



THE INTERVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS

Hiring and promoting the best possible employees are among the most important of all supervisory duties. Interviewing properly and conducting reference checks are more efficient uses of time than dealing with the consequences of poor personnel selection.

The key to a successful interview and selection process is good planning. Planning helps you to learn the necessary information about each applicant while at the same time avoiding potential legal pitfalls of the process. The following guidelines will help you develop a sound and defensible interview and selection process.

DEFINING THE JOB AND THE IDEAL APPLICANT PROFILE

Identify the most important aspects of the job (i.e., skills, knowledge and abilities). Use the job description as the primary basis. Then, using these aspects, develop a profile of the type of employee who would best fit the job. This should be done in terms of skills/knowledge/abilities required, previous experience, compatibility with the job, and the kinds of personality traits desired (e.g., aggressiveness, a desire to work with people, creativity, willingness to work as part of a team, ability to work independently). As a part of the profile, consider the job parameters (e.g., amount of overtime required, pay level, work hours, necessity for travel, opportunity for promotion, available benefits, limits on when vacation may be taken, etc.).

DEVELOPING THE INTERVIEW OUTLINE

The process of filling most AgCenter positions involves a review team or search committee. Efforts should be made to use a team or committee with a diverse membership. Where necessary, unit heads should consider adding individuals from other units or job categories (faculty, associates, classified staff, graduate assistants, etc.) to provide adequate diversity (e.g., by gender, race, etc.).

Based on the ideal applicant profile developed earlier, select interview questions which will help determine whether an applicant fits this profile. The questions must be based on objective criteria and all must be job-related. Develop an appropriate number of questions, depending on the amount of time allotted for the interview. (The last page of this set of guidelines includes a list of possible questions.) Generally you will want to cover education and experience, goals, work habits, working conditions, and relevant technical knowledge. If your interview process is to include any in-house "test" (e.g., typing), note that the test **MUST** be an actual sample of duties involved in the position. That is, the test must be job related. Also, the test must be given to all applicants.

Once your interview outline is developed, review it with emphasis on looking for areas which might be "out of bounds" due to federal and state EEO laws. The section on legal restrictions further below will help you accomplish this.

SELECTING APPLICANTS FOR INTERVIEW

For most Civil Service positions, applicants must have the appropriate test score when they apply for an advertised position. The top applicant's package for all positions must be reviewed to ensure that the applicant meets the established qualification requirements. For Civil Service positions, these are stated on the job specification sheet. For academic positions, they are stated on the Position Vacancy Announcement.

Applicants who don't meet the stated qualification requirements should be eliminated immediately. However, their records should be retained because they will be reported as part of the applicant pool, but with a notation that they were not qualified.

When an unusually high number of applicants respond to an announcement, it is not necessary to interview them all. However, in order to make an initial "cut," objective criteria which relates to the stated qualification requirements must be used. When the same situation occurs with classified positions, contact this office for assistance with making a cut.

THE INTERVIEW ITSELF

- Begin the interview by trying to put the applicant at ease.
- Outline the structure of the interview, explain the organization, and give a general description of the job (or provide a copy of the job description).
- Discuss the job parameters. At this point, the applicant should have enough information to make a preliminary determination as to whether he/she is interested in the job.
- Explain to the applicant that you may be taking some notes to record the most valuable information.
- Begin questioning. When your questioning is completed, make sure that you have the necessary references.
- Allow the applicant to ask questions.
- Explain to the applicant how and when a decision will be communicated to him/her.
- End the interview on a positive note. You want all applicants to leave with positive feelings about the organization, regardless of the outcome of the interview.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Add details to your notes while the information is still fresh. Compare your information to the ideal applicant profile. Always check references. Most references are checked by telephone, although in-person and written references are common. Sources of references include the immediate supervisor, past employers, coworkers, clientele, or peers. (Be sure you have the applicant's express approval to contact the present employer.) Develop questions for the reference check in the same manner used to develop questions for the interview.

Often you will want to hold a second interview for the applicants who appear to have the most potential after the first interview. Structure it in a manner similar to the first interview, but ask questions which fill in gaps in your information.

Make your decision by comparing applicants to your ideal applicant profile. Communicate your decision to the selected applicant as well as to those who are not selected. (Do so only after you are authorized to make an offer and it has been accepted!) If an applicant who was not selected asks you for an explanation, explain that you selected the applicant who best fits the job. Don't discuss shortcomings of applicants who were not selected. You are not required to give specific reasons to an applicant who was not selected. See a sample letter for applicants who are not selected.

LEGAL RESTRICTIONS

There are various state and federal regulations regarding EEO areas. They generally prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age or handicap. The attached "Acceptable Pre-Employment Inquiries," outlines the specific kinds of inquiries which are acceptable and unacceptable. "EEO and the Interview Process - DO's and DON'Ts" provides general information on avoiding legal problems in the interview process. All interviewers should be thoroughly familiar with this material.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

When it's time to process appointment documents for the applicant selected, you will be asked to provide a list of all applicants including their race, ethnic origin and sex. This data is very important to our EEO and Affirmative Action programs. However, since you can not ask for this information during the interview process, you must rely on your observations. In those unusual situations where you are uncertain as to the race or sex of an applicant, you should feel free to state "unknown."

Tips for a Successful Interview

Review resumes/applications in advance to obtain some general familiarity with the applicant's background and to identify gaps in the information or areas which need special attention.

Try to schedule all interviews over a period of one to three days. If interviews are spread too far apart, you are likely to have trouble making comparisons. Conversely, if too many interviews are scheduled for one day, you may use all your energy trying to get through the schedule.

When contacting applicants, suggest two or three dates/times to facilitate scheduling, while still providing the applicant some flexibility.

