Interviewing Tips for Hiring Managers

Uncovering the True Candidate

A WHITE PAPER PROVIDED BY ULTIMATE STAFFING SERVICES

Interviewing remains one of the best ways to uncover a candidate's abilities and determine if they align with the culture of your department or organization.

This white paper reviews strategies used by companies that are considered "Top Employers." Compare it to how your organization interviews candidates (or, if you're a first-time interviewing manager, use it as a guide) to help weed out unfit candidates and identify the skilled applicants equipped to thrive in your workplace.

A Broad Picture of the Interview Process

Ultimate Staffing's research has found that approximately 80% of turnover arises from hiring and interviewing mistakes. The clues were there in the beginning, but the pre-screening and interviewing process didn't bring the warning signs to the surface. Effective interviewing is vital.

Effective interviewing can ensure that the interviewing organization and the interviewee understand each other's expectations, which can lead to lower turnover, higher employee engagement, increased employer satisfaction after a qualified candidate is hired, and the foundation of a "Best Place to Work" environment. With those objectives in mind, revamp your department or organization's approach to the interviewing process using the following tips.

1. Envision the Perfect Candidate

Trying to pin down the characteristics of a successful employee for an open position while interviewing candidates is like setting sail without a destination in mind, and then hoping halfway through the voyage that you'll end up at the perfect coastline.

If your department or organization cannot define the characteristics of the perfect employee in an open role, you're setting yourselves up for failure and frustration. "It's essential to pinpoint exactly what you're looking for in a candidate before starting your search," states VP of Marketing for Roth Staffing Companies (Ultimate Staffing's parent company). "If you need a place to start, begin by assessing your top performers in that role and examine what makes them successful."

2. Establish a Pre-Screening Protocol

According to Forbes, the average interview lasts 40 minutes. That time can really add up for busy hiring managers! Therefore, in-person interviews should be reserved for only the most likely hires.

Interviewing should be one of the later steps of the candidate assessment process so that hiring managers don't waste their time meeting with obviously unfit or unenthusiastic applicants. This also saves applicants from unnecessarily expending time and energy preparing for the interview and traveling to your location.

This means you might want to fine-tune your pre-screening procedures to ensure the very best candidates bubble up to the top. For instance, consider the **ten-step screening process** used by Ultimate Staffing and other "Best Place to Work" organizations.

1. Determine a **target candidate audience** (recruit from the right group of people).
2. Learn how the audience **looks for jobs.**
3. Create and publicize an **ideal job description.**
4. **Screen resumes** using specific criteria. For more information about screening resumes and other pre-screening techniques, ask your Ultimate Staffing service manager for more white papers on screening candidates.
5. Conduct **pre-screen phone interviews.**
6. **Assess skills** and conduct work previews.
7. Pick finalists to **interview in person.**
8. Conduct in-person interviews (**more than one** with various decision-makers).
9. Check **references.**
10. Present an **offer.**

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A Roth Staffing Company

Interviews must be supplemented with other evaluation methods like reference checks and skills assessments in order to be truly powerful. After implementing proper pre-screening protocols to pare down the candidate pool, Top Employers encourage discussion between all managers and supervisors involved in the hiring process. Frequent communication guarantees that all parties are in consensus regarding who should move from the pre-screen stage to the in-person interview.

3. Prepare for the Interview

Candidates shouldn't be the only ones preparing for the interview. Top Employers realize the benefits of doing their homework too; planning ahead can lead to interviews that are comprehensive and targeted to specific position requirements and competencies, ultimately maximizing the effectiveness and productivity of each meeting.

Before the in-person interview, departments or organizations should create a system that judges candidates fairly and objectively. One way to achieve objective assessment is by asking hiring managers to create a list of questions to pose to all applicants, as well as a rubric to judge and compare interviewees' answers on a common scale.

In addition, your interview needs to include a targeted behavioral interviewing approach that is fully customized. For instance, an organization searching for a top customer service professional or receptionist may need an employee who is personable even when dealing with difficult customers, and someone who is flexible enough to respond to a variety of situations. In this case, hiring managers may want to vary their line of questioning and switch quickly from topic to topic. If an applicant remains cool and comfortable in the face of rapid and jarring questioning, chances are good that they perform well under pressure. [See next section for preparing actual questions.]

4. Avoid Bland, Uninformative Q&A

Organizations that have been recognized as the "Best to Work For" view interviews as a conversation, but unique questions help spur that conversation in the right direction. Most applicants have built a cache of interview answers, which means that unfit candidates can shine alongside the most capable applicants when asked standard interview questions. Adjust your interviewing style to move away from a one-size-fits-all question and answer session and toward a more customized and insightful approach.

