

How to Effectively Interview

The most common and recommended approach is to hold interviews over two stages.

The first stage should be relatively informal and the Fixed Price Recruitment psychometric tool will offer you the interview questions will help you to quickly penetrate into the psyche of the candidate and improve your ability to get beneath the skin of the 'interview façade'.

We recommend that the second interview is more of a formal business meeting perhaps involving a plan, presentation or formal discussion document that you ask the candidate to prepare beforehand.

It is imperative that you are as positive as possible about your company and the role as even in this market every candidate will have a choice of opportunities. We recommend that the first interview puts the candidate at ease so that they are 'bought in' to your company, your personnel and your opportunity.

The first stage should be a test of personality, character and basic culture fit. It should be a test of basic competence and ability but most of all a fact finding mission for both parties. Someone once likened the perfect first interview to 'two strangers meeting in a pub for the first time' and I feel that this is a good analogy to get the setting right.

At the second interview we recommend that you ask the candidate to prepare a formal document – a presentation, a formal discussion document matching their experience and skills to your needs, a planning document, or something else relevant to the role that you are recruiting for.

In asking the candidate to prepare something for the meeting you will not only see the candidate's ability to research and prepare but the exercise will really help focus their mind in deciding whether your business is right for them.

Here are some really solid general hints and tips to improve your ability to effectively interview. They are simple tips but effective ones!

- Make a list of the required competencies, qualities and minimum skills/experience that you require an individual to possess in order for them to succeed. This may sound obvious yet most interviewers don't take the time to do this. This exercise will make interviewing a natural process where you gather the evidence from each candidate on each point to ensure that you make the right hiring decisions.
- Do read every candidate's CV to get a 'flavour' of them before the interview. We find that by just remembering where the candidate lives, their personal information, hobbies/interests and current employer will make them feel more comfortable in the knowledge that you've taken the time to read their CV.
- The Fixed Price Recruitment personality questionnaire that we provide on each candidate gives an invaluable guide to holding an effective interview. Probe the personality traits in greater depth and use the recommended questions to quickly gauge whether the candidate has the prerequisite traits. For help and advice on interpreting and using the questionnaire please do not hesitate to contact a Fixed Price Recruitment consultant.
- I personally highlight (or underline if I don't have a highlighter to hand!) areas of each CV and the personality questionnaire to probe. This not only helps to get to the 'meat' of the interview but tangibly proves to the applicants that I've taken the time to read their CVs!

- Leave enough time for the interview itself *and* making notes afterwards. Set each interview at intervals of 15 minutes *more* than you feel you will complete the interview. Try not to over-run and keep candidates waiting.
- Avoid distractions. Interviewing to get the right staff for your team is one of your most important responsibilities. Take the time out to interview effectively in an environment where you won't be disturbed. Make sure you switch off your mobile phone!
- Remember first impressions count – and that also counts for you! Make sure the reception area is tidy and welcoming. If you are running late let the candidate know.
- Think of how you will position the interview. Do you want the formal, traditional, opposite a desk approach or do you want to interview at right angles. Being able to see the whole person will enable you to read all of their body signals
- Start by setting an agenda. How long the meeting will take, what you would like to get out of the meeting and invite the candidates to ask questions throughout the meeting.
- For the first meeting take a conversational approach to the interview and ask wide open questions. One of the best ways to start an interview is asking the candidate to tell their 'story' in five minutes in both work related and personal terms. This approach will throw up a whole heap of questions to probe as the meeting progresses and will put the candidate straight at ease. This approach will help you tease out the required information in a very natural way.
- Ensure that you take the time to detail why you are recruiting and the vision and direction of your business.
- Research has shown that an ideal first interview is 60% candidate talk and 40% interviewer talk and I would guess that this will probably rise to nearer 70%/30% in second and subsequent meetings.
- Types of questions:
 - Open – questions that start with who, what, where, why, when and how. Encourage the candidate to answer freely. However use questions beginning 'why' sparingly as they can come across as confrontational;
 - Closed – Used to acknowledge, check facts, reiterate points and clarify;
 - Leading Questions, i.e. 'we need someone to open doors in the healthcare sector, do you have experience in this field?' used to lead the candidate to detail their experience/skills/qualities;
 - Multiple questions – 'What brings you here today? Why are you looking to leave your current employer? What are you looking for in a role?' allows the candidate to answer all of the questions in a single answer;
 - Competency Based, i.e. 'give me an example of when you have.....' the best, most valuable and recommended way of questioning to gather both information and to fairly select an individual from a pool of candidates'; Similar to Competency questioning is example questioning 'Can you give me an example when you have.....?' again, useful to gather evidence and information;
 - Hypothetical Questions, i.e. 'What would you do if.....?' Personally I think that they have little use as you will get a standard interview façade answer rather than what they would do in the actual event;
 - Behavioural Questions – how they've handled particular issues/scenarios/events in the past and focussing more on their personal qualities;
 - Probing Questions, used to ladder or funnel questions, i.e. drilling the detail of a particular answer. Competency based laddering questions are some of most useful ways to interview – 'Well why did you do that', 'why did you think that was the right decision', 'what could you have done differently', etc.

- Remember to listen! Acknowledge what the candidate is saying and be aware of your body signals, nod your head in agreement, smile, use open hand gestures. Be aware of looking at your watch, out of the window, at your phone/blackberry, etc! Clarify, acknowledge and summarise to demonstrate your understanding of what has been said.
- Observe everything and if intuitively you do not feel that their body signals and words match probe deeper
- Keep to timings and don't be afraid to 'reel the candidate back to the agenda' if they embark on a journey of anecdotes!
- Make notes throughout the meeting. It is amazing how much you will forget between first and second interview.
- A professional way to recruit and select is by listing the required skills/competencies/qualities/experience and mark each candidate out of a score of five or ten. This will help you to select based on 'fact' rather than 'intuition' (By law you should have a centrally kept list of how a candidate would score two out of ten, three out of ten, eight out of ten, etc. as the candidate has the right under the data protection act to read your notes and see how you've judged them to be a particular score)
- Don't ask surreal or 'showboat questions' – i.e. 'If you were an animal what would you be and why?' Unless you are a trained psychologist they offer little value!
- Manage the candidate's expectations – detail the next stage, when they'll hear feedback, etc. Unless it is the last candidate that you are meeting in a pool of candidates do not offer them the next stage opportunity unless you are convinced they will be at the next stage!

Good luck with your interviews. To help you to interview we have also put together a list of common questions that you will find at www.fixedpricerecruitment.co.uk. We hope you have found this guide useful.