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Reviewing the Application/Resume

Before beginning the screening process, take a few minutes to review the job description and the established evaluation criteria. The purpose of the initial screening of the applicant pool is to narrow the applicant pool by ruling out those applicants who do not meet the minimum qualifications required to perform the job. These candidates will not be considered for the position.

It helps to review resumes in teams. Begin by grouping candidates into the following 3 categories — highly qualified, qualified and unqualified (doesn't meet minimum requirements). Hiring supervisors may want to develop a screening checklist using the same qualifications listed in the advertisement, which can be attached to each application.

> *Note: Never write on an original application or resume. Federal law requires that we maintain these documents on file for a specified period of time. Your comments, "squiggles," highlights, etc. could be used against you in a legal proceeding.*

When reviewing resumes, look for "red flags" that may call into question the applicant's suitability for the position. Note anything that seems overly general, vague, or unusual. Note misspellings, gaps in information and blanks left empty on the application form.

Some common "red flags" include:

- "Rounded-off" dates: for example "1995", rather than May 1995.

- Non-specific educational information. You may ask the applicant to furnish a certified transcript to validate education. However, if you request this of one candidate, you must make the same request of all candidates that you interview.

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- Reasons for leaving past jobs, if the reason for leaving was "personal," ask the applicant to explain. You have a right to know.
- Lack of salary progression. Perhaps there is a valid explanation; however, it is a "red flag" until you are satisfied that poor performance wasn't the primary reason.
- Lack of progression in job duties/responsibilities. The best employees usually receive increased responsibilities if they stay in one position. If they change positions, their responsibilities typically increase as well. There may be exceptions to this pattern, but you won't know until you ask.
- Gaps in employment history. A "gap" may or may not be cause for concern. You need to find out the reason before making an assessment.
- Overly vague/general job duties or job titles. For example, an applicant may write that he or she "handled billings" as a job duty. Explore this phrase further to determine what it means; the handling could have been transporting the billing to someone else's desk! Similarly, different organizations use the job title "Administrative Assistant" to describe duties ranging from a secretarial to mid-level managerial position.

Prescreen/Telephone Screening

Because telephone screening is an effective approach that saves both time and money, it is a mandatory step in the recruitment process. The objectives of the telephone interview are to appraise the applicant’s interpersonal skills, quickly determine if the candidate meets your basic screening criteria and learn if the salary range meets the candidate's requirements. It is important to explore the salary range before issuing an invitation for an on-campus interview.

You should schedule telephone interviews with the applicants in your highly qualified pile. The interview does not need to be long. At this point, you are not soliciting in-depth information about the applicant.

Prepare a short list of questions to ask each of your candidates. As with a formal interview, it is important that you gather the same kind of information from each candidate and evaluate each candidate. A sample telephone screening form is located in the “Forms” section of this guide.

Based on the results of these short telephone interviews, determine which candidates best meet the department's needs and possess the essential qualifications. Schedule these candidates for a formal on-campus interview.

Although it takes quite a bit of work to find out if someone is right for the job, usually, it only takes a few minutes to discover if someone is really wrong for the job. Telephone screening is especially helpful with candidates who look good on paper but who are less impressive in person. In addition, telephone interviews provide a good opportunity to assess an applicant's interpersonal and telephone skills.

TIP: Ask your top candidates to complete an assignment or to provide an example of his or her work. For example, if we were recruiting for a Webmaster position, we might ask each candidate to visit Wittenberg’s Web page and provide an analysis or recommendations for improvement.

The Formal Interview Process

Preparation

The key to an effective interview is careful and proper planning.

1. Take another look at the job description before the interview. You should know as much as possible about the requirements of the job and the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to perform the job.

2. Review the application and/or resume. Note any areas you wish to explore, such as significant time gaps between jobs, unanswered questions or unusual responses.

