

## **What NOT To Do In the Interview**

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The personal interview is a decision point for you AND for the candidate. There is no perfect way to conduct an interview. Some of you are probably more comfortable with this activity than others and that is only natural. To be an exceptionally good interviewer, you must conduct a large number of interviews on a consistent basis and frankly, who wants to do that? So, rather than suggest what you should do, it might be easier to discuss what you should NOT do.

No-No #1: Don't schedule back-to-back interviews, even if you are desperate to fill the position. You will have trouble distinguishing one candidate from the other at the end of the day. I recommend no more than two interviews per day – one in the morning and one in the afternoon. The interval between allows time for your thoughts about a candidate to “settle” and for you to feel refreshed, interested and prepared when you start the next interview.

No-No #2: Don't allow non-emergencies to interrupt the interview. Let people know you are not to be disturbed by visitors or telephone calls. An average interview only lasts twenty to thirty minutes and most things can wait that long. Interruptions lead to ineffective interviews and wasted time: “Now, let's see, where were we?” Allowing interruptions also shows a lack of consideration for the applicant. However, you are permitted to leave the building in the event of a fire, tornado or terrorist attack if you take the applicant with you!

No-No #3: Don't ask “Yes/No” questions or telegraph the desired answers. For example, “You won't have a problem working overtime, will you?” is actually a statement. How many applicants would say, “Oh, yes, I will. Can't work overtime, no, not me!” Better to ask, “What scheduling problems would you encounter if asked to work overtime on short notice?” Applicants will generally provide more information or explanation when you ask questions that require some thought.

No-No #4: Don't ask illegal questions. These include asking about age, religion, handicaps, etc. Other personal areas to be avoided include marital status, dependent children and medical information. Oftentimes, applicants volunteer this information anyway and it's certainly okay to know if someone is married and has children. However, it's not okay to ask them and it's not okay to make assumptions about their suitability based upon that information. A sales manager once confessed to me that he asked a candidate, “How many kids do you have?” and rejected the candidate because he had two-year-old twins. When I asked the manager why he would ask such a thing, he replied, “To find out if he could travel.” A better question would have been, “What problems would you encounter when the job requires overnight travel?” The applicant might have responded, “Well, I have these two-year-old twins and would be delighted if I could travel a LOT!”

No-No #5: Don't ask for information you already have. You should have the application and/or resume' and know such things as dates of employment, job titles, etc. Use the interview to obtain new information and to clarify or expand upon what you have been provided. For example, on the application, a candidate honestly states he was discharged from his previous job. Your question is, “Please explain the circumstances that led to your discharge.” Warning: This is one of those tough questions and the candidate is likely to be silent for a time. Don't be afraid to ask tough questions and don't be afraid of silence. I once asked an applicant to expound on being fired after a short time in a previous job. After a considerable silence, he admitted it was for making phone calls. I asked what kind of rule they had about phone calls and he said, after another considerable silence, “They didn't – everybody else made phone calls and they didn't get in trouble.” I responded that it seemed a bit harsh, then, to fire him. He replied, “Sure was – it was only about \$120 worth!”

No-No #6: Don't get off track. The interview is not a time for you to gossip about your competition or swap war stories about your industry. Nor is it a time to vent emotions about your dissatisfaction with the prior incumbent or things you want to change. Frankly, that is a turn-off for a quality applicant. Focus on the requirements of the job and determining if the applicant's personal attributes and work-related experience and other qualifications will make her/him a good fit.

No-No #7: Don't play "Big-Me, little-you." There is no point in intimidating an applicant unless you just want a bunch of "yes-persons" around you. The best demeanor to adopt in an interview is one of politeness, acceptance and modesty. After all, you should seek the best person for the job so you ought to look for honest, thoughtful answers to your thoughtful questions. In fact, you should only be talking about 20 percent of the time. (See No-No #6.)

No-No #8: Don't shy away from applicant questions. Believe it or not, some applicants prepare for an interview and not everyone who applies for a job is desperate for work. Many people seek to better their situation by finding more rewarding work, a better work environment and, yes, a higher income. Be prepared for questions by having a thorough understanding of the TRUE requirements of the job, opportunities and limitations. Be able to explain what factors are required for success in the job and in your company.

No-No #9: Don't oversell the job or the company. Every job has limitations and every company has challenges. Luring an applicant with false promises or depicting your workplace as a little bit of heaven on earth is asking for future trouble. Once hired, people will find your company's warts within a week. When things have been misrepresented, such discoveries are perceived as outright lies. It's a problem because most people will stay with a job, but not be fully engaged, for six months or more because they think it looks bad if they leave immediately. It's better to put your company's strengths and weaknesses in perspective and explain how the job at hand is one element in your success plan.

No-No #10: Don't be afraid to end or extend an interview. As a courtesy, when the interview appointment is made, applicants should be advised that you expect the interview to be about twenty or thirty minutes, although, there really is no set time. Sometimes you will know immediately if a candidate is unsuitable – perhaps it's the lug nuts in his ears?!? Be courteous but don't waste your time – ten minutes is long enough. Some candidates have lots of questions or might ask to see your shop or tour the offices. Isn't that better than asking how much vacation time you offer? If he/she is a possible finalist, take the extra time with them.

While you might be a little bit nervous about interviewing remember, the applicant is bound to be more nervous. So, relax and do your best to enjoy meeting new people.

If you would like to discuss this topic or any other HR matter, please feel free to call the HR Help Line at 800-683-3440 or e-mail me at [Lesley@taxfavoredbenefits.com](mailto:Lesley@taxfavoredbenefits.com).