

## Featured Article: Effective Hiring & First Impressions

Hiring great talent is not easy and if you are truly interested in hiring the best talent the market holds, it is important to remember that this may be the first interface a candidate will have your organization. So how do you make the first impression a good one? How do make sure you are not wasting time and money? How do you ensure you get the best candidates? How do you close the deal?

First things first, **HAVE A PROCESS**. Make sure you have answers to the following questions prior to interviewing:

- ?? What and where is the need?
- ?? When does the position need to be filled by?
- ?? What will this person be doing (job description)?
- ?? What are the qualifications for this position?
- ?? What is the salary range for this position, including bonus potential?
- ?? Who will this person report to? Where will this person fit in amongst the rest of the team?
- ?? Who will be the point person on this search?
- ?? How will we find candidates for this position (post the position, utilize internal recruiters, contact an outside search firm)?
- ?? What information will be required to determine candidacy (i.e., resume, writing sample, transcripts, test scores) and complete a candidates application?
- ?? Once complete applications are received for the position, who will review the resumes to determine interest?
- ?? Who will conduct first interviews? How long will candidates spend with each interviewer? What is the order of interviews?
- ?? What do we want to ask in a first interview? What do we want to know/accomplish? What do we want to convey? What is important for this person to know about the position?
- ?? Should we all ask the same questions or different questions? Should we do a panel interview or individual interviews?
- ?? How will we collect feedback on each interview (evaluation interview forms work best)?
- ?? Will there be second interviews and who will conduct them? Third interviews?
- ?? How many candidates do we want to interview for a first, second, third?
- ?? How are we going to track applicants and manage the process?

### **DEFINING A PROCESS AND SETTING PARAMETERS**

Before contacting a recruiter or starting a search, it is important that you have the majority of the questions answered above. It is equally as important that there is a consensus regarding the process and the parameters, among all those interviewing and participating in making this hiring decision. I have seen more clients waste time and money, because their own team was not on the same page when interviewing candidates. The most costly outcome when these things are not clearly defined or communicated amongst the team interviewing is not the loss of time or money, but the loss of a great candidate. Candidates will become disinterested, and left with an impression that the organization lacks leadership and direction when they receive mixed messages from the interviewers.

If it is a new position, it is very likely that your job description, and even the qualifications you are seeking in a candidate, will change as you start the interview process. This is not a problem, if properly managed and adequately communicated. It is critical to communicate to the candidate that this is a new position, and that the candidate you decide to hire, will depend a great deal on what that person brings to the table. For a newly created position, it is important to look for candidates who are open to change, open minded, and consider themselves able to “think outside the box”. You don’t want someone who needs a clear and

concise job description. By the end of the interview process, you will more than likely have a stronger grasp and understanding of what you need and want based on what you hear and see from the candidates. The position is also likely to change in the first year, and it is important the candidate understands this coming in to the position. Innovative organizations would take this new position and the interviewing process as an opportunity to learn. Ask all the candidates who interview to tell you what value they can add to the position. What they bring to the table that was not mentioned in the job description. Is there anything they would add to responsibilities of the position based on their experience.

You have (1) established a process; (2) set parameters for the search; (3) garnered consensus amongst your team; and (4) identified candidates that are qualified, and you are interested in interviewing. So let's start interviewing.

