



WHO SHOULD INTERVIEW?

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This question would seem to have a simple answer: employers with a need should interview, that's who. Simple enough! We're continually amazed at how complicated and downright wasteful of time and energy interviewing can be. Interviewing candidates should be a simple process of an employer in need of an employee, recruiting, interviewing, and hiring a qualified candidate. The process often becomes more important than the result of hiring the best candidate for the job. The most successful hiring authorities only have **three or** four people involved in the interviewing process and only those directly affected by the hire.

THE PROCESS GETS COMPLICATED

So often, the interviewing process becomes a marathon of meetings for the candidate. He or she meets with distant, rather disinterested people, who end up having a vote or say in who gets the chance to perform in a job function that has nothing to do with them. The interviewing process becomes a popularity contest rather than an endeavor to hire the most qualified person. The more people involved in the process, the more likely a safe candidate will be hired. These successful candidates often are hired on their ability to survive the interviewing process rather than on their ability to function and contribute to the work endeavor. The major reason for this is that most people have a tendency to be "naysayers" anyhow. Most people don't like to risk being held accountable by voting for a candidate who, after becoming an employee, fails. There is no risk in saying "no." There *is* a risk in hiring a candidate. People who will not directly participate in the reward or the risk, i.e., performance of the candidate, shouldn't be involved in the interviewing process. It's just too easy for those



distant parties to say “no.” The result of marathon interviewing is usually a safe, relatively neutral employee who has a tendency to be more average than anything else. The result may be a good politician/interviewer who offends no one yet accomplishes little in his or her work function.

There’s nothing wrong with more people than just the hiring manager interviewing candidates, but a problem occurs when too many people get involved in the process. The idea is that if lots of people within the company interview the candidate they will less likely make a mistake. This is simply untrue. Studies show that a complicated interviewing process doesn’t improve the success pattern or retention rate of qualified candidates. In fact, an interviewing process of more than two interviews above the hiring level will most likely eliminate qualified candidates because of “too many chefs in the kitchen.”

A month ago, we had a candidate fly to a corporate office for a final interview. The firm had arranged for her to speak to six different managers during the day. (Of course, you know that if someone’s going to go to a corporate office interview they can’t just interview with the two most important decision-makers. That would make things too simple and, often, folks feel like they have to make it look complicated.) One of the VPs that she was supposed to speak with was sick that day so in her stead they “plugged in” the vice president of procurement. This guy had absolutely nothing to do with the position of regional sales manager that the candidate was being interviewed for. He wasn’t even remotely influenced by or associated with the function our candidate was interviewing for. They plugged him into the interviewing cycle simply to “fill the gap.” He even told our candidate that he had absolutely no idea why he was interviewing her, but



he wanted to be a good team player and help out. He even began the interview by asking our candidate what she'd like to know about the company that hadn't already been answered. He didn't interview her at all. It was more of a visit.

Well, guess which interviewing authority cast aspersions on our candidate's ability to do the job? The other managers asked him what he thought about our candidate. He didn't totally stand in the way of her being hired by saying that he just didn't think she was qualified. But, according to the other managers, he said that "he just wasn't sure of her capability . . . Not that he didn't like her, but he wondered how she was going to fit in . . ." And maybe she was this and that . . . blah, blah, blah. He wondered if they could find somebody else that might be a little better. He just wasn't sure.

In the end, he caused them to postpone a decision about the candidate because the other decision makers felt like they should, politically, take into account this VP's thoughts, so as not to irritate him and make him feel like he wasn't being listened to. They came to the conclusion that they should look at a few more candidates to be sure. They told us that they really liked our candidate and would probably hire her, but needed to interview a few more people. Nine days later they decided that she was their best candidate (they hadn't gotten around to interviewing any other candidates because of time constraints). The EVP had finally gotten tired of all of the fooling around and decided that they needed to hire the lady. Unfortunately for them, one of our other clients had made an offer to the lady, which she accepted the day before the EVP called. They had interviewed and hired the lady in four days. The first client had to start all over.



All of this was caused by a VP of Procurement who had absolutely no reason to be involved in the interviewing or hiring process anyhow. He complicated and eventually altered the process.

Studies show that successful hires are just as successful when only one person does the interviewing and hiring. Studies also show that once the interviewing process gets beyond three or four people, the probability of a poor hire increases dramatically. Successful hiring authorities are decisive decision makers. They decide! They have the courage to accept responsibility for their decisions and personally accept risk.

The higher the position within a firm, the more people have a tendency to be involved. We've seen companies use everything from teams of consulting psychologists to hiring committees that vote on a group of finalists. The absurdities defy logical and good business sense. We had a candidate a few years ago for a vice presidency position of a multimillion-dollar company. They flew her to Atlanta, and in one day, she interviewed with five different people, some one-on-one, some in groups. The next week, they asked her to fly back to Atlanta again. When she got there, she looked at her agenda and she was scheduled to interview with the same five people again. She went through the same interviews as before. They called us and said they still couldn't get a 100 percent consensus. The folks confused themselves.

Google has become famous for a four-person interview and hiring process. This should be no surprise.

THE RULE OF THUMB

The rule of thumb should be that managers who have the direct need should be doing the interviewing. They should



involve *no more than two others*. That means three people in total (maybe four if you include H.R.) Other people should be involved *only* if their livelihood and work immediately depends on the person being hired. Many managers would like the personnel office to do this, but it just doesn't work well that way. The personnel office is often just too far away from the "pain and need" of the hiring manager to be most effective. The reason is simply that in most companies, the personnel office has the responsibility of screening people out. Unless internal recruiters or personnel offices are constantly interviewing for certain positions, they normally will tend to find the *safest* candidates rather than the *best* ones. Having said this, there are some very awesome HR offices with people who really know their company well. You can be your own judge.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

Keeping interviewing simple is the key to the process. Involve folks who are directly affected by the hire. Involving people from other departments in a hiring decision is not only a waste of time, but will hinder the process of finding the best candidate.

The level of the job and the type of position will dictate who should be involved in the process. For example, controllers or engineering professionals shouldn't be interviewing sales people.

Who should interview? The people in a company that have the need and are affected by a hire.