



The Hiring Process

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Abstract. – Complete globalization of hiring practices at a given company or throughout the broad service industry may not be possible, but we present a basic framework for hiring that is widely applicable across most business conditions. Our goal is to outline a set of guidelines that define a scalable process whereby your due diligence of candidates is maximized. Once this process is in place, offices and/or divisions are at their discretion to tailor and modify to meet specific needs.

Candidate Sourcing

Effective recruitment starts with an effective job description. Writing job descriptions may be initially burdensome, but when done well they identify and prioritize the professional qualities required for success in a given position at a given organization. The Internet is filled with excellent resources for writing effective job descriptions.

After a suitable job description is prepared, employment ads based on the description can be distributed using a myriad of free or paid resources:

- Your company's job board or hotline
- General online job boards
- Online job boards geared toward the service-hospitality industry
- Industry periodicals
- Job boards at educational institutions, such as hotel management schools
- Contingency and retained search firms

General Process of Due Diligence

A three-phase process is recommended to conduct thorough hiring with due diligence:

- Conduct an **objective (standardized) assessment**
- Conduct a **structured behavioral interview or series of interviews**
- Conduct proper **reference checking**

You can read more about this triangulated approach at:

<http://www.2020skills.com/asts/Candidate%20due%20diligence.pdf>. However, a brief synopsis follows.

Step 1: Standardized Assessment

Despite clear benefits from legitimate testing, however, many companies today fail to conduct any type of assessment during the recruiting process. In doing so, these companies miss out on a valuable opportunity to gauge candidates' intellectual abilities and professional competencies. Assessment can also reveal insights into whether a particular person is likely to be a good "fit" with the company's culture. Best Practice assessments have the following characteristics:

- Meet legal requirements for reliability and validity by complying with professional testing standards grounded in "modern test theory" rather than "classical test theory."
- Specifically target the competencies of proven relevance to the service industry.
- Provide specific, actionable and defensible information to hiring professionals that facilitates due diligence (behavioral interviews and reference checking).

Astonishingly, most HR assessments on the market fail to meet these basic criteria. On the other hand, the most sophisticated assessments have great flexibility in their applications. For example, these assessments are invaluable in candidate screening and selection. They can help you determine initially which candidates to interview or they can help you prepare for interviewing and reference checking a short list of candidates that have been already selected by some other method. Moreover, the best assessments assist in the benchmarking of incumbents. In this way, employers have a built-in resource for use in employee training, coaching and general professional development.

Where applicable, a standardized assessment can be augmented with assessments of job-specific competencies such as technical aptitude, web-based research, ability to utilize necessary programs and writing and typing. There are companies that specialize in this type of testing, and commercial products are also available.

Step 2: Structured Behavioral Interview(s)

There is no universal process or definition for structured interviews, but the minimum characteristic of a structured interview involves asking candidates standard questions organized around a set of job requirements. When a structured approach is used, some findings suggest that the outcomes can be as powerful as such proven techniques as ability tests and assessment centers. Rather than depend on the results of one interview, forward-thinking organizations adopt a series of interviews as a better system of checks and balances. This ensures the candidate is right for you, as well as ensures that your organization is right for the candidate.

Telephone Screening: Compliance with minimum hiring criteria

An introductory, telephone interview can be brief and either free-form or structured in format. It is a time saving and cost effective means to accomplish several goals:

- Serving as an ice-breaker to begin to assess the professional demeanor and interpersonal skills of the candidate.
- Clarifying the job description and the company mission for the candidate and responding to the candidate's initial questions.
- Establishing whether the candidate meets the minimum hiring standards you have established, thereby being worthy to invite for an face-to-face interview.

First Behavioral Interview: Determination of future performance issues

An in-person behavioral interview provides an opportunity to explore the candidate's professional background, employment history and experience. Specifically, the goal is to determine how well a candidate's skills fit with the job requirements as documented in the job description. This is best done by asking open-ended, probing questions or posing open-ended challenges (e.g., "Please walk me through in detail a project you designed and launched") rather than simple "yes or no" questions (e.g., "Do you have any experience managing projects?").

Given the high energy culture and the need for service industry employees to be adaptable and quick thinking, organizations might consider adding "shock" questions in behavioral interviews, such as used at companies like MicroSoft and Apple Computer. These questions tap how candidates react to stress and approach problem solving. The actual answer is not as important as the thought process a person uses to reach an answer. Examples include:

- Imagine you are standing in front of a mirror, facing it. Raise your left hand. Raise your right hand. Look at your reflection. When you raise your left hand your reflection raises what appears to be his right hand. But when you tilt your head up, your reflection does too, and does not appear to tilt his/her head down. Why is it that the mirror appears to reverse left and right, but not up and down?
- What is your favorite web site? Why? Now improve it
- Brainstorm about a marketing plan for packaged ice to native Alaskans
- Take your best guess at how many gas stations there are in the U.S. Work your logic out loud
- Why are manhole covers round? (e.g., they can not be dropped into the hole by accident [a square cover, if placed at the proper angle, could] or 2. extremely heavy manhole covers can be easily rolled into position when round)

