respect their time by being well organized and prepared.
- **Be punctual.** Don't keep the candidate waiting for an extended period of time. If something urgent has come up, send someone to the lobby to explain the delay and make sure that they do not need to reschedule with you.
- **Set the tone.** Let your candidates know that you're glad to meet them. Also, express your appreciation for the time they've taken to come in. Explain how the interview will proceed and then try to follow that format as closely as possible.
- **Prepare a script.** Don't underestimate the value of preparing several questions beforehand. Your human resources department may even have a set of prepared questions to use as a guide. Too often, busy managers (is there any other kind?) forget until it's too late what they wanted to ask.
 - Ask open-ended questions as well as ones that might elicit a more detailed response. For example, you may say, "Tell me what led you to apply for this position."
 - You could ask, "Accounting is a very deadline oriented profession and at times those deadlines can be daunting. Could you tell me about an experience during which a deadline was clearly not going to be met and how you handled it?"Try to ask a good mix of questions — those that give insight into behavior, elicit opinion, demonstrate experience, and reveal background. When the interview is over you should have a fairly good sense of the person's likes and dislikes, along with their strengths and weaknesses.
- **Listen to your instincts.** If a candidate seems too good to be true or seems to lack the skills you need, be honest with yourself as you assess the meeting. In some cases, you may need to pose more pointed questions. You might also make a note of your concern and check the candidates' references, honing in on the area of concern. If you cannot get "warm and fuzzys" in the areas of concern it is probably best to pass on the candidate.
- **Know what you want.** If you don't know the skill set required for the open position, chances are you might not ask the right questions, which may confuse the candidate. Make a list of what you're looking for and then ask pointed questions so that when the candidate walks out the door you know whether or not he or she is a viable choice. Be realistic about the challenges of the job such as: hours, inter-departmental issues, technical skills, etc. Some of these items may best be covered in the second interview – should there be one.

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- **Promote your Company.** No company is the perfect place to work but there is a reason you and your co-workers are there. Your company may not be as competitive in salary and benefits as other companies in the city. Salaries, Benefits, Titles all vary by organization and industry. If you know there is an area where your organization is not as competitive, then bring to the forefront those areas where your firm does excel, perhaps a solid track record of promoting from within, management that mentors and develops its staff, a great corporate culture, work/life balance, flexible hours or a 9/80 schedule. Remember, the number one reason people leave their employer is not because of money!
- **Manage your time.** If you've set aside an hour for an interview, do your best to stick with that schedule. But be prepared, too, to cut the meeting short and jump to the more concluding questions. Don't waste your time or the candidate's by stretching the meeting out. If there's no match, no amount of conversation is going to change that.
- **Write it down.** Forget about remembering everything that transpires during an interview. You'll want to take notes so that you can review the meeting at a later time. This will be especially important if you're interviewing many people for the same position. See the Client Resources section of our web site: www.metcalfresources.com for our form, "Candidate Interview and Evaluation Comments" we have developed to help you.

Don't forget that the candidate is also interviewing you. In addition to being skilled at asking appropriate questions, ones that will elicit a candidate's strengths and talents, you must be conscious of the impressions you are making as well. Just as the interviewee is selling him- or herself to you and your company, you are basically trying to achieve the same result. Make sure, for example, that you know as much as possible about your company; the interviewee will be looking to you to provide that information.

"The team with the best players wins." Jack Welch

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