

Guide to Successful interviewing (and how to uncover the best Candidates)

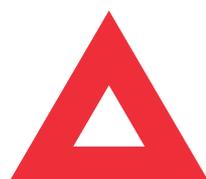
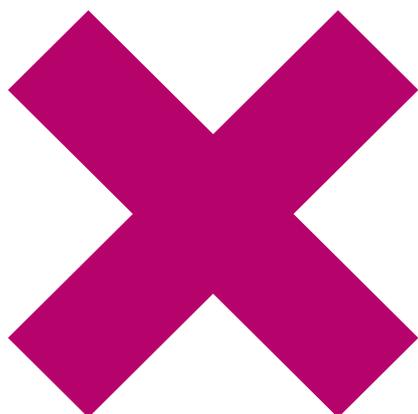
Executive summary

It is said that looking for a job is a job in itself, and it can certainly feel like that for many of the Candidates we support during their search. They are looking for a new challenge with a company that will enable them to work more flexibly, offer greater variation and responsibility, or help them take the next step in their careers. The pressure is very much on them, or is it?

Competition between Employers has never been greater. With fewer people on the market and more already in it, Employers are having to work harder to not only find the talent that is available but also to position themselves as the one that great Candidates want to work for. It isn't easy and, arguably, the most important stage of the candidate attraction process is the interview.

Irrespective of how many interviews you may have performed, the challenge remains the same – how to identify the best Candidate for the role(s) you need to fill. But - to use an Americanism – if every Candidate brings their A-game, how can you as an Employer look beyond the hyperbole to reveal the one person who you know will be the perfect fit for your organisation?

That's what this Guide will seek to achieve. Having worked with many of the largest, fast-growing and most exciting Employers across Oxfordshire for the best part of 20 years, we have acquired an in-depth insight into the interview techniques that deliver the best recruitment outcomes.



How to prepare for an interview

You've shortlisted a number of Candidates and it is now time to meet them and conduct interviews. The first thing to remember is an interview is a two-way process. It is an opportunity for the Candidate to find out more about the role, the company and the culture of the organisation and to decide whether it is a place they would like to work, as well as the interview panel deciding whether that person is right for the job in the first place.

Starting with the obvious, make sure you give the Candidate all the information they need to ensure the interview runs smoothly on the day. Have you made them aware of the date, time and location of the interview? This is especially important if the location is different to the office address on your website. Have you made the candidate aware of the parking facilities? Knowing this information can help reduce the stress of the candidate and ensure they are not late for the interview trying to find somewhere to park, or realising they have no cash on them for parking when they arrive.

Inform the Candidate of the names of the people interviewing them, so they know who to ask for when they arrive and what they can expect on the day. For example, if you expect them to give a presentation, ensure you have told them the topic, how long the presentation should be and give them enough notice to be able to put it together. You may decide to put together an information pack which you email or post out to them beforehand that has all the information together, as well as some background information on the company. This also gives a good and professional first impression of the company. Understand the objectives of the interview.

You will have had a list of criteria which you used to shortlist the Candidates, it is also important to understand what you want to find out from the interviewee during the interview. Doing so will enable you to create a list of questions that relate to the job role. Mix up these questions with some behavioural questions to give you an indication of their past experience and performance.

Unless you are naturally good at building rapport, you may want to prepare some questions to find out a bit more about who the Candidate is as an individual, what their interests are outside of work and their personality.

Ensure you review their CV and know the name of the Candidate you are expecting to arrive. Make sure you have an appropriate room booked to conduct the interview and, if they are going to be presenting, ensure that all the IT is set up prior to the interview time. Simple, yet often overlooked actions, include ensuring you have enough chairs and water available on the table, this will all help everyone feel comfortable and the interview go smoothly.

Different interviewing techniques

Deciding which interview technique to use may depend on what stage of the interviewing process you are at. For first stage interviews you may want to hold a telephone interview to verify certain skills or experience before bringing them in for a face to face interview. Telephone interviews are also great for finding out how strong the Candidate's communication skills are.

Panel Interviews

Panel interviews generally have two or more interviewers and are a more formal approach to interviewing. There are a number of reasons Employers decide to use a panel interview. It gives you an idea of how the Candidate handles pressure, an insight into their communication skills and how well they can build rapport. It will also give you an idea of how well they will fit into the team environment and working with different types of people. You may decide to include behavioural interview questions.

This technique determines how well the candidate handles specific situations within the workplace and how well they may perform in the future. Examples of behavioural interview questions include, tell me about a time when you used your creativity in the workplace? Give me an example of a time you handled conflict in the workplace? Can tell us about a time when you reached a goal and how you achieved it?

Group Interviews

As an Employer you may decide to invite some of your existing team to the interview, these are called peer interviews and can provide a number of benefits. Candidates are likely to feel more comfortable with peers and therefore may be more open and let their guard down, this will give you and the Candidate a better feel as to whether they will fit into the existing team and culture. This technique will also raise the morale and productivity of existing team members as they are helping to select future employees of the business.

Assessment centres are an interview technique where all the candidates are brought together at the same time. This technique is used for candidates to demonstrate their communication, teamwork, problem-solving, task management and leadership skills through a number of different exercises and tests.

Informal Interviews

You may decide you want to meet up with a Candidate for a coffee and informal chat, to get to know them and the type of work they are looking for. This type of interview technique is especially popular if someone has been recommended to you.

