

Managing People • part 1

How to select the best candidate

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- **Describe** the steps for developing an applicant pool.
- **Identify** and explain common interview problems.
- **Explain** how to be well prepared for an interview.
- **Describe** effective techniques for conducting an interview.
- **Explain** the process of deciding whom to hire.

This first article in a three-part series focuses on the hiring process. Topics discussed include: developing an applicant pool, common interview problems, interview preparation, conducting interviews and deciding whom to hire.

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The hiring process consists of numerous steps, from developing a pool of appropriate candidates, to preparing for and conducting interviews, to evaluating results and deciding whom to hire.

Developing an applicant pool

To develop an appropriate applicant pool, it is necessary to carefully conduct a needs analysis, develop an accurate job description and utilize effective recruitment strategies.

In order to select the right person for a

position, the hiring manager must accurately define job requirements and provide a complete job description with clear expectations for the position. The description should identify job duties, and then the skills, educational background or knowledge, and core competencies required to perform those duties. The manager should consider technical skills, as well as business acumen and interpersonal, or “soft,” skills. To determine standards of core competencies, efficient managers should examine the qualities and abilities of employees who have performed well in the job.

Next, it is important to develop recruiting strategies. Although it may be the responsibility of the human resources department to do the actual recruiting, the manager may have a say in how candidates are recruited. There are four primary recruiting methods (as shown in the graphic on page 35): print media, electronic media, personal networking, and other methods such as staffing agencies or college recruiters.

An especially successful and efficient strategy for many companies is personal networking, which involves finding candidates through personal contacts. New hires that come from employee referrals are considered the gold standard for recruiting, with the advantage that employees who refer new hires try to ensure that their referrals work out. However, by recruiting only referral candidates, a company may inadvertently engage in “indirect discrimination.” For example, if the employees who offer referrals are all white males, they may be

more likely to refer other white males.

The manager may also consider internal candidates who are interested in a transfer or job promotion, because they have already proven they fit into the company culture.

Avoiding common interview problems

Research shows that employers who are not trained in interviewing are not very competent at using interviews to select the right applicant for the job. Employers often fail to recognize the potential of some candidates to be great employees and are impressed by others who end up being less-than-satisfactory workers. Common interview problems include poorly worded questions, illegal questions, biases and stereotypes, candidate order or contrast error, and snap decisions.

Poorly worded questions. It may be best to avoid asking short-answer questions, such as “What was your major in college?” A better question may be “Why did you choose _____ as your major in college?” In order to receive essential information, interviewers may find it helpful to use open-ended, job-related questions, such as “What is your greatest strength or ability and how do you use it in your current position?”

Illegal, non-job-related questions. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and Fair Employment Practices Guidelines state that it is illegal for employers to ask questions for the purpose of discriminating on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, age (40 to 70), disability or national origin. Inter-

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Recruiting methods



Print media

- Newspaper ads.
- Newsletter ads.
- Trade publication ads.

Electronic media

- “Employment” selection on company’s Web site.
- Internet job boards.
- Electronically available industry-matching services.



Personal networking

- Asking for referrals from:
 - Existing and former staff.
 - Members of a professional association to which you belong.
 - Other contacts.



Other methods

- Staffing agencies or paid search firms.
- College campus recruiters.

viewers can ask about these areas; however, only questions that pertain to the applicant’s ability to perform certain job-related tasks are permitted. For example, a district manager at a pharmaceutical company needs to hire a representative who can communicate in both French and English. It is appropriate to ask applicants what languages they speak, read and write, or to ask them to role-play an applicable dialogue in French. However, it is illegal to ask candidates if French is their native language or where they were born.

Involvement of biases and stereotypes.

Research indicates that how an interviewer rates an applicant can be influenced by a variety of factors, including the time of day, the sex of the interviewer and the interviewee, and the interviewer’s mood. Interviewers often exaggerate the good qualities of applicants who are more like themselves and favor these candidates over others. To guard against biases, it is important to approach each interviewee in a consistent manner with the same or similar questions.

Candidate order or contrast

error: Interview order can affect how candidates are evaluated. For example, after interviewing several “poor” candidates, an interviewer may rate an “average” candidate higher than he or she normally would. This contrast may influence the hiring manager to consider the “average” candidate who does not necessarily meet required standards.

Snap decisions. A study has shown that we make favorable or unfavorable judgments about someone we meet within 14 seconds. Examples of snap judgments that should be avoided in interviewing include:

- Labeling or stereotyping individuals based on their membership in a category or group (on the basis of gender, race or age, for example).
- Basing an opinion of a candidate on appearance – for example, equating an attractive applicant with a skilled or intelligent worker.

Interview preparation

It is important to prepare thoroughly before conducting interviews, including reviewing and preparing materials, developing questions, selecting and preparing other interviewers, and planning the physical setting.

If the company has a policies and procedures manual on hiring or interviewing, the interviewer should read or reread the manual before interviewing candidates. The interviewer should also review the job description for position requirements – skills, knowledge, experience required – against each candidate’s resume and cover letter. Areas where the job and the candidate match should be noted, as well as potential negatives or areas of concern, such as requirements that are not mentioned in the application materials.

In order to sell the company to candidates, the interviewer should assemble a packet of company information for applicants to take at the end of the interview. This preparation will ensure a favorable impression and takes only a few minutes.

