



Interviews

Your Chance To Shine As An Employer!

With competition for good staff being so fierce at present, employers need to use every tactic available to attract good people. A company's image, recruitment advertising, PR and reputation combined with the efforts of HR teams and recruitment consultancies to 'put the word out' can achieve much in generating applicant interest and getting them to the door. However, all of this effort and work can be wasted if the interview fails to take advantage of a 'captive audience', i.e. the interviewee!

Of course, recruitment is a two-way process and the interview is an essential step for an employer to evaluate an applicant's skills, abilities, outlook and personal fit, but once an offer is made the final decision in the whole process lies in the end with the individual.

Most employers have HR staff and senior managers who are well-versed in interview technique and capable of selling the benefits of an organisation, but we hope these tips, which are based on our 18 years' experience of hearing the interview feedback from thousands of individuals in the industry, will be useful for those who are relatively new to the interview process from the employer's side of the table.

Environment

First impressions count! It is so easy to become accustomed to your office and not notice the small things which may 'jar' with someone seeing the environment for the first time.

If space is limited, avoid clutter. It is better to have fewer, high quality chairs in a small area, than crowding it with too much or old/tired furniture.

Are there coffee mug rings on the table? Is the doormat clean? Is the office bright and fresh in appearance? Are the magazines up-to-date? We have all been in a dentist's gloomy waiting room and have seen the huge pile of out-dated lifestyle magazines and this image should be avoided!

Is the literature relevant? Reading material in reception is a great opportunity to blow your own trumpet - display your brochure, recent articles in the press, team photos, etc. Why give somebody the choice of reading something not relevant to your business, when they can read how wonderful you really are?

The Greeting

An offer of refreshment and a polite smile is always appreciated. If the interviewer is delayed, ensure a colleague or receptionist informs the person waiting of the delay and how long it is likely to be - people understand that these things happen and do not mind if their expectations are managed accordingly.

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The Interview Room

Again, the environment is important. Try to conduct the interview, if possible, in a spacious and light room. If this is not available and the only room available is just a bit bigger than a broom cupboard (sometimes this cannot be helped!) make light of it, perhaps with a quip "next time we will be in the boardroom!". Again, people will always make allowances if they feel they have been treated with courtesy and respect. Also avoid if possible interviewing across an 'expanse of table' as this could appear a little intimidating.

The Interview Process

Golden Rule Number One - read the CV first! So many times we have had feedback from candidates who felt that the interviewer was poorly briefed or had not even read their CV prior to the interview!

Poor preparation gives the candidate the impression that their application is not being treated seriously, when the reality is it could be the manager has just been very busy, hence the reason why they need staff! Just a few minutes to run through the salient points can help start things off on the right note.

Opening Questions

Start with a couple of pleasantries. How was the journey? Have you come far? If the meeting had been delayed, offer a quick apology and move on.

Introduction

It is always good to set out the agenda at the start. Not only does this enable you to take control of the meeting, but also helps manage expectations in terms of interview format, why they are there, who they will meet, interview length etc.

Give a brief overview of the company as well as a general summary of why you are recruiting and the key points of the vacancy. The company introduction should be kept down to under two minutes if possible (chances are they will have already looked at your website) but this allows you to start with the 'corporate message'.

The Questions

Resources Group has always felt that the most important question in an interview is 'why?', not just 'what'. Sure, it is important to ensure that certain skills boxes are 'ticked' and that there is a good and logical account of a candidate's career history (that the dates match, that reasons for leaving seem fair, etc). However, what can be more revealing is 'why?'. Gentle, polite probing of answers relating to a candidate's motivation for leaving, their long-term goals or what they are looking for in their next move, can be all very revealing about the individual and will help you assess not only their skills, but their fit into your organisation. Try also to avoid using closed questions; keeping your questions as open as possible allows the candidate to give fuller and more informative answers.