Tests and Presentations

Depending on the role you are recruiting for, you may decide to put the Candidate through a number of tests or presentations. The type of tests you organise will depend on what skills you want to assess. For example, a written test would assess their common sense, comprehension, spelling and grammar, whereas an in-tray exercise assesses how well the Candidate can prioritise their workload and understand what action needs to be taken.

Presentations are generally used for more senior level jobs and assess the Candidate's ability to communicate effectively, their time management, persuasion, analysis and selling skills, as well as their public speaking ability and creativity.

Knowing the right questions to ask

The interviews are scheduled and Candidates have confirmed, you have a limited amount of time to find out as much as you can to determine whether they are the right employee for you, the team and the company. Knowing what questions to ask can help you get the best of out of your Candidates.

Be friendly

The Candidate may be feeling nervous and maybe a bit anxious so asking some simple questions at the start of the interview can help them feel at ease. Ask them how they are and if they found the office or if the journey was ok - you get the drift.

Build rapport

A Candidate who feels relaxed and can relate to the interviewer will be more open and honest. Ask questions to find out more about the candidate as a person:

- Tell me about yourself?
- What are your career ambitions?
- How do you like to be managed?
- What motivates you?

If you relate to something that the candidate says, don't be afraid to ask follow-up questions, this helps start to build a relationship with the prospective future employee.

Ask open-ended and follow-up questions

Open-ended questions, such as, tell me about your greatest achievement? creates the opportunity for conversation. It also gives the Candidate a chance to give across as many examples as they can to highlight their skills, experience and suitability for the role.

If you can obviously see that a Candidate is particularly passionate when answering a specific question, you can expand on that and ask them follow-up questions such as 'Give me an example? Can you expand on that? Or if

you are generally interested in what they are saying and another question naturally comes to you, don't be afraid to ask, even if it wasn't a prepared question.

Job specific questions

Ensure you liaise with the manager of the department that the Candidate will be working in or the current employee in the position you are recruiting for, if they aren't part of the interview panel. They will be able to ensure the questions are specific to that job. You may also want to ask them about how they keep up with industry trends and their continued professional development.

If you are interviewing for a managerial position, you may want to ask them questions such as how long have you worked as a manager? How many people have you directly managed at one time? What's your management style?

Behavioural management questions

Asking these types of questions will give the Candidate the opportunity to tell you how they have handled past situations and give you the opportunity to see how they could perform in the future. Examples of behavioural management questions:

- Tell me about a time you worked effectively under pressure?
- Give me an example of when something went wrong and how you solved this?
- Describe to us a goal you reached and how you achieved it?
- Tell me about a time when you had to motivate a team?

The most effective way to conduct an interview

The interview process should be an enjoyable one. Welcome the Candidate as they arrive, introduce yourself and anyone else on the interview panel and give them a brief outline on the format of the interview. Take the time to get to know the Candidate and make them feel as comfortable as possible – it may sound straightforward enough but it is incredibly effective at helping them relax with both parties ultimately getting more out of the interview.

Make sure you are prepared for the interview. As we talked about previously, ensure that you have reviewed the job description and the Candidate's CV and prepared suitable questions which will give you enough information to determine their suitability for the role.

Be friendly and build rapport with the candidate. An interview shouldn't be an interrogation or make them feel uncomfortable on purpose, at the end of the day you may end up working closely with this person so it is to your benefit to find out a bit more about them, who they are and what type of personality they have. You will also get a good feeling about whether they will fit into the culture of the company.

Ensure you ask questions to determine whether the Candidate's values match up with the company values. Ask a range of both closed and open-ended questions to encourage conversation. Show interest by asking them about themselves and what they are interested in rather than just the details of the job.

Give the Candidate ample opportunity to ask questions. Remember this is also an opportunity for them to find out more about the company and decide whether it is somewhere they would like to work. Make sure you are prepared for any questions that they might ask which will invariably focus on salary, learning and development opportunities, holiday entitlement and any other benefits that you may offer.

If there is more than one of you interviewing then ensure you have agreed prior to the interview who is asking what questions. Keep an eye on the time throughout the interview, especially if you have another interview shortly afterwards, sometimes it can be easy to lose track of time especially if the interview is going well.

Ensure a positive mindset before going into the interview. You may have had a hectic day and think that you have a million better things to be doing than interviewing, however it's important that you are positive and don't act like you have somewhere better to be, the Candidate is likely to pick up on this and leave with a negative view of you or the company.

Before they leave you may want to show the Candidate around the office or introduce them to the team they could be potentially working with. Make them aware of the next stage of the interview process, for example is there another interview stage or is the next stage the offer of employment? Finally manage Candidate expectations by letting them know when they can expect to hear from you.

Conclusion

The interview is a two-way process, where both Employer and Candidate are assessing one another to ensure the best possible match. With the best Candidates in high demand and short supply, the pressure has never been greater for hiring managers to maximise every interview opportunity in a bid to secure the best people for their organisations.

As we have seen in this Guide, having an effective interview strategy can ensure your business is the winner in the increasingly competitive war for talent. In doing so, they maximise the return on their recruitment investment not just in terms of attracting great people to fill the roles they have in the here and now, but also in terms of positively impacting their staff retention levels over the long term.

Allen Associates has partnered with many of Oxfordshire's most exciting fast-growth and large-scale Employers over the last 20 years. We are one of the largest independent Recruitment Agencies in the area and have recently been awarded Gold status by Investors in People for the second time. The investment we make in our own people reflects the investment we make in ensuring you get the right people for your business. Let us help you with your next hire.

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