

Hire Power: Manager on-line magazine article published 29th August 2012



IAM Chief Operating Officer, James Turner, outlines some top tips when interviewing and recruiting new employees.

The employer's objective in the interview process is to identify the most suitable candidate for a vacancy, and this can only be achieved if you attempt to measure competence, capability and attitude to carry out the role's responsibilities. Easier said than done certainly, but let's start with some basics.

Vacancy equals opportunity

When a vacancy arises from an employee leaving your organisation, use this as an opportunity to reflect on the role you would like a new employee to undertake. This need not necessarily be the same role as the outgoing employee. Note the following, for example:

1. The starting point should be to reflect on the mission statement of the organisation. What is the reason for the organisation existing?
2. If this is clearly identified there should be a strategy through which the organisation will achieve the mission statement.
3. This strategy should have been turned into specific tasks employees will need to perform to achieve the strategy, and in turn the mission statement.

So the first question to ask is what tasks will this new employee need to perform to achieve the strategy to help achieve the mission statement?

Person specifications and KPIs

If you have started with these points, you can now develop a person specification that objectively identifies both the essential and desirable criteria of the prospective employee. This should include the knowledge and understanding required for a person to be competent to perform the role, but not forget the personal qualities that would also make a person most suitable. Using national occupational standards can be very useful to develop the person specification.

From the person specification you can develop the role's key performance indicators (KPIs). These are just an extension of the ubiquitous job description, but with the inclusion of objective measurement criteria that describe the areas where the employee must perform to certain standards.

With the KPIs in place you can then choose the best method of attracting applicants for the role, secure in the knowledge you have a much better chance of recruiting the most suitable candidate.

Successful shortlisting

If you have advertised well you will now start to receive interest from applicants in the form of CVs. However, if you want to interview successfully make sure every applicant submits a well-structured application form. CVs are merely advertisements for a product – in this case the services of an employee. How many product advertisements have you seen that advertised its faults and weaknesses? A well-structured application form is the foundation of successful interviewing.

Once you have shortlisted applicants you will of course want to meet them to identify the best person, but here be aware! Even experienced interviewers can be guilty of subjective interviewing. You need to prepare an interview carefully if you are really to recruit the best candidate successfully.

Questions time

Think carefully about the type of questions you will need to ask if you are to measure competence, capability and attitude accurately. With competence, for example, you may want proof of qualifications or appropriate experience. You may look for a proven track record in a particular field, or perhaps membership of a certain professional body, or success in similar roles previously. Or even a history of promotion in similar, or closely linked, positions throughout the candidate's career. Whatever it is you decide you need, you will have to identify the best way of gathering and ascertaining this information. Ensure that you also split requirements into 'essential' and 'desirable', as identified by your person specification.

Capability is harder to assess, but not impossible if you plan properly. What you are trying to measure is a prospective employee's capability to utilise their skills and experience. You could ask applicants to carry out various tasks – perhaps role plays or group exercises – and may be able to structure the interview to allow the candidates to type a letter, or perhaps carry out a coaching session, etc., as appropriate to the role. As a very minimum you will have to structure your questions carefully, so that they delve much deeper than the superficial questioning of many interviews. For example:

- ◆ If you require the prospective employee to be good at delegating, you could start by asking: "How good are you at delegating tasks?"
- ◆ You could probe deeper by asking: "What are the essential steps in effective delegation?"
- ◆ However, these will not tell you much about capability unless you continue by asking something like: "Tell me what mistakes you made the last time you delegated, and how will you delegate better next time?"

This final question gets to what it is you need to know. Have they delegated before? How deep is their competence and experience, and have they learnt and developed from the experience of delegating? People that lack capability will always struggle with deeper questioning, and while further questioning may well then be necessary, at least you have already attempted to measure a person's capability objectively.

Assessing attitude

Attitude is demonstrated in many ways: how someone presents themselves for interview; their punctuality; the way they answer questions; the words that they use; and their body language, to name but a few. However, you'll also learn a great deal more about attitude if you ask the right questions. Some examples include:

- ◆ Why did you leave your last job?
- ◆ What are your short and medium-term personal goals?
- ◆ What are your weaknesses?
- ◆ How do you motivate yourself?

There are lots of ways to measure attitude, but you have to think about the attitudes important to you and your organisation before you start the interview, and structure your questions accordingly.

Final thoughts

The most successful interviews – the ones that most often result in high-quality employees being recruited – are the ones that have been carefully prepared. They focus on objectivity. They treat every prospective candidate the same – fairly and equally – with the prime concern being to gather as much additional information as possible. This will add to the CV and application form, and allow you to call back one or two candidates for a final interview.

At this stage you should be quite confident the people in front of you can do the job, and it is then just a case of selecting the person that would best fit with the team and organisation.

Assuming of course, that you wouldn't be foolish enough to base that decision on anything that could fall foul of equalities legislation!