

What's the worst question you've ever been asked on a job interview? Have you ever been asked questions such as: "what is the last book you read," "what is your favourite rock band," or "do you realize you are applying for a man's job"? Believe it or not, those are actual questions which people have been asked.

In a seasonal business, hiring is a constant fact of life. It can be time-consuming, often frustrating and usually costly going through the advertising process, sifting through scores of applications and resumes, interviewing potential candidates and making decisions. It is even more frustrating when an applicant who made a good first impression turns out not to have been a good choice after all – which then means we have to start the entire process over again. Even worse, if a candidate feels unfairly treated, there is the potential for a human rights complaint.

There are some steps which those who do hiring can take to minimize the stress of selecting staff, maximize the chances

of making good hiring decisions and ensure that every aspect of the hiring process meets human rights requirements.

PLAN YOUR APPROACH

Analyze the job and determine requirements.

Before drawing up questions or putting an ad in the newspaper, think about the job by asking yourself these questions.

1. What will the person be doing in the job? Be specific – don't say something vague such as "outside work." Think of a typical day/week and make a list.
2. In the past, what people have been most successful in the job? What were their qualifications?
3. What level of education is needed to perform effectively in the job? What type of previous experience is relevant? How much training is provided on the job?
4. What specific skills are required: physical strength for lifting or standing for long periods, public relations to deal with customers, ability to operate equipment, math skills to total up bills, etc.?
5. With whom will the person be working and in what type of environment? Will the person be working alone or as part of a team?
6. What behavioural skills are required to perform successfully in the job?

Define skills/qualities to be assessed.

Once you have analyzed the job, now you can identify which skills and qualities you wish to assess during the hiring process. For example, if the person will be working outside in all types of weather, be doing heavy lifting, working without close supervision and be meeting customers, then you might want to assess

some of the following qualities: physical ability, independence and initiative, decision making, customer service skills, trustworthiness and reliability.

Determine the best way to gather the information needed to make a hiring decision.

Now comes the hard part – developing ways to gather information about the qualities and skills you wish to assess. Simply asking a question such as "are you reliable" does not usually work. The applicant will just answer "yes" and you will have no idea whether or not that is a true statement.

Be creative. Try to think of appropriate ways to get the information you need to assess applicants' skill levels and aptitude for your job. Here are some examples.

1. An applicant can be asked to demonstrate a skill such as operating a piece of equipment.
2. Ask for examples from previous experience which demonstrate a particular skill.
3. Use role plays to see how the applicant handles a typical situation with a customer.
4. If math skills are important, you can give applicants a math test.
5. Give examples of typical problems which might be encountered on the job and ask applicants how they would deal with them.

The important thing to remember is this. As long as you are assessing qualities and skills which are directly related to the job, then you will probably have no difficulty with human rights. Asking a question such as "what is the last book you read" might be very appropriate for a job working in a library, but it would be difficult to explain how that was relevant



to working for a landscaping company. So don't just make up a list of questions. Make sure that everything you ask is directly related to the job. Not only will you get more relevant information to help you make better hiring decisions, you will also stay clear of any potential for charges of discriminatory hiring practices.

Determine the best way to advertise the position and collect information from applicants.

How do you want people to know about your job openings? Placing an ad in the paper will usually draw a flood of applicants. There will definitely be good ones in the group but there is usually a lot of work involved because of the sheer numbers. Many people rely on word of mouth or simply build up a roster of potential applicants from people who drop off resumes on their own initiative.

Whatever you do, make sure you create a positive image for your business or organization by treating all job applicants with courtesy and respect. Don't say you'll keep a resume on file if you don't intend to, and let people know within a reasonable time of your decisions. Remember, job seekers are probably applying at more than one place and they appreciate knowing where they stand.

You will also have to decide if you want people to complete your own application form or just submit a resume. If you do use an application form, make sure that it complies with all the human rights requirements in your province. Generally, you may not ask questions which would indicate a person's age, sex, race, marital status, family status (i.e. number of children), ethnic origin, religion or sexual orientations. So for example, you should not ask for the year a person completed secondary school since that would tend to indicate their age. Rather than asking for "next of kin" you should ask for "person to contact in an emergency" and so on.

CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

Have a plan before you begin.

Make sure you allow sufficient time for each interview. It is also a good idea to let the applicants know how long they can expect the interview to take. If they are going to be asked to take a test or go on a

tour, let them know so they can plan their day accordingly.

Put the applicants at ease immediately and try to maintain a positive rapport throughout.

It is only natural for people to be nervous on a job interview. In fact, the more important the job is to the person, the more nervous they might be. The more nervous a person is, the more difficult it will be to get a true picture of what they might be like as an employee. So, try to put applicants at ease. Try not to leave them waiting too long before you begin. Make sure there is a place for coats. Introduce yourself and any others who are participating in the interview. If appropriate, show them around in the area where they might be working. Start the interview with a bit of "chit-chat" about the weather or the hockey game just to get the conversation going.

Ask the right questions to get the information you need.

1. Ask specific questions which are related to the position. If necessary, explain the reason for asking a particular question or how the question is related to the qualifications.

2. Questions may be related to knowledge, situational experience or general qualities which you expect from your employees. A knowledge question might be something such as "what would you use to remove crabgrass?" A situational experience question might be something such as "give me an example from your previous job where you solved a problem for a customer" or "how would you respond to a customer who is demanding a refund?" A question relating to general qualities might be "what transportation arrangements can you make to ensure that you can be here on time each day?"

3. Ask good questions which will give you information. *Open* questions are questions which require more than one word to answer and are generally the best type to ask to gather information. Examples of open questions are: "tell me about your last job," or "what did you like best about your previous job?" *Closed* questions are

questions which can be answered with one word, often "yes" or "no." Examples of closed questions are: "how long did you work there?" or "did you like the job?" Generally, you should try to avoid asking closed questions, except to verify specific facts, since they tend to limit discussion and are usually conversation stoppers.

Remember, this is not an exam.

Ask one question at a time, and give people a chance to think about their answers. Try to use a non-threatening, non-judgmental tone of voice. Also, make sure you give applicants an opportunity to ask questions. Remember, as well, that the job interview not only provides you with an opportunity to assess applicants to determine if they are right for the job, it is also an opportunity for the applicants to determine whether this job sounds right for them.

Listen!!

Probably the most difficult task of all is to ensure that you really listen to what the applicants are saying during the interview. Pay more attention to their answers than thinking about how you are going to ask the next question. Take notes if necessary, but remember to make eye contact to show that you are listening. Make sure there are no distractions such as telephones ringing or interruptions from other staff. This is not only discourteous to the applicants but will also make it much more difficult for you to maintain focus on the interview.

Paint a realistic picture of the job.

Don't oversell the job or the organization. Try to be realistic about working conditions, hours, your expectations, etc. It is much better to give applicants a true sense of the job rather than have them quit after a few days because it is not what they expected. People are much more likely to stay in a job which they really want. Be open about your expectations about quality of work, quantity of work, getting along with others, punctuality, attendance, dress code, etc.

While hiring can be a daunting process, if you follow some basic guidelines, hopefully you will find it easier to do and have more successful results. ♦