

## In This Issue: “**Effective Interviewing**”

Test for Success  
Tools, Tips, & Techniques for Avoiding  
Hiring Mistakes and Developing People  
From Helm and Associates, Inc.  
And Kurt Helm

Published on the fourth Thursday of every other month  
March 2009; Volume 4, Issue 2  
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Word count for this issue: 1,396  
Approximate time to read: 9 minutes

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Each month in the “Test For Success” ezine, we are taking a closer look at each step in the hiring process. Last month, we talked about how to get the most out of the resume and application, and now we are going to turn to what is usually the next step in the process, the interview.

### First, The Basics

Let’s start by reviewing the basic purpose of the interview and where it fits into the hiring process. First, before you start interviewing people for a job, you should have a good idea of what the job is. Second, you have obtained resumes or applications from people who are interested in the job and then chosen those who appear to have the knowledge, skills, and experience for which you are looking.

The next step, then, is to bring the resumes or applications to life, and you do that in the interviewing process. There are three basic purposes that job interviews serve: to extend and amplify the information you have gathered from the resume or application, to get to know the individual as a person (check “chemistry,”) and to confirm the applicant’s interest in the job you want to fill.

Please notice that we are not using the interview necessarily to verify information from the resume or application as true; there’s another part of the hiring process devoted to that activity, and we’ll be talking about it in May. Instead, the interview is much more personal; this is where you connect a face or voice with the resume, and you get to know that person better.

## Preparing For The Interview

No matter how the interview is conducted (by phone or in person), there are certain things that you must do to prepare for it. I can't stress this part of the interview process enough: preparation is the key to an interview that is a productive use of both your time and the applicant's time.

Before an interview, review everything that you know about the applicant from the resume or application, plus any other job-relevant information you have at that point, and review the job description as well. Make written notes about any questions you have about information on the resume or application, or any questions you want to ask about the applicant's knowledge, skills, and experience. Make a written plan for the questions you want to ask, and the order you think you will ask them.

Next, think about what the applicant may want to ask you, and plan your responses to those questions. Remember, the applicant is interviewing you as well, in the sense that he or she is trying to figure out if your company fits with his career goals, skills, and life. Keep your description of the company and the job factual. Avoid promises or predictions about your company's financial future. Be ready to discuss in detail the job for which the applicant is applying.

## Choosing The Interview Format

There are two basic ways to conduct interviews: in person or by telephone. In the end, however, it comes down to an interaction between the job seeker and a company representative. The job seeker is presumably trying to make the best possible impression while simultaneously finding out as much as possible about the job, the company, and the people with whom he will work. The company representative's goal is to find out as much as possible that is job-relevant about the individual without making promises or divulging confidential or proprietary information about the company.

There are advantages to both formats. An advantage to telephone interviews is that they allow you to concentrate on an applicant's ability to express himself (if that is job-relevant) without the distraction of all else that goes on in face-to-face interactions. In addition, telephone interviews obviously save what can amount to substantial travel costs, and they save both interview and applicant time because time is easier to manage in telephone interviews.

The advantages of personal interviews, on the other hand, include the much wider range of information that you can gather about an applicant by observing her interacting with other people. In addition, communication between the two of you is less prone to misunderstanding because you have an entire set of non-verbal ways to communicate in addition to your conversation. Finally, group interviews are somewhat easier to manage in person because all participants can see one another; the interviewee knows who asked each question and can make eye contact to check for understanding as he or she answers.

## Tips For Telephone Interviews

In an ideal world, you could use the telephone interview to narrow the list of potential applicants to a smaller, manageable number who would then be interviewed in person. Let's look at some basic tips for productive telephone interviews:

1. Make sure that you are somewhere quiet and that you will not be interrupted. If you aren't using your cell phone for the interview, turn it off (or at least turn off the ring volume.) You owe the interviewee your undivided attention.
2. Be prepared! Have your notes, a copy of the job description, the applicant's resume or application, and blank paper and pencil ready. If you are calling someone in another time zone, be sure that you understand the time difference and that you place the call when you promised to do so.
3. Identify yourself when you reach the applicant, and explain how long you believe the interview will last. Be pleasant (smile!), and take a few moments to establish rapport. This gives both of you an opportunity to get settled in to the interview. Let the applicant know if you will be taking notes or making a recording of the interview (know the laws in your state about recording before you begin.)
4. Ask open-ended questions that allow the applicant to give you detailed answers. Ask for examples or more information if you don't understand an answer. Don't try to fill up all the silences with your own words! Listen, listen, listen, and take notes. At the end of the interview, summarize what you have heard.
5. Finally, be sure to thank the applicant for the time he has given you, and give him an idea about what the next step in the process will be. Remember, don't make promises you cannot keep. Be realistic, professional, and courteous.

## Tip For Personal Interviews

It won't come as much of a surprise, I suspect, that the tips for personal interviews aren't all that different from those for telephone interviews. Here they are, with a few reminders that apply more often to face-to-face situations:

1. Conduct interviews in a quiet place where you will not be interrupted. Again, turn off your cell phone and don't read your email during the interview. Be on time, and be considerate of the applicant's time.
2. Again, be prepared! Have your notes and questions, the job description, and the applicant's resume or application in front of you. Be ready to make notes, and explain to the applicant that you will be doing so.

3. Take the time to introduce yourself and to establish rapport, but don't take too much time. Remember, when you are face-to-face with the interviewee, it's easier to get off track, but everyone's time is important.
4. It is just as hard to avoid filling up those awkward silences when you are sitting in a room with an applicant as when you are talking by telephone. Resist the urge to talk too much about all that you know about the company; instead, rely on open-ended questions, and ask the applicant to "tell me more about that" if you want to understand why the applicant said something.
5. Be sure that the interviewee knows who to contact with questions, and that you explain the next step in the hiring process. Always thank the interviewee for her time.

### The Final Word

Successful interviews are built on the twin foundations of preparation and consideration. Be prepared and know what you want to learn about the person you are interviewing; it's not only OK to write out the questions ahead of time – it's recommended! And be considerate of the interviewee's time and effort. I know that I've said it before, but it bears repetition: treat the individuals you interview as you would like, and expect, to be treated if the roles were reversed.

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Remember, People ARE your most important asset!

To Hire the Best, Test!

To Reveal Management Potential, Test!

To Diagnose Problem Behavior, Test!

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