



INITIAL INTERVIEWS

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Successful hiring authorities keep initial interviews simple. Often we talk to managers who feel they have to devote days to initial interviewing. They find themselves exhausted at the end of the process because they do most of the talking; telling the candidates about the job, the company, and whatever else comes up in an unstructured conversation. Just this week, one of the CEOs of a smaller firm said he was exhausted after interviewing four candidates. He said that he spent almost two hours with each one of them, and with two of them, he knew in the first ten minutes he wasn't going to hire them. Oh brother!

Positive criteria for the position and candidate need to be established before interviewing begins. The most successful hiring authorities conduct an initial, structured interview (next chapter) lasting no more than thirty to forty-five minutes. By structured we mean a prepared list of questions that are asked of each candidate. The interviewer should record their answers so they can be compared. The purpose of the initial interview is to assess the candidate's skills, experience, and ability to do the job. Second, a personality check can be made to assess the candidate's ability to fit in. It's that simple.

BE INCLUSIVE

Most successful hiring authorities find themselves initially interviewing as many as eight, nine, or more candidates in some cases. The reason is they want to get a solid idea of the quality of candidates that are available on the market, especially if they haven't hired for a particular position. They tend to be more *inclusive* rather than *exclusive* in initial interviews. This allows them to get a realistic idea of the available candidates.



REVIEWING RESUMES

Even in reviewing resumes, the most successful hiring authorities try to be inclusive. They admit that it's extremely difficult to tell about the candidate's ability by looking at a resume. Most hiring authorities use resumes to *exclude* candidates. The most successful hiring authorities will use them to create a quality pool of candidates from which to choose.

The best hiring authorities know that *dissecting* to the nth degree is not really helpful. The best accountants, salespeople, IT professionals, engineers, etc. are likely to be lousy . . . and we really mean lousy . . . resume writers. And lousy professionals can be very good resume writers. We hear it all the time, "Well I just can't interview everybody . . . I have to use the resume to eliminate people. How else would I do it?"

The key is to look at the kinds of companies the candidate has worked for and determine how those firms compared to their firm. They look at what the candidate has done and try to relate it to the job they are interviewing for. There is nothing foolproof about this method, but we can't tell you the number of very well-qualified candidates, who are really good at what they do, who got eliminated because of what is perceived to be a poor resume. We also know, and we know we won't get much support for this, that misspellings and typos on a resume really *don't* have anything to do with one's ability to do a particular job. We know the argument is made, "Well if they can't write a resume, they can be very good at what they do." There's no sense in arguing with that because both sides are right. The point is to not get so wrapped up in what is on or not on a resume that a good candidate gets overlooked.



Successful hiring authorities will even devote a ten-minute or fifteen-minute phone call to candidates who might be on the fringe of what the company needs. A resume usually only reflects 35 percent to 40 percent of the candidate's skill or ability. Therefore, successful hiring managers will err on the side of inclusion and devote at least a ten-minute to fifteen-minute conversation with the candidate who appears to be marginal.

THIRTY TO FORTY-FIVE MINUTES

Successful hiring authorities don't feel compelled to sell the candidate on the job and the company or to make a total assessment of the candidate in an initial interview. He or she seeks only to answer a few questions about the candidate's ability to do the job. He or she should inform the candidate that the interview is only going to last half an hour or so, and, if there is interest, there will be other interviews to answer the questions from both parties. This way there are no other expectations about the length or the purpose of the initial interview. The process is clear from the start.

An interviewer has no obligation to even fill the half hour. If he or she comes to the conclusion in the first five minutes that the candidate is not a contender for the job, the interviewer should inform the candidate and end the interview. Many managers say things like, "Well, I knew in the first ten minutes that I wasn't going to hire the person, but I felt compelled to spend forty-five minutes to an hour with them simply because they took the time to come over here." Ridiculous! If, at any time during the initial interview, the interviewer comes to the conclusion that they simply aren't going to hire this person it's quite easy to say, "Well, right now we are doing initial,



screening interviews. We're trying to compare the candidates who are available on the market. We're interviewing a number of people and will contact those of further interest. Thank you for coming by." Or—only if it's the truth—"I want to thank you for coming by. The purpose of today's interview was to initially compare candidates. We've interviewed others that we feel are a better fit than you might be. I don't want to waste your time. Thank you for coming by." A candidate will appreciate that their time wasn't wasted. Likewise, if in the first few minutes of the initial interview, the interviewer concludes the candidate should be asked back and pursued, he or she can inform the candidate that he or she will be asked back, give him or her literature on the company, and the interview can end.

THE END

At the end of each initial interview, the interviewer should take two or three minutes to note his initial impressions of the candidate. Upon completion of initial interviews, the interviewer can begin to compare and rank the candidates. Candidates who are nearly equal should be invited back with the top candidates. At least five or six candidates should be invited back. Limiting it to too few runs the risk of the top one or two candidates eliminating themselves, or being eliminated, and having no one left to consider and having to start all over.

Once initial interviews are concluded, in-depth second, third, or fourth interviews can be scheduled. Following these guidelines will make the interviewing process more productive.