

Turning PointsSM



Fast and flexible tips for new managers and emerging leaders

When the Interviewer is You

Tip Sheet No. 3

Like most of your new management responsibilities, interviewing is a skill set they didn't teach you in professional school. Chances are quite good that you will be asked to interview people who may be with the organization for years. This is critical work, so get the proper training as soon as possible. In the meantime, here are some tips for new managers and emerging leaders.

1. **Criteria first** – Perhaps the most common mistake managers make when interviewing prospects is to start the interview process without clear and objective criteria. This is the “I’ll-know-it-when-I-see-it” approach, and it is a bad strategy. Conduct a careful review or “job analysis” of the target position first, before you ever meet the candidates.
2. **No crystal balls** - As the interviewer, you are making an educated guess about the likely success of candidates; people’s futures are in your hands. Unless you are a trained psychologist, your best possible tool for predicting future behavior is behavioral interviewing (see *Correlations* table), which uses past events to predict future behaviors.
3. **The dating game** - Novice interviewers sometimes resemble contestants on the old *Dating Game* television show where bachelors and bachelorettes were asked interesting but mostly entertaining questions of their prospects (i.e., “What is your favorite movie?”). *Behavioral questions* are designed to gather precisely the kind of information you need about past performance (i.e., “Tell me about a time you had to organize lots of data”).
4. **Get help and helpers** - Working with a team has multiple side benefits. They can help with the job analyses, job interviews (in series or as a group), and objective scoring. I have found that interview participants often improve their own performance and help the final candidate be successful on the job.



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Effectiveness (*r*-values) of Major Selection Methods

Unstructured interviews	.05-.19
References	.23
Modern personality tests	.38
Behavioral interviews	.48-.61
Assessment centers	.65

R-values show how well selection methods correlate to success on the job; 1.00 is perfect correlation.

Source: *Competency at Work*

5. **Train the interviewee** - Of course, interviewers need proper training, but so do the candidates. Explain repeatedly that what you want to hear are actual events from their past that answer your questions, not hypothetical responses.
6. **Listen with a mission** - The interview is no casual conversation. Make sure you probe each story and document the following: the scenario, the behavior and the result of each event. Listen to what is said and how it is conveyed.
7. **Pitfalls** - Participants are likely to give bits and pieces of stories, so make sure you fill in the blanks with follow-up questions. Avoid “leading” the candidate with closed questions; keep them open-ended and curious. Interviewees will also tend to give hypothetical answers. Thank them, but insist on actual examples, as close as possible to your behavioral questions.
8. **Check yourself** - Always be on guard against interviewer bias — yours and others. Obvious concerns are related to race, gender, religion, marital status, and other legally “protected classes.” Additional concerns include the halos-and-horns effect, unduly *liking* or *disliking* a candidate and allowing this emotion to filter what is heard.
9. **Don't go there!** - Be cordial during the interview process, but steer away from discussions of families, marital status, children, relationships, personal property or religion, even when making small talk. The very best rule to follow is to keep your questions and documentation absolutely *job relevant*.

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