Staff Interview Guidelines

Recruitment ideas for employers

Expert knowledge means success

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Introduction

The purpose of an interview between a candidate and a prospective employer is to get the measure of each other and to exchange information. Job candidates possess various qualifications, skills and strengths to offer and a prospective employer is looking for those attributes to fill a position at work. The ideal outcome is that candidates and employers achieve a near perfect match. Remember that not all people are equally productive. As an employer, you may have already discovered that, although some applicants met all the technical and specialist requirements, made a good impression during the selection process, their actual performance once recruited didn't turn out to be what was expected of them.

With the demand for talented people now outstripping the supply of those same people, organisations everywhere are undertaking initiatives to improve the quality of their recruitment practices. This typically involves implementing new strategies and tactics in both the how applicants are targeted and screened when responding.

A Two-Way Process

Don't forget that the job interview should be seen as a two-way process. It's a chance for you to assess whether the applicant is the right person for the job, as well as the applicant finding out whether the job and the company are for him/her. Allow time for applicants to raise their own questions. Their questions to you ought to be such that your answers will help them decide whether your company is the one they want to work for.

The Applicant's Questions Are Important

As an employer, you ought to be able to judge an applicant both on the quality of answers given to your questions as well as the appropriateness of the questions they raise themselves.

Stress

Interviews can be stressful for many applicants as being judged and assessed tends to provoke a stress response and applicants may become anxious. As an employer, this is something you should take into account during the interview process.

The 4 Phases of an Employment Interview

An interview is an opportunity for an employer to probe into an applicant's career and background to find out the following:

- Ability to do the job - examination of skills & abilities, experience and qualifications;
- Willingness to do the job - discovery of motivation, attitude and ambition;
- Team player suitability - ability and willingness to slot into the current structure.

There are usually four phases to an interview:

- The Warm-up or Introduction Stage. In this phase, both the candidate and employer are establishing first impressions and making personal introductions and establishing rapport;
- Background and Probe Stage. The prospective employer will ask the candidate about educational background and work experience. The employer will discuss skills and abilities in more detail, relative to the organisation's needs;
- Matching Stage. This is stage when the candidate gets the chance to highlight personal qualifications and strengths to show a good match between him/her and the position on offer;
- Final Questions and Close. The end of the interview is usually accentuated with philosophical or long-range questions.

Quick Tips for Employers

1. Recruit in Haste, Repent at Leisure
2. Hire Slow, Fire Fast

These mean that you should take great care (and time) in recruiting. **Try to get it right. It's** almost better not to fill the vacant position (perhaps relying on temporary workers in the interim) rather than taking on the wrong person.

Bosses are in the difficult position of having a very short time in front of a candidate to make up their minds as to their ability to do the job.

An error in hiring the wrong person can mean being stuck with a non-performer who will lower both productivity and morale in the rest of the organisation.

It can also mean wasting money on the recruitment agency fees payable – remember that the fees are the same for the right as well as the wrong candidate.

Open Questions

It's always best to ask open questions – questions that require a considered response and which encourage dialogue so that the interviewer can get to know the candidate and his/her skills better. Closed questions are really of no use - these questions simply seek a "yes" or "no" response.

Here are a few questions you might like to put to candidates - they will help you to gauge an applicant's suitability for the job position on offer:

1.   How would you describe yourself?
2.   How do you think others would describe you?
3.   How do you handle criticism?
4.   What do you know about our company?
5.   Why do you want to work here?
6.   What would you do for us that would make a difference?
7.   How long would it take you to make a meaningful contribution to our company?
8.   What about the job offered do you find the most and least attractive?
9.   Why should we recruit you?
10. What do you look for in a job?
11. What do you expect from this job?
12. What is your definition of the position for which you are being interviewed?
13. How long do you expect stay with us?
14. Why did you leave your last job and, if applicable, what have you been doing since your last job?
15. What salary are you expecting?

