

-- Executive Whitepaper --

HIRING THE RIGHT PERSON FOR THE JOB

**How to Improve Your Interviewing Techniques and Hire the
Right Person the First Time**

NELSON
FAMILY OF COMPANIES

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HIRING THE RIGHT PERSON FOR THE JOB

Introduction

Finding employees is a time-consuming, often expensive process. After putting the time and energy, not to mention the dollars, into searching for a new employee, the last thing an employer wants to do is repeat the process six months later. Conducting thorough, well-thought-out interviews is the key to hiring the right person for the job – the first time.

Remember that an interview not only allows an employer to evaluate a candidate, but also offers an employer the opportunity to sell the company to the chosen person.

This executive whitepaper presents some tips to help employers effectively screen candidates and mitigate the risks of a bad hire.

Before the Interview

Too often, employers do not put adequate time and thought into their interview preparation. To effectively evaluate a candidate you must have a clear understanding of what you are looking for and what specifically this particular candidate has to offer.

Develop a list of desired skills

Before you look at resumes, you should have a clear picture of the skills and abilities required for the job. Begin by listing the technical competencies needed, such as academic degrees, certifications or licenses, and related work experience. Then list key job-related behavioral competencies needed for the candidate to do the job and fit in with your organization's culture. You should also develop the job description for the position. If it is an existing role, review the job description with the employee leaving the position in order to update it.

Review the resumes

Carefully review candidates' resumes ahead of time so you do not have to take focus away from the conversation during the interview. Become familiar with their backgrounds and work experiences. You can begin to develop specific questions for each candidate by selecting two to three major topics that directly relate to the job, then formulating questions that begin with "Tell me about . . ."

Create a list of questions

After you've developed your list of required skills and reviewed candidates' resumes, compile a list of questions that will help you learn what you need to know about each candidate (see the appendix, Interview Questions, for some ideas). Try to use open-ended questions, rather than "yes" or "no" questions, to encourage candidates to share information and talk about their experiences. Probe for specific examples of how candidates have demonstrated your required competencies in past jobs.

Many interview techniques are available. Here at Nelson we utilize the Patterned Interview process, whereby we focus on candidates' previous work experience to get at the facts. This approach is similar to Behavior-Based Interviewing. The advantage of this type of interview is that you focus on how candidates handled specific situations in previous work environments. You can formulate questions that will tell you how a candidate might behave in situations that you know will occur at your workplace.

You can choose to work with one type of interview technique or a combination. Either way, you'll probably end up with a mix of questions – opinion-based ("What do you consider your strong points?"), credential-based ("How advanced is your knowledge of PowerPoint?"), experience-based ("Tell me about your supervisory responsibilities at X Company."), and behavior-based ("Tell me about a time you had to sacrifice quality to meet a deadline. What happened and how did you manage the situation?").

During the Interview

If you are receiving a one-sided picture of a candidate you should ask questions that will seek “contrary evidence.” For example, if a candidate appears to always be in complete control of every situation, you might ask “Tell me about a time when you just couldn’t keep your cool. What happened and how did you deal with that?”

Prepare for candidates’ questions

Be sure you have adequate information about the position and your company so you can answer any questions a candidate might pose. If possible, send the job description to candidates prior to the interview so they come prepared.

Prepare fellow interviewers

If a team is involved in the interview process, be sure all interviewers have the necessary information and are well trained in proper interview techniques and etiquette. All interview team members should be aware of the types of questions that cannot be asked, i.e. personal questions or those related to candidates’ protected class status, to avoid discrimination claims and uncomfortable situations.

Put candidates at ease

After you’ve introduced yourself, try to put candidates at ease by telling them the basic structure of the interview. If more than one person is involved in the interview process, have each interviewer introduce him or herself. Interviewing is stressful, but you want to help candidates relax so they’ll speak freely and offer detailed answers to your questions. You also want to be respectful and kind; remember that the interviewee of today could be the interviewer of tomorrow. Treat all candidates the way you would want to be treated!

