

How to Interview Successfully

Stone (2008:238-245) provides a few pointers on how to interview successfully:

1. Know the job

In order to select the right person, it is imperative that the people interviewing know the job to be filled; if not, how is a match to be obtained? Research indicates that when job information is used to develop interview questions as well as to evaluate the applicant's answers, the validity of the interview is enhanced. Moreover, interviewers who are given more complete job information make selection decisions with higher inter rating reliability.

2. Know the personal attributes, experience, skills and qualifications

If candidates are to be measured on common standards then it is vital for those interviewing to understand the critical selection factors before getting involved in the selection process. Before interviewing, what you want must be known. The qualifications, experience and special skills must be related to the job that is if the applicant is to satisfactorily perform the job.

3. Set specific objectives

The information that is to be achieved during the interview must be established before. Time should be taken before to develop questions to ask the applicants. If the interviewer knows what is being looked for, then they are more likely to detect its presence or absence in applicants.

4. Provide the proper setting for the interview

The interview is important to the image of the company and to the applicant; and is to be conducted in private, free from any interruptions and professional. Research by Harn and Thorton, has found that behaviours of interviewers towards applicants can influence their

decision to accept or reject a job offer; particularly when interviewing job applicants with a disability. The figure below provides some pointers when interviewing applicants with disabilities.

Table: Etiquette for interviewing candidates with disabilities

Source: Stone (2008: 239)

When interviewing any applicant with a disability:

- **Always offer to shake hands. Do not avoid eye contact, but don't stare either.**
- **If you feel it appropriate, offer the applicant assistance (for example, if an individual with poor grasping ability has trouble opening a door), but don't assume it will necessarily be accepted. Don't automatically give assistance without asking first.**
- **If you know in advance that an applicant has a particular disability, try to get some information before the interview on how the limitations of the disability may affect the performance of the essential functions of the job.**

When interviewing an applicant who uses a wheelchair:

- **Don't lean on the wheelchair.**
- **Make sure you get on the same eye level with the applicant during the interview.**
- **Don't push the wheelchair unless asked.**
- **Keep accessibility in mind. (Is the chair in the middle of your office a barrier to a wheelchair user? If so, move it aside.)**
- **Don't be embarrassed to use natural phrases such as 'Let's walk over to the plant.'**

When interviewing an applicant who is blind:

- **Identify yourself and others present immediately, cue a handshake verbally or physically.**
 - **Be descriptive in giving directions. (The table is about five steps to your left)**
 - **Don't shout**
 - **Don't be embarrassed to use natural phrases like 'Do you see what I mean?'**
 - **Keep doors either open or closed, not half opened, as this is a serious hazard.**
 - **Don't touch an applicant's cane. Do not touch or pet a guide dog.**
 - **Offer assistance in travel by letting the applicant grasp your left arm, just above the elbow.**
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When interviewing an applicant who is deaf:

- You may need to use a physical signal to get the applicant's attention
- If the applicant is lip reading, enunciate clearly, and place yourself where there is ample lighting.
- Communicate by using a combination of gestures, facial expressions and note passing.
- If you don't understand what the applicant is telling you, ask them to repeat the sentence. Don't pretend that you understand.
- If necessary, use a sign language interpreter, but be sure to always speak directly to the applicant. Don't say to the interpreter, 'Tell her that'

5. Review the application form or resume

The interviewer must review the application form or resume to determine if any additional information is required, if any information needs to be clarified or expanded on or if there are any unexplained gaps in employment history.

6. Be aware of prejudices

Most people have prejudice of some sort and if applicants are to be appraised objectively, it is important that these prejudices do not intrude on the selection decision; otherwise the interviewer runs the risk of losing good candidates and leaving the way open to charges of discrimination. Interviewers must know their prejudices and recognise when they exist.

7. Don't make snap decisions

Research indicates that interviewers make a judgement about an applicant in the first three to five minutes of the interview and from that point on, the interviewer hear and sees only information that confirms initial impressions. Interviewers must be alert to this tendency and judgement must be reserved until all relevant information about the applicant has been gathered.

8. Put the applicant at ease

The applicant must be put at ease so that the interview can flow freely; so first break the ice. Try not to be overly formal by acting in a superior way as this may fail to get all the facts.

9. Watch the body language

The interviewer should look for non-verbal signals, such as facial expressions, fidgeting, arm movements and the like, which can give important clues as to what the applicant is really thinking or feeling. Interviewers must especially be alert to cultural differences, as different cultures may attach different meanings to specific aspects of non-verbal behaviour.

10. Encourage the applicant to do most of the talking

When the interviewer is talking, not much learning of the applicant is taking place. The more the applicant talks, the more the interviewer will learn about them. The interviewer should encourage open-ended questions and follow-up questions. The interview can be ruined if the interviewer monopolises the conversation. A list of sample questions to ask in the interview may be seen below.

