Conducting a Successful Interview Process

Doing a good job of conducting employment interviews and evaluating applicants takes more time than having an informal conversation. It requires training in the skills, techniques and requirements of successful interviewing.

The following information is designed to help you develop your interviewing skills, learn what you legally can and cannot ask, and prepare you for the employee interview situation. It will also provide a quick reference tool to keep at your desk. In order for you to achieve the best results in hiring good employees, you should take advantage of every opportunity to participate in training programs that will further develop your interviewing skills. [For further resources, see http://www.umich.edu/~hrd/].

Preparing for the Interview

- Schedule a time and location for the interview
- Remove any desk or physical barrier between you and the candidate
- Make sure you have read all paperwork on the applicant
- Review the current position description and update it if necessary
- Make a list of interview questions that will help determine the information you need in order to make a decision (See 28 Tips for Selection Interviewing)

Setting the Tone

- Help make the applicant feel at ease
- Establish rapport with a friendly attitude
- Make the applicant aware of what you do and how your position relates to the position for which s/he is interviewing
- Let the applicant know about the organization

During the interview, the applicant's answers to your questions are a valuable source of information. You should ask open-ended questions so that the answers given will help determine the suitability of the applicant to a particular position.

Team Interviewing

In addition, it is a good practice to have more than one person interview the applicant. This help to better evaluate individuals and may, together with a consistent interview format, help prevent charges of discrimination. See Advantages of Involving Team in Employment Process and Prerequisites for Success in the Team Interviewing Process, and Assessing the Diversity of the Applicant Pool.

Avoiding Discrimination

University policy and federal and state law prohibit discrimination against applicants on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, disability, religion, height, weight, or veteran status. Any question you ask must be legal. Your questions should be designed to help you establish the applicant's qualifications for the position. See Chart of Legal Questions.

Interview questions should adhere closely to the position requirements. There are some questions that are unlawful and should not be asked under any circumstances, such as those listed on the Chart of Legal Questions.

Interviewing Applicants with Disabilities

When inviting a candidate to an interview, it is important to mention that the University offers reasonable accommodations to persons with disabilities. The following language may be used:

> The University provides reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities, both in the interview process and for its faculty, students and staff. Should you need an accommodation, please let us know at your earliest convenience so that we may make arrangements in advance of your interview. Please contact ___________________ at [phone number and TTY, if available] or [email address] with any request you may have.

If a candidate requests an accommodation and the department does not know how to meet the accommodation request or has concerns about the request, please contact the Office of Institutional Equity at 734/763-0235 (v) or 734/647-1388 (TTY), or Institutional.Equity@umich.edu for assistance.

Sign language interpreters may be arranged by contacting Deaf C.A.N., (248) 332-3331, www.deafcan.org/ and real time captioning may be arranged by contacting, Screenline, L.L.C. (734) 761-6686 (v and TTY) or sdeerhall@msn.com. Interpreters may also be available through the Michigan Online Interpreter System, www6.dleg.state.mi.us/interpreter/.

For questions regarding sign language interpreters or how to use an interpreting service, please contact the Coordinator for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students at the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities, (734) 763-3000, or the Office of Institutional Equity at 734/763-0235 (v) or 734/647-1388 (TTY), or Institutional.Equity@umich.edu for assistance.

Note that it is not appropriate to determine that a candidate cannot perform the essential functions of the job based on an accommodation the candidate requests during the interview process. The candidate should be given the opportunity to discuss how s/he will perform the essential job functions, just as other candidates are provided that opportunity.

In addition to offering candidates the opportunity to request reasonable accommodations, it is wise to conduct interviews in accessible locations. If you do not know whether the location where you will be conducting your interview is accessible, please contact the Office of Institutional Equity at 734/763-0235 (v) or 734/647-1388 (TTY), or Institutional.Equity@umich.edu for assistance.

