

Interviewing Effectiveness

By Mike Hulser

As a production framer, it is appropriate to pay continuous close attention to your products, processes (including facility and equipment), pricing, and promotion. While all those items are important, what truly determines the ultimate performance of your business is your people.

Your staff is your only true differentiator. Your competitors have similar products and processes, but only you have your people. This makes interviewing effectiveness critically important. It is where your relationship with new employees begins. Unfortunately, many production framing owners and managers have little or no training in interviewing.

One recent study concluded that a bad hiring decision can cost your company as much as three times the annual cost of the position. Another concluded that the typical interview is so poorly done that it only improves the chance of a successful hire by as little as 2 percent compared to no interview at all.

In many ways, interviewing is a crap shoot, a highly imperfect process with a lot riding on the outcome. The key to improving the odds of a solid hire is a serious, focused process that allows you to learn about job candidates and their behavioral traits.

- Motivation - What drives them?
- Thought Process - How do they gather information and make decisions?
- Action - How do they actually do work?
- Interaction - How do they get along with others?

Behavioral traits are critically important because,



**How you
interview
is the key
to hiring
the right
people
for your
company**

while people can learn new information and skills, it is highly doubtful that they can or will learn new behavioral traits. The psychologists tell us that personalities are pretty much formed by the time people enter their teen years. Thus, you are not going to get a major makeover of someone in his or her forties.

Previous experience, which is what most people tend to focus on in interviews, is a poor indicator of future performance.

Behavior traits are a much better indicator.

An old adage sums up the reality: You tend to hire

people for what they know and what they have done, and you fire them for who they are (can't come to work on time, call in sick a lot, alienate coworkers, etc.)

You are far better off hiring people who:

- Are good persons. They have strong values and work ethic, are eager to learn and please, are team players, and are coachable and adaptable.
- Get things done. They accomplish the desired results, achieve goals, and continuously strive to do so. Then you teach them the skills they need to effectively do the job.

Leading up to the interview, a key item is to have a current, accurate, complete job description, whether the position is a production supervisor or a receiving clerk. The job description should include:

- Key tasks and responsibilities, prioritized if possible
- Desired results described as quantitatively and qualitatively as possible
- Qualification, skills, experience needed
- Key desired behavioral traits

When screening candidate resumes or applications, it is best if you clearly know what your must-haves are and measure candidates against your must-haves, not against each other.

One way to think about what you really want is to identify the common desirable qualities in your current star performers and attempt to identify candidates who exhibit those.

In your pre-screening of the types of candidates you might want to talk to, try to determine if there is:

- A knowledge/skills fit
- A compensation fit
- A serious, targeted interest exhibited by the candidate.
- Particularly for management or professional positions, there should be a cover letter focused on your stated needs and how the candidate fills them.

Once you've done these things, you now have the people you want to talk to. Try narrowing it down to the four or five that you want to have a short phone chat with, leading to the two or three you want to interview in person.

When it comes time for the interviews themselves, here are a few helpful tips:

- Set aside adequate uninterrupted time, usually at least an hour, for each discussion
- Minimize any physical barriers to open, comfortable communication
- Employ multiple interviewers, potentially with each having a targeted thrust.

Do's and Don'ts

Now it's time for the interview itself. A few "Do's and Don'ts" to help you conduct a meaningful discussion include:

Do:

- Attempt to loosen the candidate up a bit, and make the person feel comfortable.
- Share your vision of the job, the department, and the company

- Use non-directive interviewing techniques—relatively few behavior-focused open-ended questions—to get the candidate to disclose behavioral traits, provide insight into his or her character, and help you assess the candidate's potential future behavior and performance.
- Try hard to listen. Focus on what the person is saying, not on what you are saying.

Don't:

- Talk too much, no more than 20 percent of the time.
- Quiz them on their resume or application.
- Use questions that require only one-word answers.
- Set false expectations for the job.
- Focus on skills/knowledge only.
- Allow less than critical interruptions.

After the interviews, if you like a particular candidate, you will want to check references. Unfortunately, don't have high expectations of past employers. Nowadays, most won't do much more than confirm dates of employment. If you can get someone to talk to you, use open-ended questions, probing strengths and development needs, attempting to understand what you will need to do to make the person successful in the position. Ask who else you can talk to that would have insights on the candidate. These people will not have been on the reference list.

Your people drive your business. It all starts with the selection process. Strengthening your interviewing will lead to a stronger work force in your business and sharply contribute to improved operating and financial performance. ■

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