

Client interview tips:

Allocate some time for planning an interview. Choosing the right new hire into your team is big decision and one which can have an extremely positive affect on the entire team dynamic and productivity. Getting it wrong can cost a lot of time, effort, and lost productivity so it's worth investing a little time up front to ensure a positive outcome.

We would strongly encourage re-reading each applicant's resume and perhaps making some annotations to remind you what areas you specifically want to query through the interview. Also re-read the job description so you are comfortable with the criteria applicants have been asked to respond to.

Draw up a list of criteria you want from a successful applicant and agree the priorities you have with the other interviewers (if relevant) ahead of the interviewing process. Knowing what you want and expect from a successful applicant ahead of time will help you judge applicants against each other in a more impartial, unclouded way after the first round of interviews are finalized. If you don't have your collective priorities defined ahead of the process, judging who will be the best fit will become very hard often based on less than rational decision making.

Bearing the above in mind, perhaps ***draw up some key questions that you feel need to be addressed in the interview*** – obviously, as with any conversation format, interviews can sometimes get off track but if you have at least a set of bullet points which you need to address, you should find it easy to steer the conversation back on message.

Provide a context/structure for the interview:

Interview styles will always differ and it is certainly not our place to tell you how formal or informal you want to make the set-up, however one thing which our experience has taught us down the years is that providing a structure to an interview – very much as with any meeting – from the beginning, will generally make the time spent in that meeting far more productive.

You can start by thanking the applicant for attending, introducing everyone present, and outlining the format the interview will take. Having a structure to work within generally puts an applicant at ease in terms of knowing what parameters the interview will take and should help you solicit better information from them than by simply launching into a conversation. A typical interview structure might run:

1. Brief introduction by interviewer to the company, role and themselves
2. Interviewee runs the interviewer through his/her career path to date
3. More specific drilling into individual projects and technical/functional expertise
4. Exploration as to why the applicant has shown interest in the role and why they believe they are a good fit for the position.
5. Any questions from the applicant in relation to the position, etc.

Understanding the difference between direct and indirect questions and using behavioural interviewing techniques.

Broadly speaking there are two types of question you might look to ask in an interview; namely direct and indirect questions; where indirect questions are often referred to within the industry as “competency” or “situational” based interviewing. A direct question might be something as simple as “are you a good team player” or “what do you believe are the core competencies needed to work successfully in a team”. In theory these are fairly easy questions to answer in a manner that satisfies what the interviewer effectively wants to hear – “yes, I am a good team player” and “I think we all need to be able to listen to each other and co-operate”.

Competency or situational based interviewing is designed to get around people giving these comfortable answers by asking for real life examples of where candidates can demonstrate these skills in the work place. Typically the questions will start with “tell me about a time when...” and go into some depth in soliciting how the individual has worked/behaved under a particular circumstance. It is the difference between getting a candidate to **demonstrate** rather than simply **state** their ability.

Skilled interviewers will often start with direct questions and then back them up with some situational concepts to reinforce their original impressions or try to delve deeper into how people work under specific circumstance. So if a candidate answers a direct question such as “what skills do you believe a good consultant needs to show in a pressured project situation?” with “tact, resourcefulness, and time management”, later in the interview you might want to back this up with; “tell me about the hardest project you ever worked on and the stakeholders it involved interacting with” or “tell me about a time there was some conflict on a project and how you went about resolving it”. The answers you get back should help to confirm your impressions with a degree of tangible detail.

As an interviewer it can take some practice in ***identifying when you are hearing a true behavioural response***. However if the candidate is using generic terms like “usually”, “we”, “always”, and “sometimes”, you will probably have to keep delving until you hit something more concrete. If you are hearing specific examples that include a situation or task and the actions/outcomes involved, there is every chance you are on the right track. Further examples of direct and indirect questions can be found in the tool kit section of the Acuity Search website.

Don't forget to sell your organisation/opportunity

We often forget an interview process works both ways. In today's ever more competitive and often candidate driven SAP market, both employer and potential employee are trying to assess each other to determine whether there is a *fit*. While we wouldn't encourage pandering to a potential hire or creating the impression the job is going to be a bed of roses when that isn't the case, it is certainly important to leave a clear impression as to what the attractions of both the role and organisation are. ***Think about what made you join the company and the benefits of working where you do*** – not just from a monetary perspective but also in terms of the team, career opportunities, and work culture. These are all things which should be conveyed to

potential hires – even if it is clear that some may not be the right person for the job - as over time it will help to build the brand of your team/company as an extremely desirable to work place and make hiring stand out talent easier both now and in future.