

Legal Update

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Ten Effective Interviewing Suggestions for Employers

By Jon Vegosen

Too often, we get hung up on what we can't ask during an interview. The truth is there are a host of things that we can ask to determine whether a candidate has the "right stuff" and is a good fit for your organization's culture. Of course, one of the frustrating aspects of the hiring process is predicting whether candidates will succeed. While not fool-proof, effective interviewing can help you distinguish stronger prospects from weaker ones. Following are Ten Suggestions for Effective Interviewing to assist you in making sounder hiring decisions:

1. Take the Hiring Process Seriously

Set the appropriate amount of time in your calendar for interviews and give them the attention they deserve. Hiring the right employees is important and serious business.

2. Know Your Hiring Criteria; Hire Against a Standard

Know the behavioral traits, characteristics, experience, skills, and outcomes required for the position. Develop a position profile that transcends a job description. The profile should outline what success would look like if you had the ideal individual fill the position. Specify what the candidate will be doing at your organization. Identify the most important outcomes the candidate will need to deliver for your organization. Assess the education, skill, and work experience that the candidate must possess to succeed. Determine the behavioral traits that the candidate must possess to be successful in the position. Discern the personality that best fits with your organization and culture. Extend offers only to those candidates who meet your hiring criteria.

3. Prepare

Prepare for an interview just as you would any business meeting. Read the candidate's resume and relevant correspondence before the interview. Know what you want to ask the candidate. Prepare several questions or notes prior to the interview, so that you don't have to "wing it".

4. Be Polite

Courtesy is essential; you can only make a first impression once. It will be much easier to attract candidates who are treated well during the interview process. Leave your cell phone behind or turn it off. Remember, you want all candidates, whether or not they are offered a position, to think highly of your organization.

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5. Learn About Candidates

Use the interview to learn about a candidate's skills, ability, experience, prospect for success, and fit with your organization. A particular candidate may have gone to the same school you did or may have similar interests to yours, but if he or she does not have the requisite traits, experience, and fit for the position, the school and interests are irrelevant. To avoid making prohibited inquiries, ask yourself the following two questions:

- A. Do I really need the information to assess a candidate's skill, ability, or experience for the position? (If so, ask the question.)
- B. Will the answer to my question, if I use it to make a hiring decision, rule out members of one sex or a minority or other protected group? (If so, rephrase your question or don't ask it.)

6. Follow the 80-20 Rule

A great way to learn about candidates is to follow the 80-20 Rule: Listen approximately 80% of the time, and speak 20% of the time. By doing so, you can increase your chances of making informed judgments, exhibit interest in applicants, and reduce the likelihood of making inappropriate remarks.

7. Conduct a Behavioral-Based Interview

Because past performance is probably the best predictor of future success, behavioral-based questioning is generally the most effective interviewing technique to use. In addition, it is an excellent way to avoid asking unlawful or inappropriate questions. To conduct a behavioral-based interview, you will want to ask open-ended, rather than leading, questions that (a) focus on the circumstances, (b) ascertain what actions the candidate took, and (c) reveal the results the candidate achieved. Examples include:

- What was your most challenging project with your last employer, and how did you go about meeting it?
- Please tell me about a time when you persuaded a colleague to accept an approach to problem-solving different from their own.
- Tell me about a situation with your most recent employer where your actions reflected its core values.
- Tell me about a time that you were disingenuous at work.
- What was your most significant achievement at ABC Company? What did you do to make it happen?

You will want to probe further to find out more about the candidate and how he or she handled various situations.

8. Listen to the Answers and Use Follow-Up Questions

Candidates' answers can be telling. Sometimes what they don't say is highly revealing. Invariably, you will need to ask follow-up questions to clarify vague answers and learn more about a candidate's thought process.

9. Entertain and Evaluate Questions from Candidates

While you want candidates to talk more than you do, you can also learn about them through the questions they ask. Are the questions perceptive? Do they reflect a genuine interest in your organization? Have

they done their homework and researched your company? If a candidate fails to ask questions, what does that tell you?

10. Check References

In this litigious age of negligent hiring and workplace violence lawsuits, it is critical to check references – or at least to try. To avoid the “name, rank and serial number” approach, many employers have candidates sign a release and consent form authorizing prospective employers to speak with their former employers.

While interviewing is more art than science, following these Ten Suggestions may help you avoid asking inappropriate questions, improve your interviewing techniques, and assist you in finding the right employees for your organization.

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