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Interviewing Tips for Employers

An interview is part of almost every hiring process. Interviewing can be expensive and time consuming for a company. Typically, the interview is one of the final evaluations of a candidate. Yet, many people believe that they can just “wing it” when conducting an interview, and many organizations do not take the time to prepare or train their interviewers. Improving the interview process can lead to higher quality new hires, which will certainly pay dividends for the company.

The Groundwork

One of the most important steps in conducting an effective interview (and the overall hiring process) is to develop a full understanding of the open position – the required experience and skills, responsibilities, and expectations. The hiring manager should work with the internal stakeholders to develop and agree upon a profile of the ideal candidate with the key attributes to succeed in the position. If it is an existing position, the hiring manager should consider what made prior employees successful or unsuccessful in that role. If it is a new position, the hiring manager should focus on the reasons why the position was created and the expectations for the position.

Once a detailed description of the position has been created, the hiring manager should hold a planning meeting with decision makers to determine the steps that will be taken with prospective candidates and develop the overall hiring plan based on the ideal candidate profile. The plan includes the parameters around, and identifies those who will participate in, the initial screening of candidates as well as the interviews, which normally occur at a relatively late stage of the process. Most companies only interview a “short list” of candidates who have made it through the initial screening and review process.

Deciding who to include on the interview team is very important. Whenever possible, the new hire’s direct manager or supervisor should be

included. The relationship between a new hire and that employee’s direct boss can largely determine how long the employee stays at the company. Depending on the position, it may also be useful to include higher level executives and team members or colleagues who will work with the new hire. By including more people at different levels within the organization, the hiring manager will hopefully gain a more complete picture of each candidate and his or her potential “cultural fit”.

Preparing the Interviewers

The hiring manager should meet with all of the interviewers in advance to prepare them for the candidate interviews. Some of the interviewers and perhaps, some members of management will think that this is an unnecessary step. It can, however, significantly improve the effectiveness of the interview process. The detailed profile developed for the position at the outset of the search can help the interviewers to better understand the necessary skills and attributes that a candidate must possess. Additionally, it is useful if the company requires each interviewer to complete a short evaluation of how well each candidate matches up with the position requirements, including “cultural fit” and other relevant qualifications.

The hiring manager should also provide the interviewers with some “standard questions” to be asked in each interview and which focus on the most important skills and attributes necessary to succeed in the position and at the company. If each interviewer is allowed to come up with their own questions without any uniformity, evaluating each candidate becomes more difficult. This is not to suggest that the entire interview must be scripted. However, a more “standard process” can aid in the evaluation of candidates and can be a defense against potential discrimination claims by unsuccessful candidates. It is also important that the interviewers understand what questions they may not ask. Discrimination and privacy laws vary by country or by province, region, or

state within a country. If unsure of the legal requirements governing interviews and the hiring process in a particular jurisdiction, the hiring manager should seek the advice of legal counsel. It is also important to understand cultural differences and customs before conducting interviews for an international position. While “cultural gaffes” committed by interviewers may not subject the company to legal liability, they can damage the company’s reputation and potentially hurt global expansion efforts.

During the Interview

An interview is an opportunity, not only for a company to evaluate a candidate more closely, but also, for the candidate to evaluate the company. Therefore, the company should “roll out the red carpet” and welcome each candidate. It is important that the candidate leave with a favorable impression of the company after the interview. In the “social media age” negative opinions can spread rapidly. One of the worst impressions that an interviewer can give is that he did not bother to prepare for the interview by at least becoming familiar with the candidate’s resume or CV. Asking questions that are easily answered by reviewing those documents is a waste of everyone’s valuable time. Also, while an interviewer should “sell” the highlights of the position and the company, he should allow the candidate to do most of the talking and listen attentively.

The goal of the interview is to find out as much as possible about the candidate. To try and put the candidate more at ease, it is a good idea to start the interview with a little bit of “small talk” (while remembering to avoid impermissible topics). If the candidate is less tense, she will be more likely to open up to the interviewer and share more information about herself. Also, the interviewer should make sure to ask open ended questions that require more than just a “yes or no” response. Many HR professionals favor behavioral interview questions, which typically require the interviewee to provide specific examples of past experiences in which they demonstrated a key trait or characteristic.

At the conclusion of each interview, the interviewer should thank the candidate for his or her time. Forgetting to extend this common courtesy could leave the candidate with a negative impression of both the interviewer and the company. Also, it is important that each candidate

leave with a clear understanding of the “next steps” in the company’s decision-making process.

Evaluating the Candidates

The hiring team should meet promptly following the interviews to discuss the interviewers’ evaluations and compare each candidate against the position profile. Interviews, by their nature, involve subjective evaluations. However, the interviewers should try to remain as objective as possible in their assessment of each candidate. While an interviewer should not totally ignore his “gut feeling” if something does not “feel right” about a candidate, he must be careful not to allow personal biases to cloud his judgment. A candidate’s potential cultural fit is important, and the interview process often provides the most insight on that subject. However, each member of the hiring team should remember that the ultimate goal is to find the candidate most likely to excel in the position, not a new “best friend”.

Sanford Rose Associates® offices help their clients get the most out of the interview process. At the beginning of each search assignment, Sanford Rose Associates® consultants work closely with their client to develop a comprehensive Position Profile detailing the responsibilities as well as the requirements for success. Based on that Position Profile, Sanford Rose Associates® search consultants identify potential candidates, conduct the initial screening and candidate review on a large number of prospects, and only present those candidates who are a good match for, and genuinely interested in, the opportunity to their client. After presenting this “short list” of qualified candidates within a relatively short time period, Sanford Rose Associates® offices coordinate the interview logistics and details with the candidates and their client. Promptly after the interviews, the search consultants follow up with the candidates and provide valuable “real time” feedback to the company. Improving the quality and efficiency of the interview process is one of the ways that Sanford Rose Associates® search consultants strive to meet the ultimate goal of “finding people who make a difference®” to fill their clients’ critical openings.

—Rick Carter

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