

## Improve your interviewing skills

There are numerous types of interviews – job interviews, discipline interviews, appraisal interviews and exit interviews. For managers, it is simply good sense to learn effective interviewing skills.

The following are proven practices which can enhance your interviewing skills:

### 1. Do your homework

If you are unprepared for an interview, you'll make inefficient use of time, present a poor image, and struggle to obtain pertinent details. Don't try to start or muddle through an interview cold. Know exactly the purpose of the session, read and familiarise yourself with all relevant documentation, and prepare a set of questions or topics in advance.

### 2. Put the interviewee at ease

Interviews can be stressful affairs. A relaxed setting, a warm welcome, and a few introductory pleasantries are enough to establish a friendly atmosphere. By doing all you can to reduce the intimidating aspects of the occasion and show genuine interest in the person, the more likely it is that you will get honest and detailed information – and that is exactly the purpose of the interview.

### 3. Remain focused on your objective

Know in advance what facts and information you wish to obtain during the interview and frame your questions to get that information. Don't focus the session on yourself nor allow the interview to be sidetracked by irrelevancies.

### 4. Keep the initiative

You are conducting the interview, so stay in control of the situation. Keep things moving by directing the flow of conversation along specific lines towards your desired goal and to cover your key topics. Your aim should be to maintain a pleasant atmosphere in which you encourage the interviewee to talk freely while you maintain an objective and impartial stance.

### 5. Ask the right questions

Your questions should be framed in such a way that they get complete and detailed answers. Limit closed questions which get only a "yes" or "no" response. Ask one question at a time - by asking two or three at once, you won't get satisfactory answers to any. Use follow-up questions to probe areas of uncertainty.

### 6. Keep the interviewee talking

Your job is to encourage the interviewee to talk. Don't worry about gaps in the conversation; if the interviewee stops talking, and you want to hear more on the same topic, ask for more information. The more the interviewee talks, the more will be revealed. Always listen objectively and attentively.

## 7. Be aware of legal issues

It is illegal to ask questions that aren't related to a person's capacity to do a job. Avoid questions relating to marital status, child-care arrangements, religious practices, age, plans for having children, racial background, political beliefs or physical disability.

## 8. Take notes

As unobtrusively as possible, make notes during the interview, so that important points are captured. Where appropriate, make use of check lists. For example, use a list of qualities you want to find in a job applicant, or a list of topics you want to discuss in an exit interview. These lists help you to focus the interview on pertinent matters and provide written data for analysis later.

## 9. Analyse and act on your information

Immediately after the interview, take some time to elaborate on your notes, summarise answers, record factual information and review the data. If you conduct several interviews in succession, eg job interviews, this process is essential because you'll find it difficult to associate information with particular candidates without the aid of detailed, objective notes on each person. Also, the time spent on this task will prove invaluable if you need to share your findings later with others.

Other interview tips include:

- Ensure the interview is free from interruption.
- Keep the interview going at an unhurried pace. Don't keep looking at your watch – or you will unnecessarily make the interviewee feel unwanted or upset, on the edge of the chair ready for a hasty departure.
- Watch as well as listen.
- Don't let your feelings interfere with your judgement.
- Don't waste time repeating what is already known.
- Don't criticise or indicate disapproval.
- At the finish, invite questions about any issues not covered during the session and explain what the next step will be.
- Always end on a positive, friendly note.

## Further information

The following fact sheets provide further information on these issues:

- Business vision - introduction
- Employees
- Hire the right person for the job
- Prepare and use job descriptions
- Verbal communication