3. Prepare job-related questions that you will ask each candidate. Get specific with your questioning and probe deeper into the candidate's initial responses. Use questions that cannot be answered with yes or no. For example, "Tell me about your last job" will elicit more information than "Did you like your last job?" Also, avoid the use of leading questions. Phrases such as "I assume that...." or "Do you agree that...." tell the applicant how to answer the question appropriately and they will generally respond with what they think you want to hear.

***Tip**: Ask questions that focus on the candidate's past performance. Past performance is a good predictor of future performance and will provide you with a better idea of the candidate's skills.*

III. Best Practices/Resources

Scheduling Interviews

- Before their on-campus interviews, candidates should be sent appropriate, detailed information about the position, the interview and the university. Include information such as confirmation of the time, date and location of the interview, parking and directions, position description and a list of people (including titles) that the candidate will be meeting.

- Schedule adequate, uninterrupted time for the interview and appropriate space to ensure confidentiality.

- Allot the same amount of time for each interview.

- Schedule interviews at least 30 minutes apart to allow time to complete notes and allow applicants to come and go without overlap.

- Let the interviewees know the names of the interview team members and their relation to the position. If you plan to use team-based interviews, be sure to advise the interviewees.

- Provide an evaluation form to each person on the interview team. Sample forms are located in the "Forms" section of this guide.

- Make sure that everyone on the interview team has a copy of the job description, the selection criteria, the candidate's resume and a copy of the candidate's interview schedule.

The Interview

Select a private, comfortable setting and prevent interruptions.

Interviewing is a two-way street. When interviewing, it is important to recognize your role as "ambassador" for the university and to represent the university in a positive manner.

What you need to find out during the interview:

1. Does the candidate have the skills to do the job?
2. Does the candidate have an institutional "fit"? Would he or she thrive in our culture?
3. Is the candidate strongly motivated?
4. Does the candidate have a passion for the work?
5. Do you connect with the candidate? Does the chemistry feel right?

Six Things to Do in an Interview

1. Put the candidate at ease. Research has shown that rapport between the interviewer and the applicant contributes substantially to the effectiveness of the interview.

2. Maintain control of the interview while encouraging the applicant to do most of the talking.

3. Allow time for evaluation of applicant (in relation to pre-determined objective criteria) after each interview.

4. Give every candidate a copy of the job description and a copy of the HR summary of benefits brochure.

5. Ask every candidate to sign the release form so that HR can conduct a background check.

6. Answer questions and explain next steps (time line etc.).

Six Things NOT to Do in an Interview

1. Don't talk too much. A good rule of thumb is to talk 20 percent of the time and listen 80 percent. Ask short, clear questions, then LISTEN, ask follow-up questions, and listen some more.

2. Don't tell the candidate too much about your needs. A common mistake is to begin the interview by describing the open position in detail, including the requirements for the person who will fill it. Although the candidate deserves to know the essential responsibilities of the position, the more you tell what you want, the more the candidate will tell you he or she has it.

3. Don't withhold approval or create stress. You are looking for unbiased, honest responses to your questions so that you can best determine if the candidate fits the job requirements. Expressing signs of disapproval or using an interrogative approach creates stress for the candidate. He or she may then withhold information or say only those things calculated to please you. Either way, the answers will come out forced, unnatural and biased. The best approach is to listen, compliment notable accomplishments, and downplay the mistakes or negative experiences a candidate reveals.

5. Don't be too quick to judge. Restrain the natural tendency to jump to conclusions early in the interview. Some candidates start out "cold" as nervous energy or fear may inhibit them. It might help to paraphrase and summarize the candidate's key points aloud to make sure you really understand.

6. Don't try to remember everything. It is estimated that most interviewers forget 80 percent of the interview details within an hour of its conclusion. Therefore, it is helpful to write occasional, short, unobtrusive notes and fill in the details later.

> *Tell the candidate at the beginning of the interview that you will take a few notes. This simple courtesy should help reduce any suspicion and nervousness resulting from note taking.