Describe the position and your company

Before beginning the interview, give the candidate some background about the specific job and your company as a whole. You do not need to get into detail, but a brief overview will give candidates some information and also time to settle in and relax before the questioning begins.

Always give candidates time to answer your questions

When you are asking behavior-based questions, candidates may have difficulty remembering a specific situation. Give them time to find an answer, and then guide them in the direction you want to go if they move off the subject.

Take notes

Don’t think that you will be able to remember everyone you interview, particularly if you are doing more than three interviews in one day. Always take notes, but do not put them on the resume. Keep a pad of paper with you and jot the candidate’s name at the top of the page.

One of the most important skills in the interview process is listening, but you should also be acutely aware of body language. Take notes not only of candidates’ answers, but also of their ability to maintain eye contact, fidgeting or other nervous movements during certain questions, etc. Take notes on answers to each question asked so you can compare candidates when it’s time to make a hiring decision.

Allow time for candidates’ questions

At the end of the interview, allow time for candidates to ask their questions.

After the Interview

Let candidates know when they can expect to hear from you, and always make contact. A letter is acceptable for candidates you are rejecting, but be sure it is both professional and kind.

Conclusion

Although there is no guaranteed method of avoiding bad hiring decisions, a little extra effort up front can minimize errors and help you find the right employee for your company. For additional information on hiring, employment law, and other Human Resources issues, you can visit our Web site for HR professionals at www.hrhome.com and request a free trial subscription.

Appendix

Interview Questions

WARM-UP QUESTIONS

- What made you apply for this position?
- How did you hear about this job opening?
- Briefly, would you summarize your work history and education for me.

WORK HISTORY

- What special aspects of your work experience have prepared you for this job?
- Can you describe for me one or two of your most important accomplishments?
- How much supervision have you typically received in your previous job?
- Describe for me one or two of the biggest disappointments in your work history.
- Why are you leaving your present job? (or, Why did you leave your last job?)
- What is important to you in a company? What things do you look for in an organization?

JOB PERFORMANCE

- Everyone has strengths and weaknesses as workers. What are your strong points for this job?
- What would you say are areas needing improvement?
- How did your supervisor on your most recent job evaluate your job performance? What were some of the good points and bad points of that rating?
- When you have been told about, or discovered for yourself, a problem in your job performance, what have you typically done? Can you give me an example?
- Do you prefer working alone or in groups?
- What kind of people do you find it most difficult to work with? Why?
- Starting with your last job, tell me about any of your achievements that were recognized by your superiors.
- Can you give me an example of your ability to manage or supervise others?
- What are some things you would like to avoid in a job? Why?
- In your previous job what kind of pressures did you encounter?
- What would you say is the most important thing you are looking for in a job?
- What are some of the things on your job you feel you have done particularly well or in which you have achieved the greatest success? Why do you feel this way?
- What were some of the things about your last job that you found most difficult to do?
- What are some of the problems you encounter in doing your job? Which one frustrates you the most? What do you usually do about it?
- What are some things you particularly liked about your last job?
- Do you consider your progress on the job representative of your ability? Why?
- How do you feel about the way you and others in the department were managed by your supervisor?
- If I were to ask your present (most recent) employer about your ability as a _____, what would he/she say?

EDUCATION

- What special aspects of your education or training have prepared you for this job?
- What courses in school have been of most help in doing your job?

CAREER- GOALS

- What is your long-term employment or career objective?
- What kind of job do you see yourself holding five years from now?
- What do you feel you need to develop in terms of skill and knowledge in order to be ready for that opportunity?

- Why might you be successful in such a job?
- How does this job fit in with your overall career goals?
- Who or what in your life would you say influenced you most with your career objectives?
- Can you pinpoint any specific things in your past experience that affected your present career objectives?
- What would you most like to accomplish if you had this job?
- What might make you leave this job?

