

GETTING INTERVIEWS RIGHT

In spite of their pitfalls, interviews are still the primary tool used by companies to gather information on which to make hiring decisions. Given their importance, it's essential that thought and planning are put into getting them right.

In this tight labour market, the interview has become an important opportunity not just for the candidate to convince that they are the right person, but for the company to sell its credentials as a choice employer. Companies need to be competitive in attracting the best quality people and the interview plays an important role in getting that message across.

Some fundamentals to remember when conducting interviews:

- Make each candidate feel welcome and comfortable. Encourage open communication and try to help dispel any nerves.
- Plan the interviews. Have a prepared list of questions or areas to cover with each candidate so that responses can be compared across candidates.
- Ensure the interview is conducted in a professional, confidential environment, free from interruptions.
- Find out what the candidate is looking for in a job. What are their career ambitions and can the company help them to achieve those ambitions. Will they fit with the team?
- Facilitate two-way communication. Remember that it's not just about choosing the right candidate – many candidates also have an opportunity to choose the right employer.
- Take care to ensure that interview questions do not contravene anti-discrimination laws. Avoid questions invasive personal questions or questions around age, race, marital status or sexual preference.
- Questions should be structured to prompt a detailed response rather than a yes or no answer. Encourage the person to give examples to support their responses.

Below is a selection of commonly asked questions. It is useful to select 3-4 questions from each section and use them as a basic framework for each interview conducted.

Why is the person looking for a new job?

- What happened in your last job that prompted your decision to leave?
- Why do you want to work for this company?
- What do you know about this company?
- What interests you about this company?
- What can you contribute to this company?
- How long have you been looking for a new job?
- What qualities do you think this job requires?
- What did you like about your previous job?
- What didn't you like about your previous job?

How does the person work?

- Tell me how you normally organise your day?
- How much support/direction you need from your manager/supervisor?
- What does taking responsibility at work mean to you?
- How do you handle criticism?
- Do you work better individually or in a team?
- What has been your biggest failure?
- How could you improve yourself?
- How flexible are you to work the hours necessary to get the work done?

Can/will do the job?

- What was your greatest success and how did you achieve it?
- What motivates you?
- What do you see as your main strengths: What would you like to change about yourself at work?
- What are you looking for in a new job?
- What did you do on a day to day basis in your previous job?
- What would you like a new job to involve?
- What sorts of jobs are you considering at the moment?
- How did you make a difference to your last company?
- How did you progress in your last job?
- Why do you want this job?
- Where do you see yourself in 3-5 years time?

Technical knowledge

- Ask questions specifically related to the role. The person conducting the interview should have sufficient knowledge to be able to assess the value of the answers. Questions such as:
 - What do you know about ...
 - Describe your experience in ...
 - How would you go about ...
 - What would you do if ...
 - Have you ever....
 - What do you see as the pitfalls in ...

How does the person like to be managed?

- How did your previous manager get the best from you?
- How did you get on with your last manager/colleagues
- What are you like under pressure?
- How do you cope with stress?
- What types of situations do you find stressful?
- Tell me about a time when you worked to a deadline. What happened and how did you handle it?

Will this person fit the company?

- Do you prefer to work in a small, medium or large company?
- What can we offer that your previous organisation did not offer?
- Are you accepted into a team quickly?
- How do you work with others?
- Have you ever worked with a person/people who you felt were not doing their share of the work? What did you do?
- Tell me about a time when you took initiative to solve a problem? What happened and what was the outcome?