What to Notice During the Interview

Candidates send subtle signals during the interview. Here are some things to watch for:

- ❖ How well the candidate listens and responds directly to your questions.
- ❖ Whether the candidate probes you for clarification or more information.
- ❖ How well the candidate turns potentially negative information into positive information.
- ❖ How well the candidate relaxes and builds rapport with you.
- ❖ How the candidate handles nonverbal communication such as eye contact, body posture and tone of voice.
- ❖ How you feel after the interview. Do you feel enthusiastic? Tired? Impressed?

Concluding the Interview

The following questions are good for "wrap up":

- ❖ "I have no further questions. Do you have any other questions about the position or the university?"
- ❖ "Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about yourself that we haven't discussed?"

The final step of the interview is to explain the notification process. If you do not want a candidate to call you during this period, say so.

Evaluation

Once the interview is concluded, finalize your interview notes. Again, evaluation should be based on the knowledge, skills and abilities required to perform the job. For those applicants rejected for the job, record, in job-related terms, what criteria the applicant failed to meet.

Collect each interviewer's assessment of the candidates interviewed. When you complete the Request to Hire form, you will need to include a specific job-related reason for selection or rejection of each candidate.

Reference Checking

The Hiring Supervisor is responsible for conducting reference checks on all final candidates (usually 2-3). Careful reference checking can uncover patterns of behavior that won't show up on an application form, resume or in an interview.

The purpose of reference checking is to verify and confirm information provided by the candidate, and to gather additional information about a person's past performance. Ask each of your final candidates to provide several professional references. Assessments from unsolicited letters of reference vary greatly and should be verified by a reference check.

Obtaining useful information from reference checking is more difficult now than ever before; however, that does not mean that reference checking is a waste of time. Successful reference checking requires persistence!

Preparation

1. Determine the appropriate references to check. Common reference sources include former supervisors, colleagues, peers or customers. Include those persons listed as references by the candidate, but also consider others who would have knowledge of the candidate's work performance and abilities. Contact former supervisors and professional colleagues. Don't rely solely on one reference – plan to contact 2-3 references for each candidate.

2. Review the candidate's resume and interview notes.

3. Develop a list of questions to ask. A Telephone Reference Check form is located in the "Forms" section of this guide. In addition to questions on this sheet, you should develop questions related to the specific knowledge, skills and abilities of the position.

   Caution: The discrimination laws that apply to interviewing also apply to reference checking. Reference questions must be job related. Do not ask about marital status, age, disabilities, race, religion or national origin.

Reference Checking – Steps to Follow

1. Briefly describe the vacancy and the competencies you are seeking.

2. Determine whether the reference can evaluate the candidate's abilities adequately enough to serve as a reference. Did he or she supervise or work with the candidate? For how long? When?

3. Start with general basic questions and move to more specific performance-based questions.

4. Follow-up and probe when you feel the contact is reluctant to discuss certain issues. Many times further explanation of why you are asking will draw out the information you want.

5. Watch for obvious pauses when you ask questions. This may be a sign that further questions might provide more information that you might not otherwise receive.

6. Review your list of questions to be sure you've covered everything.

7. End the call by asking the contact, "Would you re-employ the applicant?"

8. Ask for names of other reference sources.

Making the Job Offer

Contact HR to discuss your hiring decision, the selection process and the salary offer.

After acquiring approval from the HR director, you may extend a verbal offer. Important information to discuss includes such issues as the anticipated starting date; the starting salary; and any special contingencies, such as passing a physical examination or obtaining a license or certification. If the position is a term appointment or is contingent upon grant funding, include that information in your offer.

Complete the Request to Hire paperwork and attach evaluation information and reference checks. Obtain approval from the respective vice president/provost on your selection and forward all documentation to Human Resources. HR will prepare the written employment offer.

Notification to Unsuccessful Candidates

The hiring supervisor is responsible for informing the unsuccessful candidates, who were invited to campus for a formal interview, by a timely and courteous letter. A sample letter is provided in the "Forms" section of this guide. A copy of each letter should be forwarded to Human Resources.

When you encounter excellent candidates, it is helpful if you inform HR so that we can help make referrals to other departments who are seeking to fill positions with the same qualifications.