After reviewing the job description and applicant materials, the interviewer should plan interview questions around the position requirements and areas where the job and the candidate match or do not match. It is important to tailor the interview to the job by framing questions for each position requirement (work experience, education, etc.).

A focus on behavioral interviewing can be helpful when developing preliminary interview questions. Behavioral interviewing involves requesting specific examples from the candidate’s past experience to illustrate how he or she might handle a similar experience in the future. In developing a behavioral interview question, the interviewer can use the STAR technique, which consists of the following components:

- Situation: the circumstances, including position and location.
- Task: the assignment or project the applicant was asked to handle.
- Action: the specific steps the applicant took to complete the task.
- Result: the outcome (or outcomes) of the action.

Besides the hiring manager and a human

resources representative, it may be beneficial to include other parties in the interviewing and hiring process. These may include the following individuals:

- Other higher-level managers.
- Other department or division managers.
- Employees who will be working with the new hire on the same level.
- Employees who will be reporting to the new hire.

Prepare your additional interviewers by providing them with information on the candidates and the questions you intend to ask. Interviewers should focus on key questions related to their personal expertise or background. Decide which style of interview to use, whether one-on-one or panel-style.

The hiring manager should pay special attention to the physical setting of the interview in the following ways:

- Find a comfortable place to conduct the interview where it will not be interrupted; try to arrange to use an uncluttered office, conference room or sitting area.
- Notify the receptionist of where and when the interviews are to take place, and provide the names of the candidates so they can be personally greeted when they walk in the door.

Conducting interviews

The interviewer can set the stage by introducing himself or herself and describing what is going to take place during the interview. The interviewer can continue to build rapport and put the applicant at ease by discussing the company and explaining how the job fits into the organizational structure – that is, how it relates to other key positions – instead of jumping right in with questions.

Once the manager begins asking questions, he or she should probe thoroughly and carefully, taking care to:

- Start with one or two easy questions that will make the interviewee feel comfortable before progressing to more difficult or challenging questions.
- Use analytical and listening skills to find important areas to probe further, based on the interviewee’s answers to questions.
- Use focused probes to elicit specific examples of how an interviewee acted in past positions, instead of receiving theoretical “How I would do it” answers.

• Attempt to motivate the candidate to keep communicating freely by thanking him or her for answering a difficult question, or through other rewarding behaviors.

• Pace the interview and allow the applicant an opportunity to ask questions as well, specifically asking if he or she has questions about the position or the organization; this may demonstrate the degree of effort he or she has put into getting to know the company.

• Conclude the interview by discussing what the next step will be and when the candidate may learn the results of the interview.

In addition to taking notes during the interview, an interviewer may gather information about the applicant by asking for work samples, testing, or obtaining and verifying references.

Deciding whom to hire

When interpreting all of the data received on the applicants in the interviews, the manager should make judgments consistent with the job description. The manager should:

- Be aware that interviewers tend to remember, and be more influenced by, negative rather than positive information.
- Consider using multiple interviews if it is believed that one or more of the interviewers’ opinion is prejudiced.

When the manager is finally ready to make a decision about whether to hire or reject an applicant, he or she should evaluate the relationships among the questions asked, the answers received and the judgments made. Also, the motivational fit, as well as the job fit, of each candidate should be assessed. That is, the manager should ask not only whether the person can do the job, but also whether he or she is likely to want to continue doing the job for the organization. To answer the second question, an effective manager will examine the company culture and determine if the lead candidate will be a good fit, because most employees connect with the culture of an organization more than the job.

Before making a job offer to a candidate, the manager should be knowledgeable about the laws regarding hiring practices, including the EEOC and Fair Employment Practices Guidelines. In addition, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 requires equal

access to employment and stipulates that reasonable accommodations must be made for candidates and employees with disabilities. Therefore, if an applicant indicates the need for a reasonable accommodation, the company is required to provide it. Refer to the human resources department and the company’s policies on hiring for more information concerning these laws. **PR**

The next article in this series will discuss strategies for effectively managing employees.



ARTICLE SUMMARY

- In order to select the right person for a position, the hiring manager must accurately define the job requirements.
- Next, it is important to develop recruiting strategies.
 - There are four primary recruitment methods: print media, electronic media, personal networking, and other methods such as staffing agencies or college recruiters.
 - Personal networking is an especially successful and efficient strategy.
- Common interview problems include poorly worded questions, illegal questions, biases and stereotypes, candidate order or contrast error, and snap decisions.
- Important steps to take when preparing for interviews include: reviewing and preparing materials, developing questions, selecting and preparing other interviewers, and planning the physical setting.
- A focus on behavioral interviewing can be helpful when developing preliminary interview questions.
- During an interview, the interviewer can build rapport and put the applicant at ease by:
 - Using analytical and listening skills to find important areas to probe further.
 - Attempting to motivate the candidate to keep communicating freely.
 - Pacing the interview and allowing the applicant an opportunity to ask questions as well.
 - Concluding the interview by discussing what the next step will be.
- When deciding whom to hire, the manager should make judgments consistent with the job description.
 - The manager should assess motivational fit and job fit.
 - Before making a job offer to a candidate, the manager should be knowledgeable about the laws regarding hiring practices.