

PREPARING FOR INTERVIEWS - EFFECTIVE HIRING PRACTICES

Introduction

Poor hiring practices are both costly and time consuming and in a competitive marketplace it is more important than ever before to recruit effectively. Companies that can develop a seamless interviewing process, are willing and able to react quickly and can really sell the opportunity to potential employees are consistently rewarded with the best.

Recruitment can be expensive – management time, advertising costs and consultancy fees can mount up, and so once you have sourced the right candidate you will want to make sure that they accept your offer. Having the right recruitment processes in place will help you not only source the right candidate but secure them too.

Assess your needs

There is a tendency, when a vacancy arises, to try and fill it immediately. But it is often worth taking a step back and considering issues such as:

- Can this position be restructured?
- Can the work be reallocated to someone else?
- Does this vacancy require a full time employee or is it a project that could be undertaken by a temp or interim manager?

This may well be a good opportunity for change, so assess what you really need before embarking upon the hiring process.

Job Specifications

Effective recruitment begins way before the interview stage. You can't really evaluate a candidate's suitability and capabilities if you have not thought through and clearly identified the objectives of the role.

- Job specifications can dictate the success or failure of your recruitment campaign – you need a clear idea of what you want to accomplish before you recruit someone to do it.
- Taking the time to write a complete and full job spec and then getting feedback from all interested parties in your organisation, will allow you to fully assess the role – which in turn will help you identify the best candidates.

Job specs are almost always based on duties, responsibilities and experience requirements but they can be much more effective selling tools when they also define expected performance and set objectives – this gives a perception of challenge and tells the candidate what is expected of them in order for them to be successful in the role – this can include:

- Major objectives & responsibilities
- Changes and improvements needed
- Problems to solve
- Skills required
- Technical challenges
- Management and recruitment of staff

Include extra information such as:

- Short and long term career opportunities
- Full company information
- A team description
- Company /Team Support given

Preparation – know your candidates

Contrary to popular belief, money isn't the only thing that motivates people to move jobs and according to our feedback, the ten key motivations are:

- Culture – how candidates feel they will fit in
- Reputation – how you are perceived as an employer
- Stability – how long established is the organisation
- Flexibility – work/life balance issues
- Money – a pay rise or bonus
- Development – training, opportunities to learn
- Challenge – new role, more responsibility
- Benefits – canteen, gym, dress down policy, car, crèche
- Team – similar outlook, age, outlook
- Technology – more up to date systems, exposure to better technology

Find out what is motivating your interviewees by discussing their backgrounds thoroughly with your recruitment consultancy before the interview – this information can be used to press their "hot" buttons when it comes to selling the opportunity.

Preparing for interviews

Don't:

- Rely purely on a CV
- Look at the CV 30 seconds before meeting the candidate
- Give no thought to what you want to achieve other than whether you like the person or not
- Fail to prepare questions in advance

Do:

- Look at the CV in plenty of time and mark up areas of interest
- Set objectives on which to assess all candidates
- Prepare questions based on areas on the CV which you would like to probe
- Select a relaxed professional venue, free from interruptions

The interview itself

The opening minutes of an interview often set the tone for the whole meeting and are consequently key to success or failure so be on time, greet with a smile and thank them for attending. Set an agenda explaining the format of the interview including timing and ask what the candidate understands about the role and the company. It will be easier to review the CV in chronological order as the candidate will find it simpler to explain work history this way, you will have a clearer understanding of the level that they have reached and any gaps will become apparent. Use open questions to get the most information such as:

- What one thing has given you the greatest sense of achievement?
- How would your friends describe you?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What is the most difficult situation you have faced and how did you resolve it?
- Why are you looking to change jobs?
- Do you have any skills you feel you have not utilised in your current position?

Selling the opportunity

The key to interviewing – and interviewing well - is to remember that you are selling as well as buying. This may sound obvious but candidate feedback tells us that this is the most overlooked part of any recruitment process. Selling your opportunity will dramatically increase your chance of securing the person you want, significantly reduces the possibility of candidates accepting a counter offer and creates a positive impression. It's also good PR if people who don't join your team talk about your company favourably. So talk about:

- Success factors and achievements of the company
- Future growth prospects
- Career development paths, promotion opportunities and training
- Social events, teambuilding and investment in people

Additionally, be prepared to discuss the following:

- Why *you* joined the company – and why you like working there. Run through your own career progression and why other people like working there.
- Remember that money isn't the only motivator so look at all the candidates' motivations for moving and play to them. And don't forget to mention company benefits such as car parking, study support (if relevant), subsidised canteen, healthcare and pension as well as lifestyle benefits such as social events, crèche facilities, gym membership or massages.
- Talk about recent success stories – if the last incumbent has been promoted for example.
- Show the candidate around the office – introduce them to a couple of members of the team.
- Give candidates an indication of the time scale you are working to, let them know when you expect to hold 2nd interviews.
- Be honest – you need to sell the opportunity to meet expectations – but give a genuine picture.

The Offer

A motivated and enthusiastic candidate can soon lose interest if an offer is delayed so if an individual is right for the job then don't hesitate. A candidate is also more likely to accept a job from someone they get on with so avoid weighty bureaucratic offer letters.

- Don't delay the offer – you can always offer someone the job subject to satisfactory references
- If possible set an early start date – the longer the time between the job offer and the starting date, the greater the risk of losing them – don't give other companies the chance to come up with a better offer.

- It is often easier for a candidate to stay put rather than move job – a last minute counter offer can be a surprise temptation to stay – how effective this is will depend on how well you have sold your opportunity. Go back to the real motivation the candidate had for moving jobs – and remind them - or if using the services of a recruitment consultant ask them to do so! The real reasons can be used to overcome counter offers based on cash or future rewards.
- Try to ensure that the offer letters signed by the person who has had the most contact with the candidate – or if this is not possible, include a hand written note of welcome from that person.
- Spell out the total package in detail – and remember that cash does count. Outline all the benefits – a gym or canteen can sometimes be enough to sway a candidate's decision in favour of your offer.
- Ring the candidate at home if you haven't heard from them within a few days to get feedback and deal with any unforeseen problems – or, if you have recruited through a consultancy – ask them to.
- If your chosen candidate has come to you through a Recruitment Consultancy it is important to keep the consultant informed of any developments or possible delays as they happen. A good consultant will provide a vital service in enabling full momentum going throughout the whole process.

Conclusions

Despite the increasing use of psychometric testing, role-playing, graphology and a host of other techniques, the heart of any recruitment process is still the formulation of a job description, the interview and the job offer. We hope that you found this advice useful and trust that this document will act as a useful addition to your recruitment toolbox.