

Interviewing tips for HR professionals

PREPARE YOURSELF WELL BEFORE CONDUCTING EMPLOYMENT INTERVIEWS.

VICKI MARAIS-SWANEPOEL

i It is easy for HR professionals to be become very blasé about conducting job interviews. They should, however, never lose sight of the fact that the interviewee may perceive the interview as a life-changing event.

The job interview is important as it provides the interviewee with the opportunity to demonstrate her knowledge, skills, work experience and talent. It also provides her with an opportunity to “sell herself” as the best possible candidate for the position. It is important to ensure that each candidate is treated with the necessary time and respect. It is also important to listen attentively to the interviewee’s responses. As novelist, Ernest Hemingway observes: “When people talk, listen completely. Most people never listen.”

Cognisance should be taken of the fact that candidates are often very

nervous. The interviewing process can be very daunting, particularly if many years have passed since the candidate was last interviewed.

The HR manager should always include the line manager in the job interview. The line manager is undoubtedly the best person to assess the candidate’s hard skills. The HR professional must however, be aware of power play: line managers often try to impress with their knowledge and their work experience. This can be very intimidating and can also impact negatively on the interview.

Besides providing some insights and guidance into the candidate’s softer skills, the HR professional plays an important role in assessing the cultural match. A good cultural fit is a prerequisite for career success.

The HR professional and the line manager should always be well-prepared for the interview. The candidate should be asked a combination of competency and behavioural-based questions.

Where a number of candidates will be interviewed for the same position, great care should be taken to ensure consistency in questioning. This will facilitate a fair comparison of candidates.

Candidates are often asked to cite their strengths and their weaknesses. This approach should be avoided as it always elicits a long list of strengths, but very few weaknesses. A SWOT analysis is clearly no yardstick for measuring a candidate’s ability.

When testing a specific aspect, it is important to do so in a number of different ways. The interviewer should never ask a candidate whether she is capable of performing a specific task. This is a rhetorical question. Here, I am reminded of an observation by Les Gore in his article: “Tips for Interviewing Managers,” which

appeared in *ManagerWise*. When the candidate was asked whether she could handle a variety of work, she responded: “I ought to be able to. I’ve had ten different jobs in six months.”

One should always ask the candidate to provide concrete examples, which demonstrate her proficiency in a certain area. It is also good practice to ask candidates to provide examples illustrating creative behaviour, as well as examples of conflict situations and how these were resolved.

Questions should be prefaced by what, how or why. This compels candidates to open up. Most importantly, these questions provide very little leeway to provide carefully rehearsed responses.

Management guru, Peter Drucker reminds the interviewer to consider the information that has been omitted, as well as the reasons for this. As Drucker observes: “The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn’t said.”

Where a panel interview is used, the panel should decide beforehand, who will ask which question. Closure is very important. At the end of the interview time should be allocated for debriefing. This step is critical since it is very easy to forget detail, particularly where a number of candidates have been interviewed.

Most importantly, the interviewee should always do most of the talking: it is the interviewee’s story after all. Often more difficult to implement, the interviewer should never judge the superficial. Undoubtedly, the most important step in the entire interview process is to close the interview loop by checking information with previous employers. As it was said in *Macbeth*, “All things are not what they seem”.

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