

## **How to interview candidates – a Guide for Senior Managers**

Once you have established a pipeline or shortlist of potentially suitable candidates, by whichever means, you then need to make your further selection. Methods used will depend partially on the nature and level of the role in question but could include aptitude tests, personality questionnaires, assessment centres, group exercises, as well as initial telephone and structured interviews. It is the areas of telephone and structured interviewing that this guide will concentrate upon as these remain the predominate method used for mid and senior level candidates.

**Initial telephone interviews:** Views vary but my own experience suggests that typically you, as the client, should aim to interview face to face between 4 to 5 potential candidates for most mid or senior level positions. Any less and the choice could become limited. Any more and valuable senior management time may be being wasted. If a significant number of candidates appear to be suitable, then the telephone interview can be a particularly valuable tool in further pre-screening. Like all interviews however, it does need to be planned and structured.

### **Face to face interviews:**

#### **The Process**

- Prepare for the interview (so you know what you are looking for and give the right impression)
- Allow sufficient time and avoid interruptions
- Establish rapport
- Listen twice as much as you talk
- Maintain continuity, linking questions where possible
- Keep control
- Take notes (and keep a copy) but maintain regular eye contact

#### **Useful Open Questions**

- Tell me about the sort of work you do in your present job?
- What have been the most notable achievements in your career to date?
- What do you know about..?
- Give me an example of .. ?
- What is your approach to handling..?
- What have been the most challenging aspects of your job?
- What particularly interests you in your job and why?
- Talk me through how you build and manage relationships?
- Is there anything else about your career that has not come out yet in this interview but that you think I should hear?

#### **Useful Probing Questions**

- What was your precise role in this project?
- What exactly was to contribution you made to the success of ...?
- What % of your time did you spend on ...?
- How were you measured?
- Did you personally have total ownership of the ... ?
- Talk me through a particular problem you encountered on .. ....and how you solved it?
- How would your present employer rate your skill level on ...?
- What would your team say about you..?
- How would your current boss describe your strengths and weaknesses?
- What are you best at ..?
- What areas would you say you need to improve in?

### Unhelpful Questions To Be Avoided

- Multiple Questions.
- Leading Questions.

### Illegal Questions To Be Avoided

- Biased questions on the grounds of sex, race or disability, religion or sexual orientation.

### Types of Interview

- **Biographical:** Focus on last five years, motivations for moves, achievements in each role, detail of what they did. How they were measured
- **Situational:** Situations or dilemmas described, candidate asked how they would react and deal with it - testing values and approach
- **Structured behavioural (competency):** specific examples of how they demonstrated a particular competence. (See separate guide for further information.)

### Introduction to Core Competency Interviewing.

The idea behind a competency is to make interviews objective. In this style of interview you are looking for the interviewee to discuss relevant examples of things that they have actually done rather than theorize about may be done in a given situation.

One of the most important things to remember with this type of approach is that the you can only score on what is verbalised, you cannot score based upon what you think that they know.

Competency based questions tend to work in the following way:

#### Situation and Constraints

**What you did?**

**Why you did it that way?**

**Who else was involved?**

**What you achieved?**

Below is a list of 16 common core competencies that you can select from depending upon the individual role, however it is not advisable to focus on more than 5 at any one time.

16 CORE COMPETENCIES		
A.	<b>ACTION ORIENTATION</b>	Demonstrates a readiness to make decisions, take the initiative and originate action.
B	<b>COMMERCIAL AWARENESS</b>	Understands and applies commercial and financial principles. Views issues in terms of costs, profits, markets and added value.
C	<b>CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION</b>	Creates new and imaginative approaches to work related issues. Identifies fresh approaches and shows a willingness to question traditional assumptions.
D	<b>DRIVE AND RESILIENCE</b>	Maintains effective work behaviour in the face of setbacks or pressure. Remains calm, stable and in control of themselves.
E	<b>FLEXIBILITY</b>	Successfully adapts to changing demands and conditions.

F	<b>INTERPERSONAL SENSITIVITY</b>	Interacts with others in a sensitive and effective way. Respects and works well with others.
G	<b>LEADERSHIP</b>	Motivates and empowers others to reach organisational goals.
H	<b>ORAL COMMUNICATION</b>	Speaks clearly, fluently and in a compelling manner to both individuals and groups.
I	<b>PERSONAL MOTIVATION</b>	Commits self to work hard towards goals. Shows enthusiasm and career commitment.
J	<b>PERSUASIVENESS</b>	Influences, convinces or impresses others in a way that results in acceptance, agreement or behaviour change.
K	<b>PLANNING AND ORGANISATION</b>	Organises and schedules events, activities and resources. Sets up and monitors timescales and plans.
L	<b>PROBLEM SOLVING AND ANALYSIS</b>	Analyses issues and breaks them down into their component parts. Makes systematic and rational judgments based on relevant information.
M	<b>QUALITY ORIENTATION</b>	Shows awareness of goals and standards. Follows through to ensure that quality and productivity standards are met.
N	<b>SPECIALIST KNOWLEDGE</b>	Understands technical or professional aspects of work and continually maintains technical knowledge.
O	<b>STRATEGIC</b>	Demonstrates a broad based view of issues, events and activities and a perception of their longer-term impact or wider implications.
P	<b>WRITTEN COMMUNICATION</b>	Writes in clear and concise manner, using appropriate grammar, style and language for the reader.