Finance and accounting departments recruiting a new payroll manager, for instance, may find it helpful to ask applicants about a time that they had to process payroll under a tight deadline and how they responded to the challenge. IT teams assessing applicants for a programmer position might want to ask candidates about their approach to learning and practicing new programming languages.

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Uncover Traits

It's worth your time to craft questions that will specifically unveil the personality traits you seek. Most positions benefit from these three traits:

DRIVE: Find creative ways for an applicant to demonstrate their passion for certain work.
"What are you passionate about?" "What is your favorite experience at work?" "What are some things your former coworkers praised you for?"

ALIGNED VALUES: Uncover the individual's ethos, looking especially for honesty, "perfectionism," and ownership of work.
"How would your biggest fans describe you?" "How would people who have experienced challenges with you describe you?" "What makes you excited about work?"

BOUNCE BACK: Can the person take criticism? What do they do with feedback?
"Describe a time when your work was criticized — what was the issue?" "If I had a problem with your work, how should I discuss it with you?"

Favorite Interview Questions

Here is a list of favorite interviewing questions from hiring managers. Infuse your hiring philosophy into your interviewing strategy – know what you want your questions to reveal!

- *How would your best friend describe you?*
- *What unique experience or qualifications separate you from other candidates?*
- *Tell me how you would go about _____ (installing a new system, organizing these records, etc.)?*
- *Think of someone you have had problems with in your career; someone who you would NEVER use as a reference. Tell me the adjectives they might use to describe you and why they had this perception? Then we can discuss how you dealt with the situation.*
- *What are some things your current employer (or most recent) could do differently to be more successful?*
- *What have been the biggest failures in your career? Biggest achievements?*
- *When I contact your last supervisor and ask which area of your work needs the most improvement, what will I learn?*
- *Describe the best boss you ever reported to.*
- *Where do you see yourself in five years?*

Interviews should be a two-way street; interviewers should be prepared to answer various questions from applicants —such as those in the following list— at the end of the discussion.

- *Where do you see the business or department going in the next year? 10 years?*
- *What impact would I have on the team if I get hired?*
- *What would make someone really successful in this role?*

5. Get Others Involved

Ultimate Staffing recommends involving multiple people in the interviewing process. These committees can encompass the candidate's potential manager, other managers, and peers on their team and in their department. A candidate who meshes with the department manager but clashes with the rest of the team probably will not last long in the role, no matter how great the salary or benefits.

In addition, Top Employers know that including top performers in the interviewing process is a great way to assess the candidate's potential for success; oftentimes, your best coworkers are the ones most familiar with what it takes to succeed "in the trenches" and possess insight into the personality traits, skills, and experience that make a candidate qualified for the position.

"I have several top performers on my teams that always provide helpful feedback about interviewees," states Robert Hankin, Senior Vice President of Roth Staffing Companies. "I trust them to flag any areas of concern that may not occur to me when interviewing the candidate, and to provide their honest opinion about whether a prospect will be a good fit. Asking for input has saved me time and time again from hiring applicants who could have damaged the culture and productivity of the IT departments!"

Note: Requiring the candidate to make more than 3 trips to your location for various interviews can create frustration, but 2-3 different interviewing appointments is ideal and communicates to your candidate that you invest in the hiring process.

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Curve Balls

You hear a lot about "curveball" interview questions such as Zappos' famous "What makes you weird?" Asking an off-the-wall question just for the sake of it does nothing for your interview process, but strategically thinking of question(s) that will give unique insight regarding the candidate's suitability is vital!

Sometimes their reaction to a question is all you need – revisit Step 1: "Envision the perfect candidate" and build questions that reveal (or don't reveal) your list of traits.

- *If you were to get rid of one state in the U.S., which would it be and why? – Asked by Forrester Research*
- *What song best describes your work ethic? – Asked by Dell*
- *What do you think about when you're alone in your car? – Asked by Gallup*
- *Name three previous Nobel Prize winners. – Asked by Benefits CONNECT*
- *How many quarters would you need to reach the height of the Empire State Building? – Asked by JetBlue*
- *If we came to your house for dinner, what would you prepare for us? – Asked by Trader Joe's*
- *My wife and I are going on vacation. Where would you recommend we go? – Asked by PricewaterhouseCoopers*
- *Pick two celebrities to be your parents and tell us why. – Asked by Urban Outfitters*
- *Have you ever stolen a pen from work? – Asked by Jiffy Software*
- *If you could be anyone else, who would you be? – Asked by Salesforce.com*

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Interviewing in a Remote Environment

As more and more companies shift to a work-from-home setting, it has become common to conduct interviews remotely. As you are representing your company and on the quest for the best candidate, you must come prepared and ready to learn from your home office.

