

How can I hire the best candidate?



INTERVIEWING 101: HIRING THE BEST CANDIDATE

An organization's growth and success is largely based on the talent of their workers: people really are your greatest resource. Busy managers often fill positions too quickly in hopes that it will work out. But hiring the wrong person can have huge costs to your business and the team. It's not always easy to know if you're choosing the best candidate for the job but through thoughtful planning and careful decision-making, you can maximize your hiring successes and minimize your misfires.

Do the Groundwork

The first step in obtaining top talent is to screen potential candidates. Don't waste valuable resources on interviewing someone who doesn't fit the job description or clearly won't cut it. Take the time to:

Appraise, appraise, appraise. A resume, although often criticized as one-dimensional, can actually be quite revealing. How does the resume look? Is it professional, neat, perfectly aligned, results-based? Candidates' resumes are your first example of their finished product and an indication of what their work will look like. A well-written cover letter says much more than any statement about outstanding communication

skills in a resume. Read critically and make sure applicants meet the required experience, education and skills. Look out for inconsistencies, unexplained employment gaps, or other possible concerns and take note of the positive. This is the first step in the process and will help you weed out underwhelming applicants.

Make the call. Once you've eliminated the weakest candidates, it may be a good idea to conduct short phone interviews. This will save you time, money and give you the chance to develop a shortlist of applicants. Also, it's not as easy to build rapport without face time, so it's a great opportunity to identify any standouts.

As a people leader, you need to put in the time and effort to build a strong team, selecting a candidate who has the right skills, fits in with your company's culture and believes in your bottom line.



During the Interview

Ask the right questions. Create open-ended questions that will give you the answers you need. If time management skills are critical to the role you may ask: "How do you prioritize between tasks that need to be completed?" Try to touch on their ability to work as a team, cope with conflict, problem solve and communicate. Include behavioral questions that ask "how" they completed their job instead

of "what" they did. Motivation is a key element when it comes to a successful fit. Find out what motivated them to apply for the position and excel in past roles. You should ask the same questions to each applicant so it's easier to compare responses. Write down your opinions immediately after the interview so it's fresh in your mind. The first and last candidates may be easy to remember but the fourth and seventh may be a blur.

Use an interview scorecard and at the end of the process, conduct a post-game meeting to discuss the candidates. You may have drawn very different opinions or missed something worrisome. Unless absolutely necessary, it's generally not a good idea to have several people interview a candidate at the same time. It will be hard to make a connection and draw out the detailed responses you're looking for.

Remember that you are also selling your organization to the interviewee—if you want the best you need to be the best.

These tips will help me grow my team.



Interview Intelligence

Finding the best candidate goes far beyond checking off items on a list. You've already gotten rid of the unqualified applicants, so from here on in this process becomes a little more complicated.

You don't need to intimidate applicants to have a successful interview. Be friendly and welcoming instead of stiff and formal and try to put them at ease. Refrain from challenging candidates or trying to trick them with convoluted questions. You will be disappointed with the results if this is the way you approach the process and you will never get to know the applicants. Also, the interview shouldn't drag on for too long—30 to 40 minutes is an ideal length.

If possible, have several interviewers on board and from different levels of the organization to allow for a variety of opinions and perspectives. During the interview be sure you:

Close your mouth and open your ears. Interviewers often make the mistake of talking too much about their wants and needs. You only get a short period of time to connect with this person, so ask the questions and listen carefully! Resist the temptation to start the interview with a long description of the company's history, goals and your specific expectations. This provides too much insight into the types of answers you're looking for. Let candidates shape their answers and prove that they've done their homework.

Be flexible. Don't automatically rule someone out because he or she does not have the "perfect" set of experience and skills. If they do, they may not want the job, be challenged enough or stay with your company long. Without direct experience people can still excel by bringing a fresh set of eyes, lots of enthusiasm and innovation to the role.

Go with your gut. Sometimes you just don't click with someone or although you can't put your finger on it, the candidate doesn't seem like the right person for the job. If you did all your research and completed a thorough, well-planned interview process then you should be able to trust your intuition. Try, however, not to hire the candidate that you get along with the best. Remember, you're not looking for a new best friend, but a colleague who has the skills you need to get the job done right.

Building a strong team should be your biggest investment. If you can't find the right person for the job, conduct another round of recruitment. Don't settle just to fill a position. If you were making an expensive purchase you would do your research, so approach this process in the same way. Remember: this is a long-term investment with the opportunity for huge returns.

During the Interview

Encourage questions. Give candidates the opportunity to ask their own questions about the position and their expectations. The best applicants will turn the interview into a mutual conversation. In the final round of interviewing (i.e. when you've narrowed it down to two or three candidates), go over salary, benefits packages, bonus programs, car allowances etc. Remember that you are also selling your organization to the interviewee—if you want the best you need to be the best.

Do your research. A reference check is a crucial part of any interview process. You need to verify education completed, dates of employment, job titles and job descriptions. This is an opportunity to learn about the applicant's skills that are required of this position. Pay close attention to the reference's level of enthusiasm, tone and overall attitude. You may have to probe a little because most people will only speak highly of a candidate and avoid saying anything negative. Just remember never to contact a current employer without permission because some companies will fire workers for job hunting.