

A client's guide to interviewing

Not everyone is a good interviewer. It's not a skill that you are born with - it's something you learn and then need to work on developing - like any other job aspect it requires training and experience.

By [Kate Benson](#) 21 Aug 2012

I recently came to the conclusion that while I like to meet people and hear about their goals and aspirations, if I don't have a specific agenda in mind - the things that are critical to particular clients - it feels a bit empty. In order for me to be most effective, and best utilise my time along with the candidate's, I need to be looking for something.

Then I started thinking - this thing that I do all day long is completely foreign to some people. So I thought it would be beneficial to write down a few helpful hints - think of it as a cheat sheet.

1) Prepare

Take time to review a CV before meeting the candidate. Many of my candidates tell me that the person they met clearly had no idea of their background. You don't have to study the entire document, but review where they have worked, the positions that they have held and the accomplishments listed.

2) Take away the nerves

I always spend the first several minutes with someone in small talk. I try to get people talking about a neutral, safe topic so that they have a bit more ease and comfort in the interview. I know that there are some interviewers whose technique is to make the candidate feel uncomfortable to see how they perform - to me that's just not a fruitful way to begin anything.

3) Have a good understanding of your needs

If you are the hiring manager, be prepared to talk about the role, the nuances of success and failure, and what you are specifically looking for. Talk about what's worked and what hasn't - how the role has evolved or changed. How you want to build upon something that is in existence or tear down and change everything. Be able to talk about the department and company in macro terms.

If you are meeting a candidate for someone else's team or department - predetermine what you are screening for. Is it fit? Analytic abilities? The ability to work with creatives or with cross-functional partners? Are you the finance screen? Have an agenda - it's not a popularity contest.

4) What do you really want to know about this person?

How he will fit in with the company? What skillsets will he bring to your department? How long is his runway? If what he brings will complement or challenge you? Can he take what he knows and apply it in your role? Why he made specific decisions? It's important to keep this in mind during the interview, and the best way to get the answers is to be direct.

5) Know yourself

Are you a quick studier or do you need to spend two hours with someone to get a good feel for who he is? Allocate enough time to get what you need from the meeting. Do not allow yourself to be rushed or distracted. People have invested in this process. No matter the outcome you want them to walk away with positive feelings about your company.

6) What are the barriers to success in this role or in the organisation?

Be prepared to talk about things that are specific to your department, your management style or the organisation - give specific examples that have been problematic with previous employees to see how they would respond to these issues.

7) Pay attention to non-verbal indicators

We have a great screen in my office - who are those people who come for an interview and treat our receptionist horribly? Who are those people who are rude on the phone?

8) Use your time wisely

We have all heard stories about the candidate who came to interview seven or eight times. That's crazy - but if it is your company culture that has to be understood, Okay. However, think about the people who don't get the job. What was their experience?

9) Conversation vs interrogation

Make it a dialogue - give the candidate the opportunity to talk. You would be surprised how many of our candidates come back from a meeting and tell us that they did less than 25 percent of the talking.

10) Open-ended questions

This is the best tool to see how people think. Why are you here? What compels you about our company? What is our competition doing that we are not? What are we doing that makes you want to join us?

Interviewing is an art that requires the complete attention of both parties involved. Interviewers need to be empathetic, to get beyond the spoken word to grasp the intangibles. The interviewee must be well prepared to present his own credentials and to address the needs of the organisation. Each party must enable the other to participate equally and freely in a dialogue that seeks to uncover the strengths and weaknesses of the potential hire.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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