

Effective Interviewing

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Here are some tips and techniques to help ensure your interviews yield the information you need to find the candidate you're looking for:

Don't Wing It

Thinking about — and even writing out — the questions you'll ask in advance may sound like a time drain, but it's worth it. By having a set list of questions to follow, you'll ensure that you ask the same questions to all interviewees, which will help you in a side-by-side comparison of the applicants and guard against claims of discriminatory treatment.

It will also help to keep you focused during the interview, because you can listen to the applicant's responses instead of racking your brain to think what you'll ask next. You will feel more confident and convey a better impression of yourself and the company to the interviewee. And you're less likely to forget important questions you wanted to ask if you have them already written down.

Nail Down the Arrangements

Confirm interview time and place with the interviewee in writing. Arrange travel and/or supply the applicant with directions, if necessary. Book a conference room and make sure before the applicant arrives that it is empty and clean. If you will interview the applicant in your office, make sure your workspace (and especially the chair where the applicant will sit) is clear of clutter and papers. Nothing conveys a worse impression of you and the company than disorganization.

If the interviewee is kept waiting while a space to talk is found — or left standing while you clear away papers — he may well come away with the sense that you forgot he was coming or, worse, didn't care enough about the interview to prepare for it.

It's All About the Job

During the interview, only ask questions that are job-related. Small talk about family and hobbies may seem like an effective ice-breaker, but it's also an easy way to stray into dangerous inquiries that can be interpreted as discriminatory. Stay focused on the job.

Use Open-Ended Questions

If your aim is to keep the conversation flowing and get useful information, then your enemy is any question that can be answered "yes" or "no." Always try to use, "Why did you do _____" or "How did you handle _____" in place of "Can you do _____" or "Do you have experience in _____."

Don't Do the Monologue Thing

Remember, you are trying to learn about the applicant, not tell them all about you. Don't read polite interest on the applicant's part as an opportunity for you to monopolize the conversation. Tell them about the company and the job, of course, but stop there. Once you

have conveyed the information the applicant needs to evaluate the job, your focus should shift to helping the applicant convey what you need to know to evaluate him/her.

Don't Make a Show of Note-Taking

Take notes to help refresh your memory about each candidate later, but do so in a manner that will not come back to haunt you. Take brief, clear and legible notes that pertain to the candidate's answers. Don't use abbreviations or a coded rating system that could be incorrectly interpreted at a later date. Jotting down the URL of a Web page the applicant designed or the name of a reference is one thing, but using phrases such as "not impressed" as opposed to "did not have the requisite installation experience" can be misinterpreted. Further, taking notes throughout an interview may make the applicant uneasy because you are not focused on the conversation at hand.

Finally, be sure your notes evaluate criteria actually necessary to perform the job. For instance, when interviewing for a telemarketer, your notes should reflect items such as "good interpersonal skills, types 75 wpm," rather than "handsome, blue suit."

Stay Out of the Danger Zone

Avoid potentially discriminatory questions about age, marital or family status, religion, health status, national origin, race, color and religion. You'll find a detailed discussion of these issues in HRCalifornia's [Hiring Library](#).