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Staff Management Advice

Conducting an Effective Telephone Interview

Conducting a telephone interview remains a key step in the hiring process. Whether to gather basic information about a job applicant before calling him or her in for a face-to-face meeting or to have an in-depth conversation with a promising candidate who lives outside your immediate area, a well-conducted telephone interview can help you identify the best person for your company's opening.

Consider the following advice the next time you must conduct a telephone interview:

Preparing for the conversation

Before calling a candidate, be fully prepared for the interview. If the discussion has been scheduled in advance, make sure you have cleared your schedule from interruptions and distractions. Have your notes, the prospective employee's resume, pertinent questions and other necessary materials organized and in front of you. Don't attempt to "wing it." If the candidate senses you are not prepared or feels you are not serious about the interview, he or she may be hesitant to further pursue the opportunity.

Remember, just as you are trying to form an impression of the candidate, he or she is attempting to form an impression of you and your organization. One of your goals should be to convince the job seeker that your company is an ideal place to work. By coming across as organized and professional, you can be sure you've provided the person with a positive image of your firm.

When scheduling a call with a potential employee, be specific about the time and day. This will alleviate potential confusion, especially if you and the job seeker reside in different time zones. If the call is not scheduled, consider the best time to reach a candidate. If you call in the middle of the day, for example, the person may be at work and unavailable. Late afternoon or evening might be a better time to make contact.

Conducting the interview

It's important to remember the little things when you conduct a telephone interview. For instance, the conversation may be hampered by static or poor clarity if it is conducted over speaker phone or with a cell phone. If you are planning a videoconference, test the equipment ahead of time.

With the absence of body language and eye contact, you must speak clearly and try to avoid making comments that could be hard to interpret through voice alone. Also, listen carefully and show you are engaged; even brief remarks such as "Yes" or "I see" can let the person know you are paying close attention.

During a phone conversation, it can be difficult to tell whose turn it is to speak, so wait a beat or two before asking the next question or offering a comment. If you are conducting the interview with a candidate who lives overseas or via videoconference, there may be a lag between questions and responses, making it all the more important to exhibit patience.

Following up

With a tight employment market in many industries, especially the accounting and finance field, the best candidates are likely to have many job opportunities to choose from. So let the person know what the next step in the hiring process is and how long he or she should expect to wait before hearing from you again. If you leave a candidate in the dark, the person may decide your firm is not interested in hiring him or her and move on to a different opportunity.

If the phone interview has convinced you that the individual is not right for the role, let the person know and thank the candidate for his or her time. You want the person to leave with a good impression of your firm - after all, you never know when your paths might cross again or if you have professional contacts in common.

By following the steps above, you can be assured of a smooth and effective telephone interview that just may lead you to your next star performer.

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