Table: Know what to ask

Source: Stone (2008: 242)

Questions to reveal integrity/honesty/trustworthiness

- **Discuss a time when your integrity was challenged. How did you handle it?**
 - **What would you do if someone asked you to do something unethical?**
 - **Have you ever experienced a loss for doing what is right?**
 - **Have you ever asked for forgiveness for doing something wrong?**
 - **In what business situations do you feel honesty would be inappropriate?**
 - **If you saw a colleague doing something dishonest, would you tell your boss?
What would you do about it?**
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Questions to reveal personality/temperament/ability to work with others

- If you took out a full-page ad in the paper and had to describe yourself in only three words, what would those words be?
- How would you describe your personality?
- What motivates you the most?
- If I call your references, what will they say about you?
- Do you consider yourself a risk-taker? Describe a situation in which you had to take a risk.
- What kind of environment would you like to work in?
- What kinds of people would you rather not work with?
- What kind of responsibilities would you like to avoid in your next job?
- What are two or three examples of tasks that you do not particularly enjoy doing? Indicate how you remain motivated to complete those tasks?
- What kinds of people bug you?
- Tell me about a work situation that irritated you?
- Have you ever had to resolve conflict with a colleague or client? How did you resolve it?
- Describe the appropriate relationship between a supervisor and subordinates?
- What sort of relationships do you have with your associates, both at the same level and above and below you?
- Tell me about some of the groups you've had to get co-operation from. What did you do?
- What is your management style? How do you think your subordinates perceive you?
- As a manager, have you ever had to dismiss anyone? If so, what were the circumstances, and how did you handle it?
- Have you ever been in a situation where a project was returned for errors? What effect did this have on you?
- What previous job was the most satisfying and why?
- What job was the most frustrating and why?
- What do you think you owe to your current employer?
- What is the most difficult decision you've had to make? How did you arrive at your decision?

- Describe some situations in which you worked under pressure or met deadlines.
- Were you ever in a situation in which you had to meet two different deadlines given to you by two different people and you couldn't do both? What did you do?
- What type of approach to solving work problems seems to work best for you? Give me an example of when you solved a tough problem.

Questions to reveal past mistakes

- Tell me about an objective in your last job that you failed to meet and why.
- How did you deal with the last time that you were criticised?
- What have you learned about your mistakes?
- Tell me about a situation where you messed up. How did you resolve it or correct it?
- Tell me about a situation where you abruptly had to change what you were doing.
- If you had the opportunity to change anything in your career, what would you have done differently?

Questions to reveal creativity/creative thinking/problem solving

- When was the last time you thought out of the box or broke the rules and how did you do it?
- What have you done that was innovative?
- Give me an example of when someone brought you a new idea, particularly one that was odd or unusual. What did you do?
- If you could do anything in the world, what would you do?

Miscellaneous good questions

- How do you measure your own success?
 - What is the most interesting thing you've done in the past three years?
 - What are your short-term or long-term career goals?
 - Why should we hire you?
 - What do you think it takes to be successful in a company like ours?
 - How did the best manager you've ever had motivate you to improve? Why did that work?
 - What are you most proud of?
 - What is important to you in a job?
 - What do you expect to find in our company that you don't have now?
 - Is there anything you want me to know about you that we haven't discussed?
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11. Keep control of the interview

The specific objectives that the interviewer has set for the interview must be constantly kept in mind. The interviewer must make certain to get all the facts needed to make a decision; so ensure that the applicant talks about relevant subjects.

12. Explain the job

The interviewer must explain the key aspects of the job and where it fits into the organisation; as the applicant also needs accurate information about the job. The interviewer should therefore ask whether the applicant has any questions.

13. Close the interview

This should be done in a friendly way. If the applicant is clearly not the person the interviewer is seeking, they should be told tactfully. If the applicant appears suitable and is to proceed to the next step in the selection process, the interviewer should say so. If the interviewer is not in a position to give an answer on the spot, the interviewer must say when the applicant might expect to hear from the company.

14. Write up the interview

One of the biggest deficiencies in interviewing is the failure by interviewers to write up the results of the interview while it is still fresh in their minds. Accuracy is increased if facts and impressions are recorded as soon as possible; this however, may also be done during the interview through the use of an applicant evaluation form. This form will differ from company to company based on what the company deems important to be noted on this form. Normally the applicant would be rated according to the following, but not limited to, on the applicant evaluation form:

- First impression that they have made
- Appearance
- Self-expression
- Behaviour during the interview
- Responsiveness
- Background of the applicant – education, training and work experience
- Track record
- Teamwork
- Plans for the future
- Motivation of the applicant
- Overall evaluation

15. Check references

The interviewer should wait until the interview is over before making a decision and should never make a job offer until a thorough reference check has been conducted and completed. One of the biggest mistakes in reference checking is to only talk to one referee; the interviewer should talk to a few. A referee who is well acquainted with the applicant's work means a more valid reference will be obtained. This is a critical section that is often overlooked.

16. Evaluate the interview

The HR person within the company must ensure that all information required has been collected, that the objectives were achieved and that the overall interviewing technique has been evaluated. The candidate that were selected but also be reviewed; were they the best suited person for that job and are they still in that position after a few months. What would also assist in this exercise is to look at the labour turnover figures and the performance appraisal.