

EFFECTIVE INTERVIEWING SKILLS

While an interview rarely lasts longer than an hour, its consequences may last for years.

By Tricia Reardon

When you stop to consider the enormous impact an interview can have on someone's career or the cost factor for the employer if the wrong person is recruited, the importance of the interview process quickly becomes apparent. Effective interviewing skills are far-reaching. They are not only used for the obvious situation of employment, but they can also be used when conducting staff performance appraisals, assessing an employee for promotion, negotiating salary increases and counseling staff. They can even prove useful in a social setting. Have you ever found yourself in a room full of strangers wondering how to 'break' in to a conversation? In this situation, well-practised interviewing skills can come to the rescue, allowing you to ask open questions and smoothly enter the conversation. Most people like talking about themselves - you just have to ask them!

In the employment situation, good interviewing skills are critical if a manager is to make the right candidate selection. It can be a costly mistake if the wrong person is chosen. However, many managers are not necessarily taught the art of interviewing. Instead, they can simply find themselves faced with a need to fill a position and on instinct alone, choose to whom they will offer the role.

Good preparation is the key to a successful interview. This means reviewing the job description, performance measures and work environment to develop appropriate questions. 'Open' questions such as: "How?", "When?", "Where?", "Why?" and "What?" encourage the candidate to talk. 'Closed' questions that require a definitive response such as 'yes' or 'no', are used to confirm information provided. Competency-based questions focus on specific examples of when a candidate has undertaken a certain critical skill that is required in the position. Typically, competency-based questions take the form of: "Give me an example of..."; "What action did you take?"; and "What was the outcome?" Competency-based questions help the interviewer to understand the past behaviour of a candidate in a certain situation in order to predict future behaviour in a similar situation, albeit in a new position and with a new employer. Questions of a perceived discriminatory nature must be avoided. Interviews should allow for an opening (relaxing the candidate, building rapport, explaining the

process); a middle (the questions); and a close. Control of the interview must remain in the hands of the interviewer. This can be achieved by explaining to the candidate that you have a standard interview approach to gather the information you need, advising that you will do the initial questioning and that the candidate will have an opportunity to ask questions at the end. Another important point to remember when interviewing is to ensure the language and questioning style you use is appropriate to the position level for which you are recruiting and promotes two-way communication process. Be an attentive listener and try to prevent note-taking from interrupting the interview or communication flow. When closing an interview, ensure that the candidate has no unanswered questions regarding the position, ascertain the candidate's continued interest in the position and advise the candidate of the future stages in the selection process including the expected time frame.



The interview is a two-way process - an exchange of information between two parties on which both can make a decision. This gives both parties the opportunity to ask questions in a well-structured process. While the person conducting the interview must, through a series of well-planned questions, evaluate a candidate's suitability for the role and the culture, it is equally important to remember that the candidate also be given the best opportunity to evaluate the role, the company and culture fit. After all, the candidate has to make a decision on whether the position is of interest. There are two parties in the interview process. Both have the right to make a decision.

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