

How to Interview Job Candidates



Excerpts from e-magnify.com

Business is going great – you’ve exceeded your financial projections and it’s time to hire another employee. Where do you find a qualified applicant? What do you really need them to do? How will you compensate them? Who will make the final hiring decision?

Too often, business owners hire “any warm body” to fill a position in their company. But this type of non-strategic approach will only lead to frustration in the short-term and the potential demise of your business in the long-term.

Strategic hiring is critical to the survival and success of any business – regardless of its size. The only non-duplicatable competitive advantage that you possess is your workforce. Filling open positions with “warm bodies” will never successfully align your employees with the vision, mission, and key strategic objectives of your business.

But how do you find the right person for the right job? How can you be sure that they will do what they say they can do? Is it enough to simply ask them to “tell me about yourself”?

The Basics of Preparing for the Interview: Think Like a Reporter

Reporters and journalists usually approach their stories by asking six key questions: Who, What, When, Where, Why and How. To prepare to interview job applicants, ask these six questions in the following context.

WHO will conduct the interview?

The size and reporting lines of your organization determine who will interview job applicants. If you are a small organization, you will probably be the only person interviewing a candidate. But if you have managers or a corporate culture that focuses on teamwork, you should expand the people involved in the interviewing process to include those key individuals with whom

the new hire will work.

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Including more than one person in the interview process can provide better insight into the credentials of the candidate. Additionally, it is important that new

hires share similar values and goals with the organization. These “soft” skills often determine whether the new hire will work out – or whether they will leave soon after being hired. Having the team assist in the interviewing process will give the candidate a better perspective of how work is done in your organization so that they can make an informed decision on whether they want to work for you or not.

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How To Interview *from front*

WHAT KSAs (Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities) and experience level are needed to succeed in this position?

It is imperative to have a well-written job description. These job descriptions provide the foundation for the entire recruiting and interviewing process. Not only do job descriptions clearly define the tasks, duties, and responsibilities, they also identify the essential functions (the key responsibilities in the position) and the job specifications.

Most of your questions in the interview will focus on the candidate's knowledge, skills, abilities, and experience. Remember: no two jobs have the exact same job requirements! Therefore, you must focus your questions on behaviors and experiences that you believe are predictive of success in this position; insight into these behaviors and experiences can easily be found in the job description.

WHEN will you advertise the opening and ask them to start?

How much time do you think that you will need in order to advertise the position, conduct the interviewing process, make the offer and then orient the new hire to your organization? It won't be two weeks. Most companies believe that it is simple to fill a job opening. Regardless of your organizational size, it isn't. Remember: your employees are your ONLY non-duplicatable competitive advantage – you're not looking for a warm body to fill a slot, you're looking for an individual who will help you achieve your strategic goals!

Set up a realistic timeline for the recruiting process. If you're advertising in the want ads, you need to develop strong copy that will attract job candidates who possess your desired KSAs. Determine the window for accepting resumes based on the level of the job within your organization – lower level jobs with a primarily tactical focus usually have a shorter window than higher

level, more strategic jobs. Also decide your preferred start date as well as whether there is some leeway available for a particularly well-qualified candidate.

WHERE will they work for you – at your place of employment or through telecommuting?

If you decide that the job may be eligible for a flexible work schedule, choose the schedule wisely. Telecommuting may be suitable for jobs or employees that require little supervision – just watch out for hourly non-exempt employees whose hours may trigger overtime. Since many of the older Baby Boomers are seeking challenging work outside the traditional 9-to-5 work schedule, you may want to consider flextime (flexible start and end times surrounding a mandatory core set of hours, usually from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.) or a compressed work week (working four 10-hour days, rather than five 8-hours day). A little flexibility may make you a more desirable employer for experienced workers who are unable or unwilling to work a traditional work week.

WHY is this job important to the workflow of your company?

NEVER hire someone without considering how their job fits in with the workflow of your company! The reason that you are in business is to create and sell a product or service to customers who are willing to pay for that product or service. Payroll is one of the largest expenses in any size organization. Having too large of a staff can eliminate profits. But having too small of a staff can undermine your ability to successfully meet your clients' needs. To avoid costly hiring mistakes, always consider your strategic objectives before creating and filling a job within your organization.

HOW will you compensate them?

While a job candidate may be very interested in becoming a part of your team, a key consideration will be whether your compensation meets their financial needs. But if you offer too low of a salary you may not be able to recruit the level of experience that you need to propel your company forward. Be sure that you can afford the compensation that you are offering by considering the "going rate" in your market for this type of job as well as the percentage of revenue that you can reasonably afford to pay without jeopardizing the viability of your company. (NOTE: Salary surveys can be found at www.careerbuilder.com and other job sites.)

One option that both large and small companies are moving toward is a more flexible, performance-based compensation structure. Rather than offering high starting salaries (before the employee has been able to prove his or her worth to the organization), consider a lower base salary with variable financial incentives based on their accomplishment of key performance objectives. In this way, you will keep your fixed overhead expense low, but can reward employees for their contributions to your company's success.

All of these questions must be answered prior to the interview. Your answers will determine the criteria upon which you will determine who gets the job offer. Good luck!

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