### **GENERAL THOUGHTS**

- ?? Make sure to allocate enough time to interview a candidate—At least 30-45 minutes for individual interviews and an hour to an hour and a half for a panel of 2 or more.
- ?? Every “interviewer” in the process should have general knowledge of the candidate prior to the interview and a “desire” to interview—It’s a fact most people don’t look forward to interviewing.
- ?? Any company interviewing a “recruit” candidate (a candidate that’s not looking to make a move) must keep in mind that it’s important to “sell” the organization and the opportunity. 9 out of 10 times these are the best candidates and the ones you will want to hire.
- ?? Initial interviews for recruit candidates are to learn more about the position, company, culture and yes, you, the interviewer!
- ?? You may want to create two interviews (questions to ask, what you want to accomplish). One interview for recruit candidates and one for non-recruits. The focus for non-recruits—is for them to really sell you. For the recruit candidates—you will be selling each other.
- ?? Cover “pros” and “cons” of the position with the candidate.
- ?? Create an outline of what you want in a candidate - Every person in the interview process should do the same.
- ?? Remember, just like there is no such thing as the perfect job—there’s no such thing as the perfect candidate. If you have 80-90% of what you want, you more than likely have a match.
- ?? A candidate should be able to (proactively) position what he or she can bring to an organization. Remember it is an interview and the majority of candidates (even recruit candidates) are going to be selling themselves. As the interviewer it is important to determine what is confidence and what is arrogance (the two can get confused), and remember they are selling themselves.
- ?? Avoid letting your guard down with a candidate. Do not get too personal in the interview. Candidates will often reciprocate and let their guard down—it is human nature for candidates to reciprocate with like action. However, some of the common feedback I have received from clients is the candidate, “felt too comfortable.” This is often times, because the interviewer let them feel too comfortable.
- ?? Avoid talking too much about yourself or your management style. Telling too much gives candidates the opportunity to alter responses to what they think you want to hear.
- ?? Ask open-ended questions, and make sure to listen to how they answer a question (directly or indirectly, with or without examples). Listen to what they don’t tell you.
- ?? Have an outline with pre-determined questions specific to the job, the qualifications required, what is important in regards to fit (i.e., works better autonomously or as a member of a team, deals well with stress or doesn’t, etc.)
- ?? Take notes and evaluate the candidate at the end of the interview with a few lines on overall general impressions and then rate them on a scale of 1 to 10 against the other candidates you have interviewed.

### **GENERIC QUESTIONS**

1. Will you walk me through your background?—The idea is to look for holes in the resume, excessive job movement and lack of relevant experience. Try to spend no more than 15 minutes on a resume “walkthrough”. You can always come back to this in a follow up interview or phone call if there are real concerns.
2. Is there anything you dislike about your previous employers? —It’s not a bad idea to put the candidate on the spot with a question like this. What you’re looking for is to see if a candidate will

- bad mouth a former manager or organization and for what reasons. You're also looking to see how a candidate handles an uncomfortable question.
3. Tell me about yourself-The goal of this question (or request) is to learn more about the candidate on a personal level. It's possible that you might be able to uncover certain personality and character traits if the candidate is given the chance to speak freely.
  4. How do you define success?-This is simple. We all have different definitions of success. This question allows the interviewer to match up a candidate's thoughts on what it is to succeed with their own. At times, people can be worlds apart when it comes to defining the word success. It's important to know as a manager or colleague, what success is to this person and what drives them to succeed.
  5. How have you handled setbacks?-Ask the candidate for specific examples. Try to evaluate if a candidate can think out of the box to resolve issues that may get in their way of succeeding. The idea is to evaluate whether or not you have someone who can handle distractions and difficult situations in a calm, cool and level headed manner.
  6. What motivates you?-Is it money? Being number one? As an interviewer, you might want someone who's a team player, you might be looking for someone who wants to compete day in day out with their fellow colleagues. This can be a tough question for a candidate because a candidate is never quite sure how to answer it. Every candidate has been taught not to say money is a factor that motivates.
  7. Talk to me about specific achievements that have occurred in your career The interviewer should be looking for specifics. This is where many candidates trip up. Many candidates find it uncomfortable to brag about achievements. It's important to find candidates that believe in success and can talk about their achievements in a professional manner.
  8. Why are you interviewing? Candidates should be interviewing initially to learn more about the position, company, manager, culture, and to see if there is interest to explore the position further. Although there are always exceptions, the best candidates to hire (in the end) are the ones that are not necessarily looking. These types of candidates are operating from a position of strength, not weakness and will tend to make sounder decisions when it comes to job movement. These types of candidates also usually show a greater pattern of success in their professional background. I define these types of candidates as "recruit" candidates. Are you looking to leave your current firm?-If the answer is "yes" this is when the interviewer has to really probe. Ask why and let the candidate talk. Follow up each reason the candidate gives with more questions. Dig and dig.
  9. What type of management style works best for you?-In my opinion this is one of the most important questions to ask a candidate. Why is it so important? If a manager's management style doesn't mesh with a candidate's needs, you're looking at a possible disaster. The manager must know their own management style to properly evaluate the answer the candidate gives. What do you expect from a manager? Have you ever had a problem with a previous manager? If so, how did you resolve the problem?
  10. Do you have any further questions?-Every interviewer asks this question. But does every interviewer expect and look for the right question from the candidate? The best candidates will try to close you at this point as a follow up to this question. The best candidates will ask you (as a "further" question): Do you have any red flags or concerns? And should follow up by asking you: What's the next step in the interview process? Do not consider this arrogant or presumptuous. Good candidates should be confident and welcome difficult questions.
  11. Why should I hire you? A candidate can either completely make-up for any prior slips in the interview or can totally screw up in the last 5 minutes. Either way it is a good question to ask, especially for non-recruit candidates. However, I will caution that an interviewer needs to look at the entire interview and how the person did overall—not just the answer to this one question. This is a difficult question.

