

Hiring? Questions to Ask on the Phone

05/28/07

We're growing, and we're hiring. Mine is a mid-sized service company, and I'm going to need to hire a couple of people this summer. Can you give me any suggestions on interviewing? Thanks.

Today we'll focus on properly screening candidates, both for resumes and on the phone. Only meet in person with candidates that fit your criteria. Interview top candidates more than once. Open up negotiations only after you've settled on a great candidate. Have at least one backup, in case things don't work out with your top candidate.

Screening resumes can save you time and effort. Establish a set of criteria that you're looking to see in a resume. Include things like education, work experiences, degree of professionalism displayed in the resume. For example, if you're looking to hire someone who will be working in the office, doing a lot of typing, and the resume has any grammatical or typographical errors, that probably rules out the candidate. If you're hiring for a shop worker, you might be a little more tolerant.

Go through all of the resumes and separate them into 3 piles: definitely consider, probably consider, and forget it. Use your criteria to sort through the resumes. Don't change your criteria, just because you don't have enough in the first 2 piles.

Give your ad enough time to work. Oftentimes I don't even start to look at resumes until my ad has been running for a couple of weeks.

Once you have resumes in the definitely consider pile, start to do phone screens. I suggest that you have a lengthy phone screen in front of you, which you only use completely if you have a great candidate. Start out with asking the candidate to detail his or her background, starting with the most recent job. Ignore the resume, and listen for the candidate to describe what they've done, in their own words. Be sure to get exact start and end dates for each job, as well as detailed information about what the candidate did, who they reported to, how they fit into the overall organization.

When screening on the phone, listen between the lines. Candidates will tell you a lot about themselves in the words they use, the way they describe what they've done, and the confidence they exude, or not. You want to take good notes during an interview, or tape interviews so you can play them back later. Be sure to inform candidates ahead of time if you're going to tape an interview.

In addition to asking a candidate, "What did you do", ask, "How long were you there? What kind of interaction did you have with your boss, co-workers? Did you

receive any promotions? What would have been your next step in that company, had you stayed there? Why did you leave" Take your time with these questions. It's an intake you'll want to refer to later on in the interview.

Now that you have specifics on the last 3 jobs, go on to questions such as: What were you proudest of, at Jobs #1, #2, #3. What do you wish you could un-do, or do over, at Job #1, Job #2, Job #3.

Next, try asking, "Tell me about a project you are especially proud of. What was the situation? How did it come about? What was the outcome? Why are you proud of this project?" Look for job skill, initiative, working a plan, ability to make things happen; watch for results coming from a team or situation rather than the individual.

Follow that up with, "Tell me about a project you would rather forget about? What was the situation? How did it come about? What was the outcome? Why would you rather forget about it? Watch for excuse making, bad-mouthing, giving up, anger, frustration, emotional involvement. Look for personal responsibility, ability to learn and stay above it all, ability to make things happen regardless.

Now go on to the question of, "We have all been in situations where we expected to succeed, but didn't. Describe a situation



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when this happened to you. What went wrong? How did that situation come about? What did the client do to indicate to you there might be a problem? What did you do in response? How did things end up? Knowing what you now know, what would you do differently, if you had the chance to do it over?" Look for personal responsibility, commitment and the ability to know when to quit. Watch for bad mouthing, repetition of mistakes, emotional involvement, and resignation.

These are just a few of the questions you can ask on an interview. Only do face to face interviews with top notch candidates.

Looking for a good book? Try, *Crisp: Behavior-Based Interviewing: Selecting the Right Person for the Job (Crisp Fifty-Minute Series)*, by Terry Fitzwater.

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