SELF-ASSESSMENT

- What kind of things do you feel most confident in doing?
- Can you describe for me a difficult obstacle you have had to overcome? How did you handle it? How do you feel this experience affected your personality or ability?
- How would you describe yourself as a person?
- What do you think are the most important characteristics and abilities a person must possess to become a successful (job title)? How do you rate yourself in these areas?
- Do you consider yourself a self-starter? If so, explain why (and give examples).
- What do you consider to be your greatest achievements to date? Why?
- What things give you the greatest satisfaction at work?
- What things frustrate you the most? How do you usually cope with them?

CREATIVITY

- In your work experience, what have you done that you consider truly creative?
- Can you think of a problem you have encountered when the old solutions didn't work and you came up with new solutions?
- Of your creative accomplishments big or small, at work or home, what gave you the most satisfaction?
- What kind of problems have people recently called on you to solve? Tell me what you have devised.

DECISIVENESS

- Do you consider yourself to be thoughtful and analytical or do you usually make up your mind fast? Give an example. (Watch time taken to respond.)
- What was your most difficult decision in the last six months? What made it difficult?
- The last time you did not know what decision to make, what did you do?
- How do you go about making an important decision affecting your career?
- What was the last major problem that you were confronted with? What action did you take on it?

RANGE OF INTERESTS

- What professional organizations do you belong to?
- Tell me specifically what you do in the civic activities in which you participate. (Leading questions in selected areas. i.e. sports, economics, current events, finance.)
- How do you keep up with what's going on in your company /your industry/your profession?

MOTIVATION

- What is your professional goal?
- Can you give me examples of experience on the job that you felt were satisfying?
- Do you have a long- and short-term plan for your department? Is it realistic?
- Did you achieve it last year?
- Describe how you determine what constitutes top priorities in the performance of your job.

WORK STANDARDS

- What are your standards of success in your job?
- In your position, how would you define doing a good job? On what basis was your definition determined?
- When judging the performance of a subordinate, what factors or characteristics are most important to you?

LEADERSHIP

- In your present job what approach do you take to get your people together to establish a common approach to a problem?
- What approach do you take in getting your people to accept your ideas or department goals?
- What specifically do you do to set an example for your employees?
- How frequently do you meet with your immediate subordinates as a group?
- What sort of leader do your people feel you are?
- How do you get people who do not want to work together to establish a common approach to a problem?
- If you do not have much time and they hold seriously differing views, what would be your approach?
- How would you describe your basic leadership style? Give specific examples of how you practice this.
- Do you feel you work more effectively on a one to one basis or in a group situation?
- Have you ever led a task force or committee or any group who doesn't report to you, but from whom you have to get work? How did you do it? What were the satisfactions and disappointments? How would you handle the job differently?

ORAL PRESENTATION SKILLS

- Have you ever done any public or group speaking? Recently? Why? How did it go?
- Have you made any individual presentations recently? How did you prepare?

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION SKILLS

- Would you rather write a report or give a verbal report? Why?
- What kind of writing have you done? For a group? For an individual?
- What is the extent of your participation in major reports that have to be written?

FLEXIBILITY

- What was the most important idea or suggestion you received recently from your employees? What happened as a result?
- What do you think about the continuous changes in company operating policies and procedures?
- How effective has your company been in adapting its policies to fit a changing environment?
- What was the most significant change made in your company in the last six months which directly affected you, and how successfully do you think you implemented this change?

STRESS TOLERANCE

- Do you feel pressure in your job? Tell me about it.
- What has been the highest pressure situation you have been under in recent years? How did you cope with it?

STABILITY and MATURITY

- Describe your most significant success and failure in the last two years.
- What do you most like to do?
- What do you least like to do?
- What in your last review did your supervisor suggest needed improvement? What have you done about it?

INTEREST IN SELF-DEVELOPMENT

- What has been the most important person or event in your own self-development?
- What kind of books and other publications do you read?
- Have you taken a management development course?
- How are you helping your subordinates develop themselves?