

5.3.3: Face-to-Face Interviewing

Learning Objectives

- Discuss the process of effective face-to-face interviews

A face-to-face interview is generally the final step in the interview process. In theory, a candidate who has made it this far is qualified—perhaps highly qualified—on paper. From the standpoint of the interviewer, the objective is to determine which one of a short list of candidates is the best choice.

After preliminary interviews are completed, HR can provide the hiring manager with a set of promising applicants who have the skills, credentials, and background to fit the manager’s needs. Now the hiring manager can sit down with each candidate and get to know her through a personal interview. Often, hiring managers will conduct a second interview after narrowing down their options to just a few candidates. They may also include other team members in the interviewing process and/or conduct tests to determine whether candidates have the level of technical skill they need for the job.

It takes some skill and knowledge to interview a job applicant effectively. It’s important to do the job right, though, because the costs of hiring someone are substantial, and many hires leave within one year. Some effective interviewing techniques include the following:

- **Planning and preparation.** Before starting an interview, it’s important for a manager to have read the applicant’s resume, prepared questions, and know what he wants to learn during the interview. It’s also helpful to set a time limit for the interview.
- **Understanding the job.** In some cases, managers don’t have direct experience doing the job for which they’re hiring. When that happens, it’s important for the manager to talk with people who are doing the job now as well as direct supervisors and teammates. What are the most important qualities, skills, and qualifications required for the job? Are there specific situations for which the new hire should be prepared? Knowing about the job makes it easier to ask the right questions.
- **Connecting with the applicant.** Most people are nervous at job interviews, and it’s important to set the applicant at ease so she can put her best foot forward. Instead of just saying “Don’t be nervous,” good managers spend some time chatting with the candidate and explaining the interview process.
- **Active listening.** Managers want to learn about the candidate, so active listening is very important. Managers need to show that they’re interested by nodding, asking follow-up questions, smiling, or otherwise using body language to encourage the candidate to share more information.

Mock Interview

Listen to the following mock interview for perspective on how to conduct an interview. The interviewer’s comments are a teaching aid for both interviewer and candidate, providing a format to follow and insight into the objective of the question and how to interpret the responses. Human Resource professional Richard Mercer deconstructs a mock interview with Radford University senior Noell Lee:

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The key takeaway from this video is to attempt to discover what makes a candidate unique and compelling. The elevator speech point Mercer makes is good coaching for a candidate and something to listen for an interviewer.

For tips on how to prepare for an interview as a candidate, watch Harvard Office of Career Services Assistant Director Linda Spenser’s “How to Ace an Interview” video:

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For a specific example of a interview evaluation form, see Society for Human Resource Management's (SHRM) Candidate Evaluation Form, with scoring based on 12 categories and ratings on a scale of 1 (Unsatisfactory) to 5 (Exceptional).

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