



The Interviewing Process
Finding the Right Person for your Practice ©

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Without a well-trained, highly motivated staff, it will be difficult for any Practice to achieve its strategic vision and performance goals. At some point, every Practice will need to hire someone and that decision requires a well-honed Talent Acquisition strategy. One of the key elements involved in that strategic plan is the Interviewing Process, especially critical since employees are our most valuable assets and we want to hire an ‘A’ player every time.

The interview provides the perfect opportunity to identify the applicant(s) best qualified and best suited for the Practice. If conducted properly, you gain valuable insight on how an applicant will perform the essential functions of the job and whether he/she will fit into the culture of the Practice. However, if handled incorrectly or unprofessionally, you risk alienating a candidate to whom you may want to issue a job offer.

As part of the interviewing process, an applicant checklist should be developed to ensure all necessary information and documents have been obtained and distributed to persons involved in the interview and selection process (e.g. application, resume, etc...). Speaking of which, who should be on your interview team? Depending upon the size of your practice and the functional hierarchy, the team typically should include your practice manager, an individual who is currently performing the function that is being recruited (but not just anyone – make it your ‘A’ player for that job function), department manager/supervisor to whom the new individual will report to and you, the practice owner for the final candidates (or however you wish to be involved).

If the team is new to interviewing, then ensure that they are trained on the process, role play some scenarios to give the new interviewer feedback and practical experience in addition to creating a list of common questions to be asked of all applicants for the same job. While the need to ask additional specific questions of each applicant will certainly arise during the interview, having a core group of questions will ensure every interviewer receives a common subset of information about each applicant. Be sure all team members know what skills, knowledge and competencies they will be looking for from each candidate. To ensure the interview process runs smoothly, it is advisable to assign responsibility to one person to act as “gatekeeper” of the interviewing process. This person will make sure each interviewer has been provided with all of the information and tools needed to conduct a thorough and legal interview, will also coordinate all interview arrangements and schedules as well as potentially being designated to conduct preliminary phone interviews to determine which candidates are invited

for an in-person interview and to complete an application of employment before coming in. A lot of preliminary planning and work has to be done before you even see the first candidate.

As you begin the actual interview, be sure to introduce yourself and your position, briefly discuss the Practice and its attributes – you are promoting your Practice’s brand as ‘Employer of Choice’. Ask broad, open-ended questions that require an applicant to process what is being asked and develop an appropriate response not a practiced, canned answer. Questions should be job-related, be asked in a direct, clear manner, and pertain to the applicant’s education/training, work history, attitudes towards work, people and working conditions. To obtain information about work history, questions might center on specific duties and responsibilities of current/past jobs and what has he/she done to prepare for assuming greater responsibilities. Additional behavioral interviewing questions eliciting responses regarding goals, motivation, and responses to specific real situations that have occurred involving the applicant are valuable in determining if your Practice’s culture and organization structure offer opportunities that match those of the applicant. To learn more about attitude and motivation, you might ask about what aspects of prior jobs the applicant felt were particularly rewarding and what serves to motivate him/her. Regarding working relationships, ask an applicant to describe the working environment, handling conflict resolution and tell you about his/her prior supervisors. This supports the psychological premise that past behavior predicts future performance, good or bad and you get to determine if that is the attitude and competency you wish to have within your Practice.

There are many ways of ascertaining information from an applicant. However, asking the wrong questions, or asking the right questions in the wrong manner, can result in serious legal problems for a Practice. Numerous laws and regulations have been passed that provide extensive protection against discrimination in employment. These laws have been created to ensure an applicant is not discriminated against on the basis of age, gender, marital status, religion, or sexual orientation or any other protected class. Thus, it behooves each Practice to ensure all of its employees involved in the interview process know what can and cannot be asked during an interview. The key to understanding unlawful inquiries is to ask only questions that will provide information about the person’s ability to do the job, with or without a reasonable accommodation.

Effective interviewers actively listen much more than they talk. Remember, your goal in the interview is to learn as much as you can about the applicant. Be sure to control the pace and flow of the conversation. Once the interview is completed, be sure to thank the applicant for coming to the interview and explain where you are in the interviewing process. As close to completing each in-person interview, your team should huddle to discuss the candidate and evaluate him/her against set criteria on a scorecard. Remember, this is all about business, so no ‘editorial’ notes on the candidate’s resume, within your notes or on the scorecards.

You have narrowed down the field of candidates and wish to have other members of the Practice meet the individual - here are guidelines on how to proceed with your interviewing process:

- **Shadowing Interviews** are done after you have interviewed your top candidates and wish to pursue how they might embrace your Practice’s culture. An unpaid shadowing interview is a one-time 6-8 hours observation/asks questions opportunity for those

candidates whom you wish to pursue for the position. This individual will need to sign a release and waiver of legal liability agreement, confidentiality agreement and submit proof of health insurance. They are not to help clean, stock or do anything that could be perceived as work. OR

- **Working Interviews** are done after you have interviewed your top candidates and wish to pursue how they might embrace your Practice's culture. A paid working interview is a one-time 6-8 hours work/learn session for those candidates whom you wish to pursue for the position. This individual will need to sign a release and waiver of legal liability agreement, confidentiality agreement, submit proof of health insurance and complete the necessary paperwork in order to be paid for the hours worked (usually not through payroll processing but via a W9/1099). This individual is not to be left alone but they can work according to his/her skill level and experience. [To learn about related topic of paying volunteers see VBA newsletter archive June 2011. www.veterinarybusinessadvisors.com]

You have sifted through dozens of resumes, read through countless cover letters, conducted several interviews for numerous applicants, and analyzed every candidate six ways from Sunday. Now that you have completed the interview process and determined whom you want to select, it is time to decide how to extend the job offer, which is an entire other process for discussion at another time.

To close out the interview process, don't forget to send short, simple thank you notes or emails to those candidates not selected either for an in-person interview or for not getting the position. And for the candidates that were not the first choice but close seconds or thirds, start building your candidate portfolio to keep warm because you never know when you will have to hire your next employee for that same function. A thorough interviewing process is a strategic exercise to ensure success in hiring and retaining that right person for your Practice.