

Employer's Guide to Resumes / Job interviews ,Some Practical Tips (George Robotham)

Background

The author has received tertiary training in Human Resource Management and training in the "Targeted Selection" method of employment interviewing. He has conducted a number of employment interviews and attended a number.

Major tip

Recruitment & selection uses "**Past behaviour predicts future behaviour**" The idea is to elicit plenty of examples of where in the past they have **successfully done the sort of things that will be required in the new job**. Get them to say what they did, how they did it and what were the results.

Preparation

The essence of good recruitment and selection is to identify key competencies of the role through task analysis. This will lead to a position description with roles, responsibilities and selection criteria.

I once had a senior H.R. professional indicate to me that selection criteria are only for H.R. people who are too lazy to read a resume. My view now, both as an interviewer and applicant, is that selection criteria adds some much needed definition to the process.

Selection criteria for government jobs ask you to respond to typically 5 to 6 selection criteria in different ways-Maximum of 2 pages in total, Half to one page per selection criteria, Maximum of 2 pages per selection criteria. Personally I do not think you will get sufficient information with the first approach and the third approach will be too much to read.

Some of the competencies may include-

Academic or other required qualifications

Adheres to continuous improvement philosophy

Liaison with external bodies

Change management

Achieving excellence in ?

Leadership

Strategic thinking

Workplace Health & Safety

Knowledge and application of legislation

Advice to management

Auditing

Ability to work independently

Investigating

Negotiating

Project management

Training

Undertaking research

Customer service

Equity

Technical skills relevant to the job

Written communications skills

Oral communications skills

Computer skills

Interpersonal skills, very important, probably the most important of the lot

Flexibility

Responsible attitude

Seeks to review and improve processes

Establishes effective relationships

Willingness to commit

Managed staff

Built effective teams

Quality management

Time management

Once you have carefully defined what you want in the position you must find the people that meet the criteria. Be realistic in your search, if you have a moderate salary package you are unlikely to attract many super stars. Talking about salary packages, always advise a salary package in your advertisement and say it is subject to negotiation, saves a lot of time wasting.

The selection criteria

In looking at the responses to the selection criteria you are looking for solid examples of past achievements that are relevant to the current role. Hit the important bits with a highlighter pen for later reference. How people respond to selection criteria, assuming of course they wrote it, will give clues to written communications competencies. Look at the spelling, the grammar, the punctuation, the words used, how it flows etc. Be aware there are professional resume and selection criteria writers around these days and they can make pig poo look like strawberry jam.

The advertisement

Make sure you include your e-mail and telephone contact details, the selection criteria, a description of the company and the role responsibilities. If possible reference a web-site to refer to.

The resume

Unless it is a senior or highly technical role do not bother reading resumes that are over 4 pages in length or just read the first 4 pages to see if you want to bother with the rest. When you have lots of resumes to read you do not have time for war & peace. Hit the important bits with a highlighter pen for later reference.

The telephone screening interview

A telephone screening interview can eliminate the obviously unsuited with a minimum of drama to both parties.

The face to face interview

A lot of interviewers sit there dead-pan and uncommunicative and this is very awkward for those being interviewed, just relax and be yourself.

The following questions are often asked in interviews in the private sector.

“Why have you applied for this position? / What interests you about this position?”

“Where do you want to be in 5 years time?”

“Tell me about your ideal job”

“What makes for an ideal supervisor for you?”

“Tell me about yourself”.

“Why are you the best person for this job?” / “Why should we give you this job?”

“What are your strengths?”

“What are your weaknesses?”

“How would your friends describe you?”

“How would your boss describe you?”

“Describe what good communications means to you”

“What motivates you?”

“Why did you choose to start working in x field?”

“What is your most significant achievement in x field?”

“ Please give me an example of where you have gone the extra mile for a customer”

“ Please give me an example of how you prepare for a training session”

“Please give me an example of how you went about x”

“Can you describe your experience with regard to the development and review of X management system?”

“How did you contribute to accomplishing a team goal?”

“Describe how you found it difficult to build an effective working relationship with a customer / colleague?”

“Tell me what you have done to help a peer / team member to understand what knowledge / skills area to strengthen?”

“Provide an example of X documentation you have developed?”

“Tell us about a time when you faced conflicting priorities?”

“Describe the most difficult conflict you have been involved in or the toughest group you have had to work with?”

“Describe a time when you had to help a group of employees understand why a specific change process was necessary?”

Interviews in the public service tend to stick more to questions about the selection criteria. You should be seeking behavioural examples.

It is not a bad idea to have some idea of what is an appropriate answer to your questions but do not be too rigid in your expectations, you are dealing with human beings. Always a good idea to trial your questions before the interviews to see what sort of responses you get.

General

Do not ask intrusive, personal questions that infringe E.E.O. and anti-discrimination policies.

Be prepared to discuss the time frame for making a decision and appointment.

Give specific instructions on how to find the place where the interview will be conducted, advice on parking may be appropriate.

Indicate when feedback from the interview will be available.

Always give the applicant the opportunity to ask questions.

Make a determined effort to be on time, some applicants will simply leave if they are left waiting too long without intervention.

Have a greeter who knows the applicants name! Nothing creates a worse impression than “And what was your name again? And why are you here?”

