



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, creed, sex, religion, national origin, age, sexual orientation, veteran's status, or marital status, or disability. 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.

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

DO ask all applicants the same questions to ensure fairness. However, the applicant's initial response and the information provided in the resume/application will determine the extent to which you pursue the area opened up by the question.

DO follow your interview outline closely to avoid crossing over into areas which are "out of bounds" (i.e., unacceptable inquiries see below).

DO maintain records to include all applicants and the dates/times of interviews. It is also wise to maintain a copy of the interview format, outline, and questions, along with reference questions.

DO exercise extreme caution in dealing with physical requirements. By law, employers are required to make reasonable accommodations for those applicants with disabilities. Often minor modifications to the physical requirements of a job can remove barriers for a person with a disability. Never assume that an applicant's age, sex, or disability will prevent the performance of tasks. In setting physical requirements, consider the frequency and value of each affected task.

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

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

DON'T indicate to a minority or female applicant that your interest in them stems from a desire to improve your EEO image.

DO avoid stereotypes. For instance, never imply that females should not travel alone or that the job requires a young person with energy or that a person with a disability may find the job too demanding.

DON'T pursue legally out of bounds areas, even if the applicant raises them. Stick to the job duties. For example, if an applicant raises concern over child care arrangements, explain work hour requirements 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.

DON'T offer a position to an applicant until after you have been notified that the Employment Screening Form is back and you may continue the job offer process.

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Tell me about yourself.

Why do you think you should be selected for this position?

What qualifications do you have that will help you to be successful in your field?

What personal characteristics are necessary for success in your field?

Thinking of your competition for jobs to which you aspire, what do you see as your assets and limitations?

What are your short-term and long-term goals? How do you plan to achieve those goals?

If you have your choice of jobs and organizations, where would you go?

Tell me about your most recent job. Past jobs?

What did you spend of your time on in that job? What was a typical day like?

What was the most enjoyable part of your work? The least?

What benefits, other than pay, did you enjoy most?

What have you learned from some of the jobs you have held?

What jobs have you enjoyed the most? Least?

What were some of the more important accomplishments in your last job?

Considering these accomplishments, what were some of the reasons for your success?

Were there any unusual difficulties you have to overcome in your present or past jobs?

Describe a work-related situation in the past that you found to be frustrating?

What type of training have you been given in previous jobs?

What decisions are easiest for you to make and which ones are more difficult?

What would you do if your supervisor was on vacation, had left you with a major project to complete and you received an urgent request for a second major project?

Where do you rank your present job compared to other jobs you've held? Why?

Please describe your relationship with your last three supervisors.

Do you prefer working independently or on a team?

What kind of supervisor do you prefer? What kind of supervisor gets the best performance from you?

Do you mind traveling? Overtime work?

If you have a supervisor who was the opposite of the kind you like, how would you handle the situation?

What do you feel is an acceptable attendance record? Do you arrive at work on time?

Do you prefer a large organization or a small one? Why?

How do you respond to criticism?

Are you a leader or a follower?

What do people generally think of you?

How do you handle pressure and deadlines? How do you set priorities?

What do you think determines a person's progress in a good organization?

What are your own special abilities? How are you unique?

What is your major weakness? Strength?

What planning processes have you found useful and how do you go about them?

Please give me an example of how you have been particularly effective in relating to others on the job.

What have you done that indicates you are qualified for this job?

What skills do you believe will be most helpful to you in this position?

What type of training do you anticipate needing from this organization?

What is your work philosophy?

What types of people do you like to work with the most? The least?

Are you creative? Analytical? A leader? Give an example of each.

If you had a co-worker who you felt did not carry their share of the work, how would you handle the situation?

Why do you think you would like to work for this organization?

Why do you think you would like this particular job?

What questions do you have about our organization?

What interests you about our organization?

In what school activities did you participate? Why? Which did you enjoy the most?

What courses did you enjoy the best? Least? Why?

Why did you choose your particular major?

Do you feel you have received good general training? Why?

SUBJECT MATTER/TECHNICAL QUESTIONS AS APPROPRIATE FOR THE SPECIFIC JOB.

ACCEPTABLE PRE-EMPLOYMENT 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; recommendations for references from church.
Citizenship	Whether eligible to work in U.S.; may require proof of employment eligibility AFTER hiring.	If native born or naturalized; proof of citizenship; date of citizenship; whether family 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, so long as not used to determine race, sex, etc; offices held.	Listing of ALL clubs to which applicant belongs.
Photographs	AFTER hiring for identification purposes.	May not request photo; may not take photos.
Work Schedule	Willingness to work required work schedule.	Willingness to work on any particular religious holiday.
Physical Data/Handicaps	May ask whether the applicant is able to perform the <u>essential</u> functions of the job, with or without accommodations.	To ask height, weight, impairment, or other non-specified, job-related physical data. May not exclude handicapped applicants as a class on the basis of their handicap; each case must be determined individually and employers are responsible for making reasonable accommodations.
Service Animals	May ask only two questions – whether the dog is a service animal that is required due to a disability and what type of work or task the dog has been trained to do.	No other inquiries are allowed regarding service animals.

SOURCE: Excerpts from Understanding Personnel Law, Council on Education in Management.