

The Pitfalls of Interviewing - A guide for the Interviewer

By Grania Sweeting
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How many times do you hear managers complaining about the “wasted time in interviewing”? Here are a few tips that will help in selecting and recruiting staff more successfully:

First impressions

Initial impressions can often be deceptive, but research shows hiring decisions are made subconsciously in the first three minutes, usually before any appropriate questions are asked. Positive decisions can be reversed later in the interview, but adverse ones rarely so. So try and keep an open mind at least until the end of the interview!

General Etiquette

Ensure that invitations to interview letters are friendly in tone (these could be future colleagues), and include the practicalities: interview location, car parking, whether travel expenses will be refunded and who to ask for at reception.

Double check that reception knows of their arrival, their name, who and where they will be interviewed and informs the interviewer of their arrival. If candidates need to wait, offer them cloakroom facilities, a seat and a drink.

When interviews run late, ensure that someone apologises for the delay and keeps the candidate informed. When the candidate enters the room, provide a friendly greeting, smile and introduce yourself by name and job title.

Constant interruptions from the telephone or visitors, a noisy room, the sun or bright lights in a candidate's eyes and the interviewer seated higher than the interviewee are all unnecessary distractions.

Too much chat

Many interviewers do more talking than listening and apart from initial pleasantries and closing thanks, they should normally confine themselves to asking pertinent questions and to answering candidate's questions.

Inadequate preparation

Five minutes preparation can save 15 minutes interviewing time. Check that you have all necessary documentation – job description, terms & conditions and a description of the organisation so that you can answer any potential questions concisely.

Interviewers often forget or are unfamiliar with candidate's CV's at the beginning of an interview. Consequently, they waste interview time asking for information already available to them. By not planning their key questions beforehand, many fail to uncover vital information. Look for time gaps (did the candidate take a year out – if so, what did they do?)

The questions

Interviewers shouldn't ask too many closed questions (which are only answered by a yes or no). Remember the basics of when, where, who, what, why and how..... Silence is also a powerful tool, especially if combined with a smile, as candidates will be encouraged to talk more. Have a set of pre-arranged and relevant questions available as this will structure the interview more effectively.

Poor follow up

Interviewers should tell candidates during the interview what the next steps will be in the selection process and when they may expect a decision. If there are unexpected delays in giving a decision, write a holding letter and explain the delay.

Unsuccessful candidates should always be informed as soon as possible and thanked for their interest in making an application and attending the interview, ideally by letter rather than email.

By following these tips, managers will gain confidence in selecting the right staff for their departments and may even enjoy the interviewing process!

About the Author

Grania Sweeting is a CIPD qualified Human Resources specialist, providing HR expertise to help senior teams manage their people more effectively. She provides outsourced HR support to organisations on a retained, ad hoc or consultancy basis. Her company – Grapevine HR Ltd - was established in 2005 and her clients include SMEs to PLCs. Her commercial experience and friendly yet discreet approach has led Grania to work across a variety of industry sectors.