If you cannot get the supervisor of the advertised position to the interview re-schedule it. It is vital the supervisor and the applicant have the chance to check each other out.

Remember things like the opportunities for work/ life balance are becoming increasingly important in many people's minds.

Best to do the interviews with a panel of 3 if you can.

Have a good system of recording what interviews you have booked. It does not create a good impression if someone turns up for an interview and you are busy doing something else.

Always confirm verbal arrangements with a letter or e-mail.

Be aware of the limitations of psychological appraisals.

The difficult area of money is often left to the last. The big organisations know if you pay peanuts you get monkeys. Know the salary range for the job and place yourself your offer appropriately. Be wary of those with too low a expectations.

Encourage people to bring along a number of good examples of their previous work.

After the interview sit down and try to identify what went well and what opportunities for improvement were presented. You may find it useful to write this down and review it prior to the next interview.

Do not take notice of written references, always ring the referee.

Some jobs will want to confirm the right to work in Australia and have a Police check conducted, advise people to bring along their drivers licence, preferably their pass-port if they have one, their Medicare card and their bank details.

A lot of the bigger companies ask for a pre-employment medical these days, be up-front about this so both parties do not waste time.

It is a fallacy that the best person for the job will always get the job, do not be too surprised if people do not work out despite your best efforts. A senior Human Resources Manager in the Qld. Government once said to me "We have very sophisticated recruitment & selection procedures, I cannot figure out how we end up with so many idiots working for us"

Do not make jobs out to be much better than they really are.

A lot of employers realise that an interview, in isolation, may not give a good result and will ask for a demonstration of skills-A welder may have to do a weld test, a safety officer may have to do a safety inspection, a training officer may have to present a small training session, a word processing person may have to demonstrate their skills on a computer and so on. For a management position they may have to complete a psychological appraisal. The use of authentic tests to check out employees claimed competencies is to be encouraged.

Some employers are disorganised at interview, applicants will be asking themselves if this is a reflection of how they generally do business.

You should arrive at the interview all keen and prepared, do not be surprised if some applicants are not keen or prepared. When you put in all the hard work you have to do to be prepared for an interview it will be a real downer if the applicant is not equally prepared.

I went to one interview with a Qld. government dept, was given 20 minutes to review and prepare my answers to the questions to be asked at interview, about 10 questions. Got to question 4 in the interview and it became obvious that the questions they had were different from the questions they had given me. They offered to re-schedule the interview but I figured if they were this disorganised it was not the place for me. Check the questions before you give them to people!

With large organisations who have many questions the interviewers will be so busy writing down your answers that there is little communications happening. This is very off-putting for the applicant so ease them into the situation.

Sometimes when you give feedback applicants will be astounded by your feedback and will wonder why you came to a particular conclusion, often it is because you did not ask the right questions. Sometimes interviewers ask broad general questions expecting specific responses, the fact that the applicant cannot read your minds is not their fault. Good employment interviewing requires detailed preparation by the interviewers.

Avoid the temptation to make the decision to hire or reject depending on the impression made in the first 5 minutes of the interview.

Relax and smile, try to project an image as a dedicated, high energy professional.

Like many things in life employment interviewing follows the 6 P rule (Prior Preparation Prevents Piss-Poor Performance).

Follow E.E.O. and anti-discrimination practices to the letter.

After one interview I helped with, a fellow interviewer said about an interviewee "He had enough metal in his head to make a Commodore" The focus should be on their competencies not what they look like.

If you are having regular turnover in a particular job investigate why and remedy the causes instead of simply filling vacancies all the time.

Rightly or wrongly we live in a world where recognised qualifications or "pieces of paper" are becoming increasingly important. Ask for certified copies of important qualifications.

Have a screening telephone interview and then one face to face interview for 3-5 selected applicants. If you cannot do it with this you are not organised . Personally if I see more than 2 interviews are required for a position I will not apply.

If people are going for a professional position, membership, or even better, advanced standing in professional associations may be looked on favourably by some employers.

A good general rule in life and particularly with job interviews is to avoid discussion on sex, religion and politics. If you do not know your audience discussion on these topics can be disastrous. Sometimes people will say something controversial to see how you react.

When I was a young bloke my Father said to me "If you are going to be a bulldust artist you have to have an exceptional memory and be very good at it, otherwise you will get found out."

A commitment to personal training and development will be appropriate with some employers for some jobs.

For some positions questions on leadership style could be appropriate.

Interviewers should be conservative in dress and appearance.

For professional jobs it always pays to check out the person on the internet. Facebook and Twitter may give you the unguarded person and you will see what papers they have presented at conferences and / or wrote.

Generally ask open questions and follow-up with probing questions if you do not get what you want.

Set the applicant at ease initially, this can be a very unnerving experience for some

Turn off your mobile and / or divert the desk phone.

Applicants tell me it is really common that interviewers ask questions that are indicative that they have not got a clue about what is in the applicants resume. In the break between interviewees have a quick revision on the next persons resume.

One of the most important things you are looking for throughout the entire interview is their interpersonal skills!

Remember that the interview is as much about you interviewing them, as them interviewing you. You have to be happy with a decision to employ them, equally they have to be happy with you as an employer.

As an interviewer you find it relatively easy to screen for experience and training, what is difficult and very important to screen for is "Fit" with the organisation.