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Careers & Recruitment

Stick to the principles of selection

Companies recruiting for staff in a candidate rich market must take care to make the right choice, writes Gareth Naughton.

Doing a job interview is up there with the driving test and getting married as one of the most daunting experiences in life. What most people don't consider is that giving an interview can be just as nerve-wracking.

Do it right and you have secured an asset for your company. Get it wrong and you could actually cost your company money and lose the best candidate for the job. Preparation, good listening skills and the ability to put others at ease are all key to conducting a good interview.

Preparation

Just as you would expect a candidate sitting in front of you to have done some research on your company and the role that they are applying for, you should also make sure you are adequately prepared to conduct the interview, said Mairead Fleming, director, Brightwater Recruitment.

"Read the CV inside out and know the candidate's back-ground before they come into you. It is common courtesy to show the same preparation that you expect from them, so make sure you are not literally scanning their CV while they are sitting in front of you," she said.

Part of your preparations should be establishing what the job entails and the skills required, and putting together a list of questions designed to get as much relevant information as possible from the candidate. However, you should also be prepared to let the interview take its natural course.

"Do not be so focused on the questions that you want to ask that you are not listening to what they are saying. You need to be able to pick out points that you can follow up on, and you have to be prepared to go down different avenues," she said.

This is particularly important in cases where a panel interview is taking place. Often panellists can go in with a very rigid idea of what they need to ask and the structure means that they don't listen to the candidates. They may, in fact be over-prepared.

"There is a balance there. You have to be able to pick up on something that the candidates says that is relevant and, if you need to go down a different angle, you have to be flexible in your approach to be able to do that," she said.

Nerves can also cause interviewers to concentrate too much on what they themselves are doing and fail to pay attention. Listening is vital if you want to get the best out of your candidates.

"Interviewers can be almost self-conscious. That can get in the way of conducting a really good interview because they can be too focused on what they have to do as well. They are as nervous as

the candidates. It is not a natural thing. If you are a team leader in an accountancy division, you are not an experienced interviewer, yet you are expected to be able to conduct it and that is tough. Practice it – it is so important to get that right,” said Fleming.

Building Rapport

It is up to the interviewer to make sure the candidate is totally at ease. While it might seem like the way to go is to employ the aggressive interview style used by Gavin Duffy when he is helping Bill Cullen to cut the deadwood on *The Apprentice*, treating candidates like that does you no favours. The interview who marches into a room and barks “talk” at a candidate is doing a disservice to the candidate and the company, according to Adrienne O’Hare, manager of To Be Training.

“You are being interviewed as well – the company is also being assessed so it is important to show courtesy. What is that individual saying about the culture of the company and the level of respect they have for people? It is absolutely critical to have prepared and to put people at ease. If you don’t know how to do it, go and get training,” said O’Hare.

If someone feels comfortable enough from the very start of the interview you are likely to get more out of them and a better more rounded idea of who they are as a person. In truth, all candidates will come with their “game face” on and it is up to you to see past that.

“If you put them at ease and build rapport with them, the candidate is going to be more relaxed and show more of their character. They will be in a position to communicate their skills more effectively. You are not going to get rehearsed answers – you are going to get the real person,” said O’Hare.

“There is a lot of game-playing in the process, because it is not natural. It is almost like a first date, and that is why employers have probationary periods, so they have that cooling off time.

“On the first date, everybody dresses up and is a shinier, brighter, more intelligent and funnier version of them-selves.

“Sometimes it actually takes a marriage to happen before you realise that this bright, shiny person who you thought you had committed to isn’t actually that person.”

The interview process is about finding the best possible candidate for the job, and companies need to arm their interviewers with the tools necessary to conduct them.

“It requires a level of advanced communication, interviewing and listening skills and being able to interpret the dynamics of the relationship and the information. It is unfair to just expect people to be able to do it.” O’Hare said.