

Interviewing Techniques

How to conduct a meaningful interview

To be a good interviewer, it is not necessary to be a psychologist or a professional recruiter. However, you need to have a well-planned agenda to include a set of meaningful questions. Make sure each candidate is asked the same questions, and then compare their answers. In what follows, we offer a guideline for conducting and analyzing interviews. Be ready, some of these principles will go against your own stereotypes of how to interview a potential employee.

Before the interview begins, observe how the candidate acts coming into your office. Not a word has been spoken, but the interview has already begun. Seventy percent of all communication is non-verbal. Write down their demeanor, are they outgoing or introverted, cautious or enthusiastic. Later, you will have a chance to interpret your notes, and you may find these points quite revealing.

1. Greeting and Small Talk

Hobbies, interests, travel, sports, etc. Some interviewers do not like the small talk and want to cut to the chase. Please note it is important to be consistent with each interviewee. In other words, do not behave one way toward one candidate, and an entirely different way toward another. To do so would compromise your interview data.

2. Transition Question

Ask to see if the candidate has reviewed the information on the opportunity. If so, what is the candidate's understanding of the position? If the candidate has not reviewed any information on the opportunity proceed to the next step.

3. Overview

Articulate an overview of what you would like to cover and accomplish during the interview. A clear outline would include discussing the candidate's experience, background and professional goals. From there you can share your perspective of what your firm is seeking in the successful candidate and the long-term goals of the office/region/firm. You can let the candidate know you will be asking questions about jobs, education, interests, outside activities and anything else the candidate would like to add.

4. Good Place to Start is Work History

In general you are interested in the positions held, types of responsibilities, likes and dislikes in job tasks/roles, and what the candidate gained/learned from them. In specific, you will be interested to know how their work history fits the current opportunity. For example, if the candidate will be tasked with business development, a review of how they contributed to revenue generation in the past will be helpful. Open ended questions can bring out stories and details that assist you in understanding what the candidate brings to the table.

Try to ask probing questions that start with:

- ⊕ What...
- ⊕ Tell me...
- ⊕ Review...
- ⊕ Explain...
- ⊕ Describe...
- ⊕ Give me an example...

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Ask general questions such as:

- ⊕ Things like best and least
- ⊕ Accomplishments and how they were achieved
- ⊕ What lessons have been learned
- ⊕ Difficult problems faced and how they were handled/Types of challenges and they met them
- ⊕ Ways the candidate is most effective with people
- ⊕ Reasons for job change(s)
- ⊕ Frustrations in a position and how it was resolved
- ⊕ Ideal working environment

5. Education

Once you understand job history, you may want to explore education history. This will give you an idea if there are others in your firm from the same schools/programs. Also it may help with the original intent on why a candidate is pursuing a career in the design/building industry. How far back does the candidate's passion go? Did the candidate take interesting turns in their educational/professional development? How was the candidate mentored? Etc.

- ⊕ Why college was chosen
- ⊕ How you decided on architecture, interior design as a profession
- ⊕ Toughest courses
- ⊕ Major achievements
- ⊕ Favorite and least favorite classes

6. Interest and Activities

Outside interests and activities will give you some sense of work/life balance and how a candidate replenishes energy for bringing the best of what they have to give to a job. What are the candidate's interests outside of work? What does the candidate do for fun/relaxation? Is the candidate involved in community activities?

- ⊕ Spare time activities
- ⊕ Hobbies
- ⊕ Community Involvement
- ⊕ What activities desired but not presently engaged in

7. Self-Assessment

This is a good time to summarize the conversation so far. From what you've discussed, how does the candidate self-assess their strengths and weaknesses?

Does the candidate lead from strength, collaborate to overcome weaknesses, delegate effectively, continue to learn and develop?

Ask

- ⊕ What contributions have been made
- ⊕ Specific talent and/or interests
- ⊕ Recent performance review (positive)
- ⊕ Best qualities as seen by others
- ⊕ Assets in working with and directing others
- ⊕ Development needs
- ⊕ Areas of improvement
- ⊕ Qualities wish to improve
- ⊕ Advice received by others
- ⊕ Areas of improvement when working with others
- ⊕ Future training or experience needed
- ⊕ Recent performance reviews (things to improve)

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9. Presenting Company Information

When you share information on the company and the position, you are in sales mode. This is the time to make a compelling case why your firm excels: describe the firm's core competencies, how the firm rates in the market, and why the position is important. All the people in your firm who are involved in the hiring process are the face of the firm, not just to this candidate, but also to the market. You want the candidate to be able to discuss your firm in a positive light after leaving your office.

- ⊕ Describe your firm and its culture with enthusiasm. Share the good, the bad and the ugly. Be honest and under no circumstances should you misrepresent the position or the company. Please remember these individuals are taking time away from their schedule to meet with you.
- ⊕ Respect the candidates for they are invited guests. More importantly, every interview turns your face toward the camera. Everyone who meets the candidate is representing your firm. Make sure all parties involved in the interview process understand this point.
- ⊕ Many companies fail to realize that clients are not the only constituency they need to continually impress. The professional community is just, if not more so, important. No company would tolerate an employee treating potential clients wrong. The same goes for a potential employee. Make the candidate feel special, your reputation is riding on it.

10. Closing

Does the candidate have any lingering questions? What is the candidate's level of interest? Be open to exploring any doubts or concerns.

- ⊕ Explain the next steps, including whether there will be more interviews and approximate time when decisions will be made.
- ⊕ If you know immediately that it is not a fit, tell the candidate tactfully why. Don't leave them with unrealistic hopes, but be careful not to damage self-esteem. ■