

It's hiring time. Here are 5 key tips for interviewing job candidates

January and February are typically when companies roll out updated budgets and sales forecasts and have a better idea of staffing needs for the upcoming year. So, there is no time like the present to brush up on the do's and don'ts of interviewing, whether it's in Q1 or any other time throughout the year.

Interviewers play a critical role. They are not only the company's brand ambassador, but if they ask an inappropriate question or make an off-handed reference, they can land their company in hot water. Here are just five tips to consider when preparing to interview.

First and foremost, be clear about the position you're looking to fill. Prepare a written job description, job title, and ask the prospective supervisor to ensure the duties and responsibilities are current. Make sure to list software programs the candidate will need to know, certifications or degrees required, and skills the applicant must have.

The description should include the anticipated work schedule, work location and physical requirements to communicate to potential candidates before they even apply for the position.

Second, prepare a set of questions to ask and use this set of questions when interviewing all candidates. Some experienced interviewers may prefer an unstructured format, giving the candidate some latitude to lead the interview.

In an unstructured format, questions tend to be open-ended, allowing the candidate's personality to shine through compared to closed-ended questions which engender brief answers. While unstructured

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interviews work well with those who are experienced interviewers, always be sure to refer back to the prepared set of questions.

This way, each interview ends with the interviewer obtaining the information needed to make the hiring decision. When all applicants are asked the same questions, it is easier to defend against allegations of discrimination in hiring and selection.

Third, don't delegate the process of screening/interviewing to someone who has no human resources training. All interviewers should be familiar with federal, state and local employment laws pertaining to employment interviews.

Generally, questions about a candidate's marital status, how many children they have, where they were born or grew up, criminal background, disabilities, age, and how much money they were paid by their past employer are prohibited. An inexperienced interviewer can easily get caught up in what they think is a friendly conversation, but instead create liability for their employer, particularly if that candidate is not selected for the job.

Fourth, if your company is considering hiring someone from a competitor, make sure there are no contractual restrictions between the candidate and their current or former employer(s). The last thing any new employer wants is to find itself on the right

side of the "v" in a lawsuit because it knew or should have known about a candidate's non-competition agreement.

Always ask if the candidate is currently subject to any restrictive covenant agreements what would preclude them from accepting a job with your company. If the candidate answers yes or they're not certain, request a copy of the agreement to review for yourself and to run by your attorney. Overlooking this important step in the interview process can invite unsuspected legal action.

Fifth, while there are various schools of thought about note taking during interviews, it is important to document feedback about each candidate. Never write notes about a candidate's race or other physical characteristics that can become plaintiff's exhibits in a discrimination complaint.

Those who interview regularly jot down notes on a separate sheet of paper during the interview and then prepare a written summary to compare one candidate to the other, or to remember something that stood out about a certain candidate's experience that is relevant to the position with your company.

Whether your company needs to replace folks who recently retired or is looking to grow a division, consider these tips to help your hiring practices run more smoothly. Good luck hiring the best candidates!

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