



EXECUTIVE NEWSLETTER

January 2007

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HOW GOOD IS YOUR INTERVIEWING STYLE?

Preparation overcomes the worst mistakes in interviewing job candidates.

Many years of practical experience is no guarantee of success in conducting employment interviews. Most experienced interviewers believe themselves to be competent, and less successful ones are not aware of the errors they commit. Consequently, they go on year after year repeating the same mistakes, reinforcing faulty interview habits. Here are some of the more common interviewing errors, and some advice on how to conduct an effective interview.

Failure to establish rapport with candidate

The interview never gets off the ground. No substantive discussion is ever initiated or conducted and the entire interview flounders. As a result, no real information regarding the applicant or his/her qualifications is obtained. Several areas of inquiry regarding the candidates background may be touched upon, but for the most part the interview merely reviews the data the applicant has already made available from the application form or CV.

The applicant may concede that they were courteously treated by the interviewer, but are still disappointed and frustrated because they know that they were never able to tell their story or to present their qualifications adequately. They felt let down, and knowing that they have lost their opportunity to be seriously considered for the position. The interviewer also realises that

something went wrong. They may be aware that the applicant's credentials look interesting – at least on the application form – and wonder why, at the interview, the candidate did not make a better impression.

Failure to follow an interview strategy

Some interviewers do not have a particular plan of action to follow during the course of the interview. Lacking a system they just hope for the best. What they obtain is considerably less than that. Sometimes they are not even aware of the type of information they need to elicit. They don't know what questions to ask and end up dwelling at length on such irrelevant items such as the candidate's hobbies, politics, the weather, or sports.

Not allowing sufficient time

Many interviews are simply too brief and too superficial to gather enough information. When an interview is properly conducted, there is a direct relationship between its length and the amount of useful information obtained.

Incorrect interpretation of information

The reasons for this may be subtle. To begin with, there might be a communication gap between the interviewer and the job applicant, causing the interviewer to draw the wrong conclusions from what they hear. The candidate may say they want

to leave their job because they are having difficulty in establishing a satisfactory working relationship with their superior and feel it would ultimately affect their progress in the company. Such a response could be interpreted in a number of different ways. The interviewer might conclude that the applicant lacks sufficient skills to relate satisfactorily to other people. Another explanation might be that it is the candidate's superior who is difficult to work with. The interview must delve deeply into the applicant's background to obtain enough information to substantiate their evaluation of the candidate's qualifications.

Subconsciously, the applicant may remind the interviewer of someone else. It may be an employee of the firm who triggers a specific reaction based on a previous experience. The interviewer attributes the characteristics of the employee – positive or negative – to the new job applicant, disregarding the fact that although there may be similarities in their background and qualifications, they are two very different people.

It is only natural to form some initial impression when meeting an applicant. However, it must be borne in mind that first impressions are not necessarily true indications of typical behaviour response. Some job applicants are nervous and ill at ease during the first few moments of the interview. Once rapport is established, however, the nervousness, discomfort and awkwardness are soon dispelled.

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Too much talking by the interviewer

If the interviewer does most of the talking they learn very little about the applicant. There is a right time to talk – when providing the job seeker with pertinent information about the position. However, there is also a time for the interviewer to listen carefully in order to obtain meaningful information. Too many interviewers do most of the talking and do not get more information about the candidate than the data already on the application form. Sometimes the unskilled interviewer interrupts an applicant with a question or a comment, cutting off what might have been highly relevant new facts. As long as the applicant is not wandering far afield and is providing the interviewer with meaningful and useful material, do not interrupt. They may reveal some important and relevant facets of their

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attitudes, behaviours and personal values.

Putting the candidate under stress

Some people deliberately inject stress into the interview. They resort to techniques intended to upset the

candidate. They may subject the job applicant to verbal abuse; they may engage in sarcasm or facetiousness; or they may belittle, insult or degrade the applicant and their qualifications and past accomplishments. On a less hostile but more subtle level, they may ask trick questions with the intention of trapping the applicant and to catch them off guard.

The stress interview is a disastrous technique to follow. It almost always destroys any rapport that may have been established, and it is very damaging to a company's public relations and its image as a desirable employer. Perhaps even more important, there is no shred of evidence that this technique generates accurate or objective information regarding the applicant. Only when the applicant is relaxed, comfortable and made to feel at ease will a true picture of their behaviour pattern emerge.

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