Keep It Friendly

Aggressive interviewing seldom engenders positive feelings among candidates. The 'prove to me you are right for this place' school of interviewing is very out-of-date and the chances are the candidate will have plenty of other options to consider, so it may leave them asking "why should I join you?" Furthermore, relaxed candidates are usually more open and this can allow for a far more effective interview and evaluation of their suitability, while also ensuring they are more receptive to positive messages from you.

Avoid Clichés

Please avoid the 'strengths and weaknesses' question if at all possible! Everyone knows it. They are also likely to have rehearsed the answer 100 times in their head and you are not really going to get much from this. Better questions to ask could be: 'likes and dislikes'; 'wants' and 'don't-wants'. Another cliché is "Where do you see yourself in 5 years' time?" Most people don't know what they will be doing at the weekend, let alone in 5 years, and this question is usually far too abstract to glean any real indication of true long-term motivations and ambitions. We would suggest instead asking what people would like more of, or less, in their role in the longer-term, or are there any more general long-term aims?

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Discussing The Job

After you have introduced yourself and the company, have given a brief overview of the role and have asked all of the questions you need relating to the individual's relevance, take some time to discuss the role. This is also a good opportunity to sell the company and the job again and we recommend that you also address the following:

- Day-to-day responsibilities of the job.
- How the role fits into the organisation and with whom it interacts.
- To whom it reports.
- Any technical requirements; discuss further technical training if necessary.
- The direction and evolution of the role/team/organisation.
- Any longer-term corporate objectives that may benefit the individual.

Salary

It is perfectly acceptable to ask candidates about their current salary and expectations in the first interview. There is no 'rule of thumb' but most applicants from a recruitment consultancy will assume that their salary details have already been conveyed and lie within the salary band for the position. If this information is not to hand, it is best to ask the question before the individual does to avoid being wrong-footed! A quick check of a candidate's current salary and their expectations is usually sufficient.

We would avoid, if possible, stating a specific range - people are understandably aspirational and will always want an offer at the top end of the stated range. If later on an offer is made which is not at the top of range (this is usually because of the need for further training or gaps in the skills base) the discussion will shift to a debate on why the top-end figure was not offered, distracting from the overall positive sentiments of the conversation so far.

At the end of the day, most people are reasonable and know that it is an 'inexact science' to balance the needs of the individual and the employer, but avoid digging a hole for yourself by having all of the facts to hand first!

Meet The Team

Meeting other members of staff is an excellent way of giving people a good 'feel' for the company and the environment. We recommend a tour of the office and introduction to other members of staff is undertaken at the second interview stage. This is particularly effective at junior/mid levels where candidates can meet their peers and it helps to create a good "bond" which may be advantageous in a competitive situation.

For more senior individuals, meeting other Board members or senior peers is also a good opportunity for them to find out more about a company's 'modus operandum' and corporate goals. As with more junior candidates, it is also a good way to create a 'personal' bond.

Closure - Leave A Positive Impression!

The final stage should be used to address any additional queries. It is also a good opportunity to leave things on a positive note and perhaps ask some non-work related queries, for instance a candidate's interests and hobbies. This is often overlooked and we have found on a few occasions that candidates have chosen one employer over another because of a common personal interest with the line manager!

At the end, also clearly state what the next step would be and when they can expect to receive feedback and/or a decision. If you are interviewing through a recruitment consultant, giving prompt feedback to the consultant will help them to manage candidate expectations and maintain interest.

The single biggest reason why employers fail to recruit the candidate that they want is because of poor feedback and long delays after the initial interview. So if the person you have just seen is of interest, help us to help you and let us know!

If the candidate is being rejected, again we strongly recommend prompt feedback. Most people don't mind a rejection if they feel their application was treated in a courteous manner. Long delays are often seen as rude and a candidate who has been rejected after a long and unexplained wait is unlikely to say nice things about a company to their friends in the industry, who could include other potential candidates for you!

We hope this overview has been beneficial and if you have any queries on this or any other recruitment matter, please contact one of the team at Resources Group.