### **YOU FOUND "THE ONE"**

Alright you have created the process, established the parameters, established your own "general thoughts" on interviewing, garnered consensus, written an outline with job specific and "fit" specific questions to interview recruit and non-recruit candidates, have created an evaluation form, and ...now you have narrowed it down to the candidate you want. What do you do? Prior to even beginning the interview process, you should have established with each and every candidate that came in for an interview, the following: (1) what is his or her current salary with bonus and the breakdown of salary vs. bonus, (2) what is their desired salary (most candidates will only consider a move for an increase), (3) are there any other

perks they currently enjoy and would be giving up (are they going to be giving up stock options, year end bonus, paid parking, flex spending program, working one day from home, etc.). If you have this information you are ready to make an offer.

After being in the business a while, I have some pretty strong opinions (which most recruiters would not agree with) on what is the right way to make an offer, and I don't think if you are the employer making an offer directly or a recruiter making an offer on behalf of a client—that the process should change. I believe prior to an offer being made both sides understand there will be no negotiating. As a recruiter, I explain to the candidate that this is not my role. My role is to get you in front of the client, get you through the interview and get you an offer, but not to negotiate an offer. I tell my clients the same thing.

Never in the course of a search, do I want my client to question why I am asking for the salary I am (it is simple—that is the magic number that will close the deal). I will advise candidates if their “magic number” is unreasonable, and I will counsel them to reconsider. The “magic” number I give my clients is typically what I will pre-close a candidate based on. I ask the candidate—if you received an offer of x, would you accept? If you can't pre-close a candidate at this point (it is harder to do when you are the client making the offer directly, however, still doable) I would be skeptical. Make sure you have a candidate that wants an offer and undeniably wants the job. Make sure not to let your 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> choice candidates go until you have a signed acceptance offer and the candidate has communicated to you that he or she resigned their current position. Candidates should not need more than a few days or a weekend to consider an offer. Candidate's that cannot commit at this point are not serious candidates and are likely to consider counter offers from their current employer, so if you can pre-close—DO. It will save you time and the potential loss of other good candidates (as time goes on, even recruit candidates will start looking at other opportunities). I never recommend an employer come in low, the other side come in high and meet in the middle. This is not a merger of two companies, in essence you are asking someone to join your family and it should be done in the most forthright and honest way possible—where both sides feel like they are winning instead of losing.

What I've put together are general ideas and thoughts on effective hiring, from setting up the process to closing the deal. Remember your process is a direct reflection of your organization and your people, and if done right can also save you time and money. I hope this article proves useful. If you have any questions, or if you would like to obtain a copy of this article to distribute and use internally with your staff, please feel free to contact me (Janelle Lowe, 404.842.2800 or [jlowe@cambridgprofessionals.com](mailto:jlowe@cambridgprofessionals.com)).