Digging Deeper

The overview questions can then be followed by questions aimed at learning more about the personality and other attributes of the applicant:

1.   Do you generally speak to people before they speak to you?
2.   What was the last book you read?
3.   What new skills or capabilities have you developed recently?
4.   What is the toughest part of a job for you?
5.   Are you pro-active?
6.   How would you describe your own personality?
7.   Do you prefer to work by yourself or with others?
8.   Can you act on your own initiative?
9.   How could you improve yourself?

10. What are your future goals?
11. Can you give me an example from a previous job where you've shown initiative?
12. What are your strengths and weaknesses?
13. What have you learned from your past jobs and what were your biggest responsibilities?
14. Do you achieve your goals or do you feel stopped by setbacks?
15. How do you cope with stress?
16. Can you make decisions quickly?
17. Are you self-assured and consistent?
18. Are you alert and attentive?
19. Are you appreciative or do you tend to focus on **other people's** shortcomings?
20. Are you able to motivate, enthuse and inspire others?
21. Would you say that you are affectionate or rather cool and distant?

Government Guidance

The Government website at: www.businesslink.gov.uk provides a wealth of useful information and guidance for employers at the following section: *Employing people: Recruitment and getting started.*

The following guidance was originally published by the Department for Education and Employment. As of 28 June 2007, employment law is now the remit of the newly formed Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform and skills is now the remit of the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills.

Better Recruitment

Key questions are:

- Where do you advertise now?
- Could you recruit more effectively in other places?

If you always advertise vacancies in the same one or two places you can limit the numbers of potential recruits. This may be okay for jobs that are easily filled, but not for jobs needing hard to find skills. Potential recruitment sources include:

- Jobcentres;
- Adverts in:
  - local, national and trade press;
  - journals of professional institutes;
  - internet sites;
  - local radio and TV;
- Career officers in schools and colleges;
- Local Careers Service for young people and adults;
- University appointment boards;
- National Training Organisations;
- Recruitment agencies and executive search consultants;
- Trade associations;
- Trade unions;
- Your own employees.

If the vacancy is not urgent, or you have several vacancies to fill, you may also want to try:

- Recruitment fairs run by commercial exhibition organisers or jobcentres;
- Careers events run by schools, colleges and universities;
- Hosting an open invitation event at a local hotel in the evening or weekend;
- An "open day" for potential recruits to see your premises, talk to staff and take away literature;
- Offering work experience opportunities to schools, colleges and universities. This has the added benefit of helping young recruits understand the world of work and develop the attitudes and motivation to be an asset to your business.

Better Job Adverts

Key Questions are:

- Are your job adverts effective?
- Could you make them better?

If you rely on job advertisements, they must be well written, well presented, and catch the eye and the interest of the type of candidate you wish to attract. This does not mean that they have to be expensive to create or involve the high costs of taking quarter or half pages in the media. A small advertisement that highlights the key features of the job can be very effective.

Research shows that the four most important items to include in a job advertisement are:

1. The employer's name.
2. Job title and brief description of the work.
3. The location of the job and any relevant travelling.
4. The pay - this could be in a range or as an approximation.

Casting your Net More Widely

The key question is:

- Are you fishing in all the right pools?

You may have got used to placing advertisements to reach a narrow range of potential recruits, such as experienced staff in other companies or graduates in a particular discipline. But you may get better results by looking more widely including changing the job, taking on someone to train, and flexible working patterns. Here are identified groups you may not have tried to target before including:

- Women who want to return after bringing up a family - you may need to offer relevant training;
- People with disabilities - you may need to adjust working arrangements to help suitable recruits;
- Ethnic minorities;
- Older workers;
- Unemployed people, including those from outside the normal travel to work area for your business - you may want to offer help with transport;
- Former staff including those who retired early;
- Temporary or interim managers.