Make whatever arrangements are necessary to insure that the interview will be conducted without interruption.

Use your questions to force the applicant to tell you what you need to know to compare the applicant to your ideal applicant profile. Ask for examples whenever appropriate.

Talk to the interviewee at his/her level in easily understood terms. Vary the kinds of questions asked. Ask narrative questions as well as specific informational questions. Ask problem-solving and situational questions.

DON'T do all the talking!

Be patient in giving the applicant time to think.

Encourage the applicant to ask questions, but don't allow the applicant to change the direction of the interview.

Don't make up your mind on the basis of your first impression. Try to keep an open mind. Observe not only what the applicant answers, but **HOW** he/she answers.

Avoid the **HALO EFFECT**. This is the tendency to allow your impression of one attribute of the applicant to be generalized to all other attributes of the applicant.

EEO and the Interview Process – DO's and DON'Ts

Various state and federal regulations regarding equal employment affect the interview and selection process. These regulations generally prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age or handicap. The "Acceptable and Unacceptable Pre-Employment Inquiries" chart on the reverse side of this page outlines the specific kinds of information which you can and cannot ask. In addition to being familiar with this chart, you should pay special attention the following areas to avoid violating equal employment regulations.

DO consider the person's true ability to perform the duties of the position. Never assume that an applicant's age, sex, or disability will prevent the performance of tasks

DON'T express a preference for race, sex, a particular age group or indicate any other preference which might be construed as discriminatory.

DO keep in mind the applicant's perception of you. Don't refer to applicants in an "endearing manner." Never use racially or ethnically oriented terms. Don't flirt with or patronize the applicant.

DON'T indicate to a member of a "protected group" (e.g., minority, female, person with disability) that your interest in them stems from a desire to improve your EEO image.

DO avoid stereotypes. Keep an open mind. Don't imply (or assume) that the job requires a young person with energy or that an older person may find the job too demanding or that females should not travel alone.

DO use extra caution in dealing with physical requirements. Federal regulations, and most recently the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA), require employers to make "reasonable accommodations" for persons with permanent disabilities. Often minor modifications to the physical requirements of a job can remove barriers to employment. Federal regulations also state that only the "essential duties" of a position can be taken into consideration when determining whether a person with a disability can adequately perform the job. Essential duties are the duties which are fundamental to the position, taking into consideration frequency and value of the duties. Contact the AgCenter HRM Office or the LCES Civil Rights Office for assistance in this area.

DON'T pursue areas which legally are "out of bounds," even if the applicant brings them up. Stick to the job duties. For instance, if an applicant raises concern over child care arrangements, explain the work hour requirements of the job and allow the applicant to make his/her own assessment.

DON'T indicate that you already have someone in mind for the position. The interview process should be an open process where all applicants receive equal consideration.

DO remember that most of the tips above also apply to what you say outside of the interview. In the event that a discrimination claim is filed, comments made outside of the interview can come back to haunt you when co-workers are asked to answer under oath regarding what was said "in private." Remember, keep an open mind and don't draw conclusions or make assumptions you can't defend.

**ACCEPTABLE AND UNACCEPTABLE
PRE-EMPLOYMENT/INTERVIEW INQUIRIES**

Area	Acceptable Inquiries	Unacceptable Inquiries
Name	Whether work records are under another name (if necessary for access to records)	To ask if a woman uses Miss, Mrs., or Ms. or to ask for maiden name
Residence	Address and phone number or how applicant can be reached	Not applicable
Age	After hiring, proof of age by birth certificate	Age or age group or birth certificate or similar record
National Origin	None	Birthplace of applicant or family; other inquiry into national origin, ancestry
Race	Race for EEO statistics AFTER hiring (voluntary for employee)	Any inquiry that would indicate race or color
Sex	Sex for EEO statistics AFTER hiring (voluntary for employee)	Any inquiry that would indicate sex
Religion or Creed	None	Birthplace of applicant or family; references from church
Citizenship	Whether eligible to work in U.S.; will require proof after employment via I-9 form	If native born or naturalized; proof of citizenship; date of citizenship; whether family or native-born or naturalized.
Marital Status	Status AFTER hiring for tax/insurance purposes; same for dependents	Any question revealing marital status or number/ages of dependents; child care arrangements, etc.
Military Service	Job-related experience; may require military discharge certificate AFTER hiring	Military records, military service; type discharge
Education	Schools attended; foreign language skills if job related	Questions which would reveal race, national origin, religious affiliation
Criminal Record	Listing of convictions, other than misdemeanors	Questions on arrests
References	General and work references not relating to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, ancestry	Reference from clergy or other person who might reflect race, color, religion, sex, national origin, ancestry
Organizations	Professional memberships and offices, so long as not used to determine race, sex, etc.	Listing of ALL clubs/organizations to which applicant belongs
Photographs	AFTER hiring for identification purposes	May not request or take photos
Work Schedule	Willingness to work required work schedule	Willingness to work on any particular religious holiday
Physical Data/ Disabilities	Whether able to perform the essential functions of the job, with or without accommodation. Note: if an accommodation is needed, contact the HRM or LCES Civil Rights Office for assistance.	To ask height, weight, impairment, or other physical data. May not ask about past sick leave usage. Must make reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities who are otherwise qualified to perform the essential functions of the job.

SAMPLE LETTER TO APPLICANT NOT SELECTED FOR POSITION

January 26, 2005

Mr. John J. Doe
2233 Elm Parkway
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70888

Dear Mr. Doe:

I enjoyed talking with you recently concerning our vacant clerical position. We had many good applicants and we have now selected the one we believe will best fit the needs of this position.

I would like to thank you for your time and interest in employment with the LSU AgCenter.

Sincerely,

Mary Miller
Parish Chair