

How to Assess Your Candidates

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Have you ever felt after interviewing several different candidates that you haven't got a single unique answer all day long? Well, then you know what a challenging if not impossible mission is to find the best candidate nowadays.

Why, oh why?

There are several different free guides helping job seekers to prepare for an upcoming interview and everyone knows or thinks they know the 'good' answers to the common interview questions. Don't misunderstand me. It is good news if your applicants took the time to prepare properly to the interview. It means they do want to become a member of your team. But it makes your job so much more difficult. It is no longer enough to read the resumes and ask the standard questions. You will have to use different techniques to assess the applicants' skills and personal attributes. It is even more essential now, that the rate of unemployment in the eurozone hit record heights in the first months of 2013. Yes, the figures are somewhat lower in the UK (7,7%) but it still means that there are many talented individuals looking for work. All you have to do is to recognize talent when you see it.

What to assess?

During an interview you usually find out where the applicants studied and worked. They will also talk about their strengths and weaknesses. But to prevent making a purely subjective impression about them, you should focus on assessing specific skills that are vital to your job vacancy.

Skills and abilities that are usually worth assessing:

- decision making
- organizational skills
- problem-solving skills
- strategic thinking
- communication skills
- creativity
- leadership
- self-management
- ability to co-operate (teamwork)
- leadership skills
- reasoning ability

Sounds good, doesn't it? Now, let's skip to the 'how to do' part.

1. Shock with your questions.

You cannot exclude the tried and tested questions all-together. You probably want to know what were the applicants' previous jobs. But make sure to add also some odd questions such as:

If you were an animal, what would you be and why?

If money weren't a problem and you'd had no obligations what would you do with your life?

How would you rate me as an interviewer?

It gives your candidates the opportunity to demonstrate how creative they are and show their personality.

Do you think it's a bit off-topic? Well, that's the idea. Shock them and see how they react. Are they innovative? Do they handle unexpected situation with poise or with humor? You are about to find out and one more thing: even the greatest companies apply this strategy. My favorite shocking question is reported to be asked by Google: 'How many cows are in Canada?'

2. Ask them to explain how they would handle different situations.

If you just ask what their strengths and weaknesses are you will get only a list of skills that are either true or a bit exaggerated. Of course, you can ask for references but why trust others' judgments if you can see it for yourself. How to do it? First of all, select the skills that are vital to the job itself. Then, ask them to describe a situation when they actually used these particular skills. For instance: 'Describe a situation when you didn't agree with the suggested course of action. What did you do and what was the outcome?' The best part is, that all these questions depend on the skills and abilities needed to your vacancy and it is hard to prepare for such questions.

3. Make them think and work

You can make your candidates face real or hypothetical situations and ask them how would they handle the project or task itself. Ask them to walk you through their thinking and back up their decisions with reasons. For instance, you could ask candidates for a sales manager position to describe how would they find new clients.

Or you can go a step further and ask them to perform a task: write an article, find an error in a software, make a call, etc. Again, it all depends on what will be the employee's duties.

Of course, how far you go with these tasks and hypothetical situations depends on your goals. Check out how Heineken assessed their candidates:

Other somewhat unusual interview techniques to consider:

- **presentation exercise** – ask the applicants to make short presentations to assess their communication skills and strategical thinking
- **team work** – ask them to work with your employees to see how they co-operate
- **group interview** – call more than one applicant to the interview. It makes easier to compare the candidates

Naturally, a lot depends on the actual duties the successful candidate will have to perform, but mixing the traditional questions with one or more of these techniques will make the assessment not only more productive but also more interactive and enjoyable. Good luck with your search!