Over two million disabled people are working and this is because their employer knows they are the best person for the job. Nevertheless, there are over a million disabled people who want jobs but are out of work - even though many have similar qualities and skill to those who have jobs. Most disabled people don't need any special help to do their jobs, but where help is necessary it is often at little or no cost - and there may be Government help with the costs.

The Access to Work programme is designed to help disabled people and their employers find solutions to any practical obstacles at work.

There are also special programmes for the over 50's, lone parents, unemployed and education leavers. Find out more from your local Jobcentre or use the Jobseeker Direct helpline on +44 (0)845 6060 234.

The Selection Process

The key question is:

- How can you improve the selection process?

Beware - even when your recruitment process brings in the applicants you want, your selection process can lose them. You could try to avoid this by:

- Replying promptly and politely to job applicants;

- Giving the opportunity for an informal, no commitment discussion before people decide to send in a formal application;

- Giving applicants more information about the company, the job and the terms of employment than you included in the advertisement;

- Being objective when deciding which applicants to interview - the selection criteria should be based on the job description and person specification;

- Holding interviews promptly;

- Providing suitable interview facilities and adequate time to be thorough;

- Providing relevant training (including on avoiding gender and racial bias) for managers who conduct interviews;

- Explaining the nature and purpose of any tests involved; use only psychometric tests which are formally validated, and are administered and interpreted by trained staff;

- Assessing candidates only against clearly identified requirements for the job to avoid judgements on the basis of assumptions or stereotypes, and considering whether adjustments will enable individual disabled people to do the job;

- Giving candidates an early decision on their application and where appropriate test results - giving feedback to unsuccessful candidates is a courtesy and good public relations.

Pay Levels

The key question is:

- How do you know your pay offer is in line with local rates?

It is not good practice to base your judgement on a few employees who have left for higher paid jobs, or on higher salaries seen in a few job advertisements.

All organisations experience some staff movement. Employees may leave for other reasons but quote pay as the easiest explanation. Job titles in advertisements may be similar to yours, but the job content may be different.

Reliable data about the competitiveness of your company's pay levels can be found in:

- Pay surveys published by pay research bodies; commercial surveys run by consultants; or surveys produced by or for professional institutes for particular occupations;

- The information services that regional and national trade associations and other employers' organisations provide to their members;

- Advice from local Jobcentres;

- Pay data exchanged between members of "Salary Clubs" - groups of employers who agree to swap information about pay and other employment issues.

Surveys will show you the upper and lower limits of the pay range that different employers pay for the same or similar jobs. Paying the average (or median) amount in that range is not necessarily the best option. You may decide you need to be a market leader. Or you can use particularly attractive non-pay benefits to compensate for below average pay - interesting work, excellent training, and good career opportunities.

How does your total employment package compare with the market?

Professional pay surveys usually include information about non-pay benefits such as pensions, holidays, sick pay and company cars. Compare your total package with what other employers are offering; you may find that making the employment package more flexible - offering more choice - makes it more attractive and helps you recruit more successfully. Think about offering:

- Flexible working hours, with employees able to choose start and finish times built around a core time when everyone must be at work;

- A choice of levels of pension contributions by both employer and employee;

- A choice of car within a specified range or a "cash for car" choice;

- Flexibility around holidays and extra days for longer service;

- Minimum levels of training and development assured in future years;

- Annual profit-related bonuses or similar schemes by which employees can share in the success of the business;
- A "cafeteria benefits" scheme, with employees able to choose their own package within clearly defined limits.

Flexibility

The key question is:

- How flexible are your working arrangements?

You might like to consider filling your skills gap by employing someone who works:

- Short days;
- Mornings or afternoon only;
- Two or three full days per week;
- Evening shifts;
- Weekend shifts;
- Full-time in school term time only;
- On a job-sharing basis;
- From home, perhaps with a computer link;
- A mix of company and home-based working;
- As a freelance self employed professional.

If you are able to do so, you might want to provide childcare support for some of these arrangements.