TIPS FOR REMOTE INTERVIEWING

1. Dress professionally: Make sure you dress as if you are going to work. Your background should either be blank, an image provided by the company, or simply free of any distractions and clutter.

2. Minimize distractions: It could be a good idea to set yourself as "busy" on your calendar during interviews so you can pay attention and focus on your candidate and what they are saying.

3. Come prepared and pay attention to expressions and tone of voice: It's important to review the candidate's information ahead of time and prepare with the questions you want to ask. Make sure your voice is clear and calm and that your facial expressions are showing that you are engaged and attentive throughout the conversation.

4. Articulate next steps: Make sure you let the candidate know what the next steps are and if they have any questions at the end of the interview. It is also important to thank them for their time before you end the conversation.

5. Have a backup plan: Always be sure you are familiar with the technology you're using and test it ahead of time. Technology can sometimes fail us, though, so if you experience a technical hiccup at the time of your interview, make sure you have the candidate's information to keep them informed in case you need to switch to a phone call or use another application.

What you can ask:

- Previous work experience
- Education and training
- Job-related military service
- Open-ended questions are the best to stimulate conversation

What you cannot ask:

- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Age
- Arrest
- Citizenship
- Credit
- Disabilities
- Financial status
- General questions regarding military service
- Health/Medical Condition
- Marital Status/Children
- Religion

Questions with Purpose

Unstructured – Informal discussion (e.g., "What do you like to do in your free time?") will not tell you much about potential job performance. It may tell you if you "like" the person, but little else.

Motivational – Asking questions about interests and goals (e.g., "Why do you want to work here? What do you want to be doing in three years?") provides limited information about potential job performance. Wanting to do something and being able to do it are not the same thing.

Situational – Asking a series of hypothetical questions about job related situations (e.g., "What would you do if a customer started yelling at you?") gives some good information about job performance, however, there is often a big difference between what we say we would do and what we end up actually doing.

Behavioral – Asking questions about past performance in job related situations (e.g. – "Tell me about a time when you had to calm down an angry or irate customer?") provides very good information about potential job performance. The best predictor of future behavior is past behavior in similar situations.

Questions that say a lot...

Work Experience

Tell me about your current job. What are your major responsibilities? What do you like best about your job? What do you like least about your job? Why are you seeking other employment?

Customer Service

Tell me about a specific customer complaint or a time where you had to handle a rude, difficult, or unhappy customer. What was the complaint? How did you handle the situation? What was the outcome?

Attendance & Reliability

Tell me about the last time you missed or were significantly late for work? What did you do to reduce the impact of your absence? Did you notify anyone? What was the outcome?

Decision-Making

Tell me about a difficult decision you had to make at work where you didn't know the right answer or course of action? Why was it difficult? What did you decide to do? What did you do to find out the answer? What was the outcome?

Following Directions

Tell me about a time when you overlooked or otherwise failed to adhere to a written policy or work procedure. What did you do? Why did you decide not to follow the policy or procedure? What was the outcome?

6. Reevaluate the System

The same interviewing processes and styles may not work for your department or organization forever, so it's important to reevaluate protocols every six months or so to ensure that they remain effective in recruiting top performers. Don't be afraid to try new interviewing strategies! Sometimes the most unlikely approaches can uncover the best candidates who will be passionate about building your department or organization into a "Best Place to Work."

Sources: Forbes, CareerBuilder, Open Req, XeniumHR.com

ABOUT US

In 1994, we envisioned a company unique to the industry, one based on pride and purpose. We wanted Roth Staffing Companies, the parent company of Ultimate Staffing Services, to be an organization our business customers consistently raved about.

We are the only national company in the commercial staffing space that has been recognized with all four of the industry's major awards for service excellence and coworker engagement.

As a business line of Roth Staffing Companies, L.P., we have received awards for quality and service excellence in alignment with the Malcolm Baldrige criteria and we remain the only staffing company to be ranked the #1 fastest-growing, privately-held company in the United States by *Inc*. magazine. We are consistently ranked as one of the largest, privately-held staffing companies in the nation.

A FULL-SERVICE FIRM

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» Temporary-to-Hire
» Temporary
» On-Premise Management
» Payrolling

We love to create remarkable experiences... every person, every time.®

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