

CAREERS

Interviewing for effective hiring

BY AMY R. RAMOS

SPECIAL TO THE DAILY SOUND

Thanks to the eye-catching employment ad you wrote and your diligent work in reviewing resumes and cover letters, you've been able to invite a group of well-qualified applicants to interview for your open position. The interview is your chance to determine whether the candidate measures up in person to the picture he presented on paper, but keep in mind that you still need to market the job, the company — and yourself as a boss. To get the most out of the time you spend with candidates:

MAKE IT A PRIORITY. Don't wait too long to schedule interviews — the best candidates will find other jobs if you delay. Set aside sufficient time for interviews so you won't be interrupted or distracted by other work duties. Applicants will appreciate having your undivided attention, and you'll be able to make better decisions.

BE PREPARED. Hiring employees is one of your most important responsibilities as a manager, so don't take a seat-of-the-pants approach to interviewing. Ask one or two other people whose judgment you trust and who represent the company well to conduct the interviews with you. As a group, develop your list of questions: general questions for all applicants, as well as specific questions related to the background of individual candidates.

LET APPLICANTS DO THE TALKING. Ask open-ended questions that can't be answered yes or no —for example, "What kinds of projects have you done using AutoCAD?" instead of "Do you know how to use AutoCAD?" This ensures that candidates talk about their experience instead of giving you the answers they think you want to hear. It's widely accepted that past

behavior is the best predictor of future conduct, so focus on asking applicants what they have done, rather than hypothetical questions about what they would do in a given situation. For instance, ask them to describe how they resolved a conflict with a co-worker, rather than asking them how they would resolve one. If you have any concerns about the candidate's background, such as gaps in employment history, this is also your chance to get them addressed.

KEEP QUESTIONS APPROPRIATE.

This means staying away from questions related to race, sex, religion, or other legally prohibited topics (check with HR in advance if you're unsure about what's off limits). Remember also that questions should fit the job; for instance, entry-level candidates should be asked about their general skills (working on a team, problem-solving, managing time) not about their experience in the specific field, which they probably don't have yet.

MAKE APPLICANTS FEEL WELCOME.

Candidates should be greeted warmly and made to feel comfortable. Respect their time by doing your best to stay on schedule, and make sure the room where you conduct the interviews is clean and quiet. Remember that the candidate is making a decision about you too, so give her a chance to ask questions during the interview.

BE POSITIVE AND PROFESSIONAL.

Candidates will respond to your genuine enthusiasm for the organization, your project, and your team.

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