



7 Tips for Improving Your Interview Process

By Vistage member Joseph Sefcik

Interviews are the most commonly-used component of employee selection and hiring. With 99% of all organizations using hiring interviews, it follows that we should all be excellent at interviewing and making the right hiring decisions. Unfortunately, that's not often the case.

Many interviewers are rendered ineffective by the following issues:

- Lack of training – Only 1/3 of all interviewers are trained and certified, so the untrained 2/3's are making the majority of critical yet unqualified judgments.
- Biases – Quick judgments and general impressions interfere with the quality and accuracy of assessing applicants.
- Inconsistency – Lack of consistent structure and process undermines the accuracy of determining the best candidate.
- Inefficiency – Interviewers often ask the wrong questions and use poor evaluation techniques.

Too frequently business owners allow high-stakes decisions to be made without the proper quality assurance, and unfortunately they live with those decisions for an extended period. Science can and should be applied to the interview process. Effective interviewing takes careful planning and effort so that hiring decisions are based on relevant and sound information not superficial cues or first impressions. Here are steps you can take to establish a sound interviewing process:

1. **Create structure for the interview.** Random processes produce random results. To create structure, start by defining the key requirements of the job. Once you have identified the job requirements, create standard interview questions based on these requirements. Use the same questions for all applicants for that position. If there is more than one interviewer, all questions should be consistent and target the same job requirements. Different interviewers sometimes have their own "pet questions." These should be eliminated or included as part of the standard interview.

Structure is equally important for the evaluation and rating process. Before conducting any interviews, determine ideal/acceptable responses for each question. This will increase objectivity and improve the accuracy of your ratings. Structured interviews produce better judgments.

2. **Establish minimum standards for non-verbal cues.** Body language, posture, mannerisms and appearance have an effect on our decisions. Our judgment is influenced by what we see. Non-verbal cues cause us to perceive people more positively or negatively depending on our interpretation. These cues can be helpful in making a decision, but they are also easy to manipulate and can be easily misjudged. To avoid biases and personal judgments, establish clear standards for non-verbal cues which are reasonable for your business culture, employee standards and customer expectations. While today's norms are somewhat relaxed, there are still acceptable and unacceptable norms. Once you've determined that the applicant meets the minimum standards, focus your attention on the substance of their responses.
3. **Acquire and convey information.** There is a dual purpose for an interview, a) to solicit and discern the qualifications of an applicant and b) to provide information about the job, organization, and culture. The interview needs to be managed to allow time for both acquiring and conveying information. If a multi-step selection process is used, then the interview can be apportioned to complement the entire process.

4. **Manage interviewer consistency.** Not all interviewers are equally effective. Most interviewers have never been trained, yet those same interviewers are proven to be overconfident and to overestimate their ability to effectively interview. Interviewers will naturally default to their comfort zone when conducting and evaluating interviews. During the interview, some may ask questions and acquire information better than others, and some may present information better and be great ambassadors for your company. When evaluating interview responses, some interviewers may be very detail oriented and systematically process responses, while others may apply global judgments to applicants. To improve consistency, interviewers should cite specific statements and examples from the interview. Avoid interviewer opinions or impressions. Interviewers should use examples, not hunches, to support ratings.
5. **Judge applicants on performance not on promises or prior experience.** Applicants want to make the best impression possible. Applicants anticipate what you want to see and what you want to hear. Their goal is to convince you that they are the best person for the job. They want to look good to you and will promise that they can deliver. Recognize that during the interview, applicants are probably the best they will ever be. Promises and past experience are not a guarantee of future performance. You can reduce the smokescreen by asking questions that target actual performance results. Ask applicants if the results are their own, or team/ workgroup results. If the job lends itself to a work sample, ask for one.
6. **Provide applicants with information about your company.** Applicants leave an interview with their own impressions and judgments. While you are making a choice about them, they are making a choice about the job and your company. Interviewers need to provide information, yet only a limited amount can be absorbed. It is helpful to supplement the interview with written or on-line information, and more importantly, to provide for follow-up questions to be answered.
7. **Automate your interview process for better results.** Newly developed software allows companies to automate some aspects of the interview process. This automation applies a structure and process that increases the accuracy and efficiency of interviews. If you plan to incorporate software automation into your interview process, ask the technology provider these questions. How does the technology: improve consistency, increase accuracy, remove biases, expand access and applicant flow, lower cost, and eliminate the drudgery of interviewing.

Interview automation makes the most sense for companies that have a number of openings to fill for the same job, who frequently hire for the same position, or need to fill positions quickly. The technology also benefits companies that interview candidates from other locations (incurring travel costs, time zone restrictions, and scheduling issues), interview candidates in multiple languages, or desire to expand access to candidates in diverse locations.

Automated interview systems are typically available on a per use or time basis and often include an initial setup or implementation fee.

By applying the above principles, we can increase the efficiency, accuracy and outcomes of the interview process.

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