

Making Sound Hiring Decisions

By BNET Editorial

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Recruitment appears simple: a vacancy arises, the role is advertised, a pool of qualified candidates is interviewed and otherwise assessed, the successful candidate selected and the position offered. It rarely goes as smoothly at that, however. By final interview stages, so much information about the candidates has been gathered, that those who must decide between them are often overloaded with information and turn to subjective impressions and biases. Establishing a structured process facilitates fair and objective decisions.

What You Need to Know

Who should participate in the selection process?

In a small business, there may be only one staff member available to interview new recruits. However, it is a good idea to involve at least one other co-worker in the process if possible. Having more than one interviewer provides a valuable second opinion on each candidate, making it less likely for the selection decision to be influenced by individual first impressions. It is helpful to involve the person who will ultimately manage or supervise the new recruit. Another helpful perspective is that of an employee with specialized knowledge related to the position being filled.

When involving colleagues in an interview process, schedule time to brief them prior to the interview(s). They should know what the job requires, the selection criteria being used, and the questions they will be expected to ask.

Is it a good idea to give interview candidates a tour of their potential workplace?

Providing candidates a brief tour of the workplace is typically good practice, especially for new entrants or for people returning to work after a break. A workplace tour helps give candidates an idea of what to expect. It can also be an opportunity to see how candidates interact with potential colleagues.

It is essential, however, to speak carefully when you are showing candidates around the workplace before the final decision has been made. Well meant and seemingly innocuous

remarks such as "This is where you will be working" can be construed as suggesting a contract of employment. Keep terminology as generic as possible—instead, for example, say "This is where the successful candidate will work."

After the interview, what should occur?

If you have narrowed the candidate pool to two or three people, consider asking those candidates back for a second interview. This provides a chance to follow up in more detail on the original interview discussions, in order to identify the very best person for the job. Basic information—such as qualifications and experience—is typically covered in a first interview. A second session can provide an opportunity to ask candidates about their ideas for the business, or to request more specific detail about how they would actually perform the job if it were offered to them.

Once the hiring decision is made, inform the successful candidate as soon as possible, as they may be pursuing other positions or considering other job offers. It is common to deliver the good news over the telephone, but this conversation should be immediately followed by a formal offer letter. The letter should confirm the job offer subject to any follow-up processes, such as checking references or verifying employment history. It should detail start dates and basic terms and conditions, such as salary and amount of vacation time. Optionally, information about what the new recruit should expect on the first day, what time they should report to the office, and to whom they will report could be included. The new recruit should be asked to return a signed copy of the offer letter to indicate his or her formal acceptance of the job.

Write to unsuccessful candidates to inform them of the outcome of the interview as soon as an acceptance is received from the candidate who was offered the job.

What to Do

Document Interview Impressions

It is always helpful to take some notes during interviews, but in such a way that the meeting doesn't become stilted. In the gaps between interviews, write down more detailed reactions to candidates' answers while they are still fresh in your mind. Consider using an interview rating form to score each candidate using a consistent scale (e.g. 1 to 10) against key criteria. This practice necessitates asking each candidate the same questions.

In addition, make a note of any general impressions you have of the candidates (such as their communication skills, enthusiasm, and confidence) and how well they may be suited to the advertised job. Remember, however, that the best candidate is not necessarily the most outspoken or extroverted one. Base the decision primarily on relevant skills and experience, versus personality.

Just as it is unlawful to ask potentially-discriminatory questions in an interview, writing any notes pertaining to the candidate's gender, race, sexual orientation, religious views, age, marital status, or family commitments is never appropriate and could also be viewed as discriminatory.

Assess Candidates Consistently

Before interviewing for a position, you should create a *job description* as well as an *ideal candidate profile*, describing the type of candidate sought in terms of their qualifications, experience, skills, and knowledge. Additionally, key selection criteria for the job should be decided before the interviews. The final decision should be based on how closely each candidate matches these criteria.

An interview rating form on which each candidate is scored on each of the criteria can assist with decision-making. To avoid subjective scoring, use a scale that goes from totally appropriate to totally inappropriate. When multiple people are interviewing candidates, it is good practice to rate the candidates separately and then compare notes before agreeing on a final score.

What to Avoid

You Ask Potentially Discriminatory Questions

It is essential to ask only job-related questions during an employment interview. Labor law prohibits asking prospective employees about topics which may be perceived as discriminatory. A few examples of topics which must be avoided in interview questions include:

- age;
- race or ethnicity;
- religious beliefs;
- height or weight, if it is not directly relevant to the position;
- marital status, how many children the candidate has, and/or their childcare arrangements;
- military experience.

If your organization has a human resources department, request some training or documentation on this critical legal topic before interviewing candidates. If there is any uncertainty about lawful versus unlawful questions to ask, obtain appropriate legal advice before the interviews start. Do not risk a legal claim by being uninformed on this topic.

You Make Assumptions

It is very easy to allow stereotyped assumptions to creep into the interview process. Beware of rejecting candidates on the grounds of a “gut feeling” or the idea that he or she would not “fit in.” The

courts are increasingly suspicious of such comments, as they are often considered to be based on discriminatory assumptions and may lead to findings of discrimination.

Where to Learn More

Web Site:

U.S. Department of Labor Compliance Assistance Law Guide:
www.dol.gov/compliance/guide/index.htm

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