Using Effective Interview Questions

It is a good idea to have a fairly structured format for interviewing applicants. This helps to ensure consistency and comparability of your information on each candidate. You need to use legal (link to Chart of Legal Questions, open-ended questions developed from your selection criteria to encourage applicants to supply more in-depth information. You should apply a uniform method of questioning to all applicants.

Do not try to fill silences during the interview. It is important to allow silence for thinking and reflection by the applicant. In addition, use a consistent interviewing format. This helps you to more accurately evaluate individuals and guard against discrimination and unfair hiring practices (See 28 Tips for Selection Interviewing.)

Closing the Interview

- When ending the interview, give the applicant a chance to add anything else he or she thinks may be important for you to know in making your decision.
- Give the applicant an opportunity to ask you any further questions about your organization or the position.
- Make the applicant aware of the next steps:
  - Will the applicant be asked to attend additional interviews, etc.
  - Who will contact the applicant and in what time frame
- Thank the applicant for his or her time.

Documenting the Interview

It is a good idea to take some notes during the interview. Notes can be helpful in reflecting on individual applicants and in discussions with others who interviewed the same persons.

Notes should be factual in nature and concern only those areas the University is lawfully allowed to consider. Bear in mind that interview notes and search documents may be subjected to scrutiny after the fact (e.g., during a federal audit, litigation or public records request) and the meaning of each word may be questioned. Jokes or sarcastic comments, or information regarding the attributes of a candidate that are not job-related, may create an appearance of bias that is not intended and may be difficult for the University to explain if the documents must be disclosed. Notes and documents that focus on required skills and relevant applicant responses will be more easily explained by the University. All interview notes and search documents, whether from phone interviews or on-campus interviews, should be maintained as part of the search record (see Records Retention, page 26).

Hiring officials or search committees who would like more information regarding access to search records through public record requests should contact the University's Freedom of Information Office at (734) 763-5082. Questions regarding access to search records via litigation, audit, subpoena or other mechanism should contact the Office of the General Counsel at (734) 763-0304.

Making Reference Checks

The University has an obligation not to negligently hire. It is essential that we do not hire people who might endanger our employees or our students. Because people sometimes falsify their credentials and backgrounds, especially in times of economic hardship, it is important to check references. In addition, people sometimes interview well but have a record of not actually performing as well as they have led you to believe. Therefore, it is important to check out any areas in which you have doubts or uncertainties. Often reference checks will dispel these or give you information that will help you be a more effective supervisor of the new employee. Reference checks are also a form of insurance. The hour or two it takes to conduct a reference check is far less time than the time it will take to deal with performance, attitude or behavior problems.

If more than one finalist's references are checked, it is important to once again ensure that candidates are treated consistently. For example, if references are checked via telephone for one candidate, the same should be done for other candidates to the extent it is reasonable.

The hiring manager/search committee should develop a list of specific job-related questions that will be asked of references before contacting them. Note that references cannot be asked questions that the University is prohibited from asking candidates, such as questions about disabilities, religion or children (see "Chart of Legal Questions")

If the selected candidate happens to be a university employee, ask your Human Resources Representative to pull the individual's personnel file for review.

For external candidates, it is usually best to rely on the Human Resources Service Center of the former employers only for simple “name, rank and serial number” information.

To get more detailed information about external candidates, you usually need to call:

- Former supervisors,
- People whose names the candidate has given as work references to establish the working relationship
- People you know personally who have worked with the candidate
- People recommended by any of the above who are said to know the candidate’s work.

What to Do:

- Identify yourself and your organization
- Ask if the time is appropriate for a reference check
- Say the candidate has applied for a position within your department
- Gain the confidence of the reference person
- Describe the position
- Ask straightforward questions
- Solicit opinions on the candidate’s ability to perform the new position
- Ask for additional sources of referral
- Thank them for their time

If a reference on a candidate is problematic, you should check with other sources to confirm. You want to ensure that one person is not purposely and perhaps falsely giving a poor reference.