

The consequences of hiring decisions, both good and bad, can impact an organization for years to come. To improve the quality of hires made, managers must focus on the interviewing process. Conducting a successful interview requires not only thorough preparation, but also an understanding of interviewing techniques.

Sharpening Your Skills for One of the Most Impactful Assignments You've Ever Been Given

As part of a small or mid-sized organization, you've become an expert at wearing multiple hats, resourceful when it comes to stretching your budget and relentless about driving projects to completion in a timely manner. But the prospect of filling an important position with the right person is like no other. More art than science, it's difficult to master the process when you only make key hires a couple of times as year.

Yet the consequences of your hiring decision, for good or bad, can have an impact on your organization for a long time. As businesses today become aware of the expense and the value every hire brings to an organization, the importance of making good hiring decisions increases. To improve the quality of hires made, managers must focus on fine-tuning one pivotal and ever-so-critical evaluation process: candidate interviewing.

Start with the Interviewer

For too many businesses, the success of the hiring process is pinned on two unknown factors: the interviewing skills and preparation of the interviewer. Because interviewing is more art than science, managers must be well-prepared and well equipped in order to conduct successful interviews. However, few managers and hiring authorities today are trained in interviewing techniques, making interviews more of a gamble than a strategic business process. In order to identify, select and hire exceptional workers, interviewers need to know how to turn an interview into a substantial conversation. One of the most effective tools for sparking rich, informative discussions with job candidates is behavioral interviewing.

What is Behavioral Interviewing?

The interviewer's job is less about matching skills to needs, which has already happened in the prescreening process. Instead, it should be more focused on exploring the workplace competency, past performance and experience of the individual, which is the purpose of behavioral interviewing.

Behavioral interviewing — often called situational interviewing — is a questioning technique that forces interviewees to give real-world examples of how they have handled specific events in the workplace. Rooted in the principle that past performance is the best indicator of future performance, behavioral questions focus on how something was done rather than the end results. For example, in a typical interview a candidate is asked to describe the duties of his or her previous jobs. In a behavioral question, a candidate will instead be asked to describe a recent work situation in which he or she overcame a difficult challenge. The focus is on the action taken and lessons learned.

Here are some additional examples of behavioral interviewing inquiries: Give an example of a successful teamwork experience. Describe an important learning experience you have had in the workplace.

In behavioral interviewing, the interviewer's challenge is to throw candidates off the scripts they've rehearsed and get them to provide spontaneous answers. With behavioral questions, you can pull candidates away from the facts in their resumes or on their job applications. By helping candidates focus on their workplace experiences, you get an unrehearsed look at their workplace skills and personality.



Quality, Not Quantity

In all interviewing, the quality of the question is much more important than the amount of questions asked. Managers should take time to consider what they really want to know about an individual's work style, experience and past performance. Remember: just a few key behavioral questions can launch an interesting discussion of workplace scenarios and experiences.

On the other hand, too many non-behavioral interview questions (i.e., "What do you see as your strengths?" or "What are your long-term goals?") can lead to stock answers that don't probe deep enough into the candidate's capabilities and compatibility. An interviewer should prepare a concise but balanced list of questions that explores performance, behavior, experience and accomplishments.

Prepare & Rehearse

A skilled interviewer will take the time to review the candidate information available, such as the resume, referrals, testing scores and notes from previous interviewers. The more preparation the interviewer puts into the interview, the greater the opportunity is for gathering information that is helpful to the selection process.

Talk to the Team

When recruiting for a work group, a manager should also sit down with the team prior to the interview to gather insight into the day-to-day demands of the job. Team members and prospective colleagues offer rich job insights from the frontlines of the workplace. They can help identify the professional traits needed for a specific role and outline the challenges for a future hire. Managers not only get a better picture of the candidate needed to fill a role, but also gain an understanding of the resource needs, goals and expectations of existing employees.

References & a Grain of Salt

While references are a good way to gather additional information about a potential hire, managers must keep in mind that the references provided are candidate selected and approved. A candidate looking for a new opportunity provides references that will give positive, persuasive recommendations. Therefore, be clever and use references to your advantage.

Rather than asking typical reference-check questions (i.e., "Was John Doe a diligent worker?" or "Did Jane Smith get to work on time regularly?"), managers need to do more of the talking. Explain the role and ask how and why the candidate would be a strong fit for the job. A carefully guided discussion with a reference can provide helpful insight into a candidate's past and potential job performance.

From Great Interviews to Great Hires

In the end, it will always be people—HR staff, recruiters, hiring managers—who lead to the right hire. Supported by skill tests, referrals and performance records, it is their interviewing abilities and instincts that determine who joins the company. By improving the interviewing process, a business energizes managers to take greater care in talent selection and to see greater value in every hire. The result for businesses that emphasize interviewing excellence is a stronger management team equipped and ready to build a stronger, better workforce.