In addition, consider asking probing questions that will reveal the candidate's personality, temperament, energy level and interests, as these questions can help gauge the person's compatibility with your office/division culture. Examples of these types of questions include:

- Do you have any experience writing?
- Do you enjoy writing and creating a compelling written message?
- What is the most important attribute of a workplace that you are looking for?
- What was your least favorite class in college and why?
- If you have a deadline approaching, how do you deal with the task at hand? (map out a typical execution strategy)
- Do you find following pre-set guidelines challenging or do you like to chart your own course?
- Do you have any questions for me?

Second Behavioral Interview: Peer discussion

Where feasible, it is advised that candidates also meet face-to-face with at least one "peer" already working within the office or division environment. This would be conducted immediately before or after the main behavioral interview above. This allows the candidate to ask "real world" questions of an associate or someone already occupying a position paralleling that the candidate is seeking. As such, this part of the interview process can be more along the lines of a casual discussion or a simple question/answer session.

Involving employees in the recruitment process also encourages the staff to feel a sense of team building, company ownership, responsibility and respect. Moreover, existing employees can offer valuable feedback on a candidate's compatibility with the group's dynamics.

Follow-up Interview: Negotiation issues

Some companies invite short listed candidates back for a second or third behavioral interview in order to:

- Repeat the probing exercise with other key executives or even a panel or committee
- To clarify a candidate's qualifications and the company's expectations

However, it is recommended that a final interview be conducted via telephone or face-to-face in which specifics are discussed specifically relating to compensation, incentives and any additional

requirements. This final interview is generally conducted by the Managing Director and/or hiring decision-maker(s).

Step 3: Reference Checking

The U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board lists seven characteristics that set reference checking apart from casual conversation and make it a valid and useful component of the hiring process. Of course, this information is germane to most global businesses:

- *Job-related.* The focus of a reference checking discussion is on an applicant's ability to perform the job. *Based on observation of work.* The information provided by a reference must be based on experience observing or working with a job applicant.
- *Focused on specifics.* The discussion must be focused on particular job-related information common to all job applicants to ensure fairness. Skillful probing and comparing of information ensures that the process produces more than a superficial evaluation.
- *Feasible and efficient.* Because reference checking is focused, it can be conducted quickly. It provides a reasonable return for the small amount of time needed to do it well.
- *Assessments of the applicant.* The information obtained from reference checking may be used to determine whether an applicant will be offered a job. Reference checking procedures therefore are assessments subject to employment regulations, such as the *Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures* (www.UniformGuidelines.com).
- *Legally defensible.* It is necessary for reference checks to meet high professional standards, and reference checkers can meet these standards within the constraints of the law.
- *Part of the hiring process.* The purpose of the reference check is to inform a decision about hiring. The results need to complement other assessments used in that process.

Given the state-of-the-art practice and potential of reference checking as an assessment, the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board further recommends compliance with five steps:

- Organizations should require applicants to provide appropriate professional references and make applicants responsible for ensuring that they can be contacted.
- Organizations should develop and follow a thoughtful reference checking strategy that is an integral part of the hiring process.
- Organizations should use a consistent reference checking process that treats all applicants fairly, obtains valid and useful information, and follows legal guidelines.

- Organizations should increase standardization of and training in effective reference checking techniques.
- Organizations should conduct proper reference checks for each hiring decision.

Resources and Further Reading

Preparing Job Descriptions

Lindenberger, J. (n.d.). How to write a job description.

<http://www.businessknowhow.com/manage/jobdesc.htm>.

UCLA Letters and Science Personnel. (n.d.). Guide to writing job descriptions (based on Campus Human Resources' *Job guide handbook*).

<http://www.college.ucla.edu/Personnel/writing/jdescrip.htm>.

Standardized Assessment

Houran, J., & Lange, R. (2006). State-of-the-art measurement in human resource assessment.

HVS Journal. 28th Annual NYU Hospitality Industry Investment Conference, New York, NY, June 4-6. <http://www.2020skills.com/asts/State-of-the-art%20in%20HR%20assessment.pdf>.

Other suggested reading at: <http://www.2020skills.com/About/RecentArticles/>.

Behavioral Interviewing

Fear, R. A., & Chiron, R. J. (2002). *The evaluation interview: how to probe deeply, get candid answers, and predict the performance of job candidates*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Turner, T. S. (2004). *Behavioral interviewing guide: a practical, structured approach for conducting effective selection interviews*. Victoria, B.C., Canada: Trafford Publishing.

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Andler, E. C., & Herbst, D. (2003). *The complete reference checking handbook* (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: American Management Association.

Barada, P. W., & McLaughlin, J. M. (2004). *Reference checking for everyone*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

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