For more information on the legislation relating to flexible working rights see our publication *IP 591: Flexible Working Regulations.*

Eligibility and Suitability

If you get someone who's eligible and suitable, you're very lucky. But experience shows that they get bored and move on to new pastures and challenges elsewhere.

On the other hand, someone that's eligible but unsuitable is a bad fit so far as you're concerned – maybe you should be honest and go for suitability first and eligibility second.

The worst thing you can do is to recruit someone (or retain them, if they're already part of your team) if they're not eligible and they're unsuitable. Then you're really in trouble – you've got someone who's a misfit.

Maybe the best thing you could do is to look for someone who's suitable but not eligible – often "eligibility" can be learned. Then you've got yourself a surprise fit.

When you're interviewing, try to do these things:

- Ask the right questions based upon the job analysis and person specification – see the list earlier in this paper;
- **Don't ask "closed"** questions that require only a "yes" or "no" answer. Instead, ask questions that require the candidate to provide an answer in depth;
- Try to develop a systematic scoring method that enables you to make proper and reliable discriminations between candidates;
- Make your selection of the right candidate based on complete data – keep notes of what is discussed and let the candidate do most of the talking;
- **Focus on the candidate's good points and don't rely too much on the** negative ones – you may have a "surprise fit" person sitting right in front of you;
- Be aware of your natural biases – by **being aware, you'll make a better** selection. Remember things such as: (1) we tend to like people who are most **like us; (2) "attractive"** applicants tend to encourage job offers rather more **than "unattractive"** applicants and (3) disabled people get fewer job offers than other people;
- **Don't be over-**influenced by what is called the "contrast effect" – after seeing one applicant who's absolutely the wrong person, there's an inclination to give the next candidate a much better rating.

Predictors of On-the-Job Performance	% Accuracy
Interviews	14%
Reference Checks + Interviews	26%
Personality Testing + Reference Checks + Interviews	38%
Ability-Personality Testing + Reference Checks + Interviewing	54%
Interests-Abilities-Personality Testing + Reference Checks + Interviews	66%
Job Matching (performance benchmarking) + all of the above	75%

The Law

An employer has so many things to think about when interviewing a prospective employee that it's easy to forget some of the legal requirements and obligations that apply today – such as:

- Discrimination at work, e.g. on grounds of
  - Race;
  - Disability;
  - Sex;
  - sexual orientation;
  - age.

- National minimum wage;

- Equal Pay legislation;

- Part-time work regulations;

- Working hours regulations;

- Employing Temporary Workers.

Employers should make sure that the entire recruitment and selection process is fair and accessible so that it complies with relevant equal opportunities and data protection legislation.

For more information on avoiding discrimination at the interview and induction stages see our publication *IP 589: Anti-Discrimination Legislation.*

Recommended Reading

- Competency-based Recruitment and Selection, by Robert Wood, Tim Payne, published by John Wiley and Sons Ltd; ISBN-10: 0471974730; ISBN-13: 978-0471974734

- Recruitment and Selection, by Gareth Roberts, published by Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD); ISBN-10: 1843981173; ISBN-13: 978-1843981176

- Teach Yourself Recruitment, by Edward Peppitt, published by Teach Yourself; ISBN-10: 0340799897; ISBN-13: 978-0340 799895

- The Recruitment and Retention of People with Disabilities, by Nigel Meager et al, published by Institute for Employment Studies; ISBN-10: 1851842276; ISBN-13: 978-1851842278

- Competing for Talent: Key Recruitment and Retention Strategies for Becoming an Employer of Choice, by Nancy S. Ahlrichs, Nancy Ahlrichs, published by Davies-Black Publishing; ISBN-10: 0891061487; ISBN-13: 978-0891061489

Further Information

An excellent source of information for interviewers can be found at:

www.job-interview.net/Bank/interviewquestions.htm

This guide is for general interest - it is always essential to take advice on specific issues.
We believe that the facts are correct as at the date of publication, but there may be certain errors and omissions for which we cannot be responsible.