

Interviewing /Selection



Most of us go through some kind of interview process an average of ten times more frequently than did our parents or our grandparents. This estimate refers to work- or job-related interviewing. The same rate of change applies to many more situations, as well.

The word interview is interesting in itself.

“An interview is an open exchange of views between two or more parties in order to form an opinion.”

This definition suggests that an interview is a two-way process (rather than the one-way assessment it is often presumed to be by the applicant).

A successful selection interview is not a matter of luck or even effective conversation skills. Neither is it an opportunity to look for personal empathy with the candidate or to guess whether their qualifications or experience mean that they will be able to do a certain job. A typical interview is short, but we will look at a rigorous and structured process, in six phases: Prepare, Evaluate, Question, Listen, Observe, and Decide.

INTERVIEWING/SELECTION

1. Prepare

Despite its frequency and popularity, the typical interview is a highly imperfect event at best. Basically, two relative strangers meet from 30 to 90 minutes and take turns talking about a limited number of topics. This can act as a precursor to having a similar conversation with someone different in a further interview, but it might result in a determination that the candidate is not suitable for work in an organization (for what might be many years).

Our task is not to question whether this short and structured conversation is sufficient or adequate enough for the purpose for which it is intended. However, we can focus on how the exchange itself can be made most useful and effective. The first and most critical of the ways in which we can do this is to PREPARE, PREPARE, PREPARE!

Many interviewers use the few rushed minutes just before the candidate arrives (or is waiting outside the door) for preparation. This is not what we mean by preparation! Preparation needs to occur days and hours before the interview event itself—not minutes. In addition, preparation does not start with the candidate résumé (which we will talk about later), because this will ignore the context of the position to be filled.

Sample - Do Not Copy

Every job for which you are recruiting or selecting should be described in some way. This might be through an advertisement (or what the candidate will see) or a brief job profile. Despite its brevity, this is what attracted the individual in the first place. The interviewer needs to carefully review the words used and make his or her own notes on the descriptive clues and hints in the ad about the kind of person that is likely to be a success in this particular position.

A job description is an even better resource for information on what a role might require by way of skills and experience. This is very much the case if the role is not familiar to the interviewer. Underline or highlight important responsibilities where appropriate.

As a final preparation step, good interviewers know that the job represented on paper might be quite different from what the job does, in real terms (it might only represent a summary of the full extent of the role). This gap can be addressed by talking to those who have held the job or by chatting to co-workers from the same team. This should be done much more often than it is. Informally chatting with peers about a job to be filled can be extremely helpful.

INTERVIEWING/SELECTION - Prepare

Look at the overall specifications for the position and the competencies in particular: This will be quite helpful in developing a specific list of relevant and useful questions to ask. However, you need to remember that you only have a limited amount of time in your interview.

If you always allow five minutes at the beginning of an interview and at least five minutes at the end to let the interviewee ask a couple of questions, this must be deducted from the overall time available. In addition, you should allow the interviewee to talk at least two to three times as much as you. This leaves the average time to ask and respond to a question (and briefly follow-up from time to time) as two and a half minutes. Hence, a half hour interview will only allow for eight core questions to find out if the person is suitable for the job (not including time to follow up or clarify any of the responses at a deeper level).

You might have longer, but it is obvious that your list of questions needs to be highly focused and to elicit as much of the key information that you need as possible. To do this, categorize questions in a way that is appropriate for you and the task. Ideally arrange them in logical order so that each question builds on the previous one (without overlapping) in a sequential way.

For example, the questions "Tell me how you got your first job" followed by "What sort of a career did you want to pursue at college?" might create repetition and even confuse the interviewee as you jump back and forth in time or from subject to subject. This doesn't mean that you always have to go chronologically, but a sound logical path is critical.

A one-to-one interview might not even be the best format. Consider an alternative assessment methodology; group or panel interview uses two, three, or even more people in the interview, who all ask different questions. The downside of group-interview formats is that they can take longer and allow even fewer individual questions in the time available. They also need much more planning to avoid overlap. The advantages are that the person not asking the question can sit back and observe or calmly make notes and more closely "read" the interviewee's potential suitability. Don't forget that if you choose such a format, work out who will ask what beforehand.