



## Tips for Successful Interviewing

When you're hiring employees for your small business, it's vital to use the interview process to identify the most qualified candidates for your company. Successful interviewing is similar to many other "communications" skills - it's a matter of asking the right questions, listening to the answers, and getting candidates to talk honestly about their abilities and attitudes. The good news is that candidates are predisposed to be open about themselves, so your challenge is to ask questions that guide them to the information you need to make a hiring decision. Use the tips below to hone your job interview talents.

### **KEY ITEMS:**

- **Pace your interview**
- **Listen more than you speak**
- **Set a schedule**
- **Ask open-ended questions**
- **Ask questions before you describe the job**
- **Avoid standard questions**
- **Consider a two-interview process**
- **Know what you can't ask**

### **Pace your interview**

Use your first few questions to loosen up the candidate and set the tone for the rest of the interview. Questions that deal with a person's work experience -- such as "Tell me about a typical day on your current job. What do you like about it? What don't you like?" -- can get a candidate to open up and start talking...which, after all, is the point of an interview.

### **Listen more than you speak**

If you're spending more than 20 percent of the interview talking, then you're not giving the candidates a chance to talk about themselves. The purpose of an interview is to help you make a decision based on how a person responds to your questions. You need to take time to listen to those responses.

### **Set a schedule**

Put interviews on your calendar, and treat them as you would any other business appointment. Make sure you give the candidate your undivided attention - clear your desk; put your phone on "do not disturb;" close your door; let people in your office know you don't want to be interrupted.

## **Ask open-ended questions**

Avoid any question that can be answered with a simple yes or no. Instead, use open-ended questions to encourage candidates to talk about themselves. Listen to responses, and ask plenty of follow-up questions such as "Why do you think that's the case?" or "How did you do that?" If you need more information, ask the candidate for it.

## **Ask questions before you describe the job**

Avoid providing a detailed job description at the beginning of the interview. A smart person will pick up on your description, and start phrasing all responses around what he or she perceives you want to hear. By asking as many questions as possible before you review the job, you'll be encouraging more honest answers.

## **Avoid standard questions**

Everyone knows some of the typical interview questions - Where do you want to be five years from now? What are your strengths and weaknesses? Tell me about yourself? The problem with these questions is that many candidates have spent time preparing their responses. These scripted comments are of little use to you. Instead, try to come up with challenging questions that force interviewees to think on their feet and give an honest appraisal of their strengths and limits. For example, scenario-based questions, where you ask the candidate to react to a typical on-the-job situation, can paint a more accurate picture.

## **Consider a two-interview process**

Use a first interview to pare down candidates to the top two or three. Then use a second round of interviews to select the best. The second interview might be conducted by people who will interact with the candidate most closely. Their input is important.

## **Know what you can't ask**

The law is very strict regarding questions you can't ask during a job interview. In general, these forbidden questions are ones where the answer could be used to discriminate against a potential employee. They usually focus on non-job-related information such as age, race, marital status, or disability.