

HIRING GEEKS THAT FIT



by Johanna Rothman

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Johanna Rothman

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9 Plan and Conduct the In-Person Interview

Interviewer: “Have a seat on this step while I take a few seconds to look at your résumé.”

Job Applicant: “Are we meeting in this stairwell for the interview?”

Interviewer: “Well, yes. No one booked a room for us to talk in but we’ll have lots of privacy here because no one ever takes the stairs.”

Don’t let this happen to you when it’s time to conduct the interview. Interviews serve two distinct purposes: First, they help you discover how the candidate has worked in the past so you can determine whether he or she is suitable to fill your open position. Second, they help you sell the candidate on your company. Even if you don’t hire the candidate, he or she may refer others to you, so it is important that you make the experience as positive and professional as possible.



Remember that the in-person interview is as much about you and your organization as it is about the candidate. Use the interview *experience* to sell the company. You don’t have to spend any precious interview time selling the company.

Prepare just a little to have a seamless interview experience for everyone. Choose an interview team; plan who will ask the candidate which questions about skills, preferences, and qualities; and create and distribute an interview package so that all interviewers know what to expect. If you take the time to create an interviewing environment that reflects how you work—that is, one that is true to the corporate culture—you will benefit from having an interview process that works for you.

9.1 Select an interview team

I have a very specific reason for selecting each person on the interview team for a candidate—I want to gain insight into how the candidate will work with these people. I begin by creating an interview team composed of the people who will work with the candidate if he or she is hired. If the candidate could work with more than eight people if hired, I select from those people—up to a maximum of eight—to serve as members of my interview team, but I do not use all of them for the first-round interview.

Ideally, everyone you select for the interview team will be available to interview all the candidates. You want consistency and openness for your will be comparing their reactions to candidates after the interview. Discuss the issues of trust with interview-team members. If they don't trust each other—and you—hiring anyone is going to be an issue. Clear that up first.

I prefer to limit a first-round, in-person interview team to four or five people, plus the hiring manager. I do this is to limit the interview time to one-half a day assessing a candidate. If we

decide not to proceed with the candidate, we haven't wasted much of any person's time—including the candidate's.

For the second round of interviews, I again use people from the department, project, or geographic area where the candidate will be assigned. For example, if whoever fills the job opening will work with more than eight people, I choose another four or five representatives from the people with whom the candidate will work. If you have a large team, project, or department, plan on a second round of interviews to ensure that your candidate will fit.

I select a sampling of people with whom the candidate will work. My goal is to select up to a total of ten other people to conduct the first and second rounds of interviews.

If you're in a highly competitive job market and plan on making a same-day offer, you'll need to assign more interview participants to the first round than the four or five I generally recommend. This is because you will need more interviewers to gather enough information about the candidate that day. Conversely, if the candidate makes it to the first-round interview session or somehow slips through to the second round, but is obviously unsuited for the position, plan in advance with the full team how the session can be interrupted mid-session and canceled—and plan who can cancel.

Choose whether and how to use your HR representative on the interview team. If the representative is not capable of participating in an interview designed to assess the candidate's preferences, qualities, and skills, then I invite the HR rep only to the second round.

When planning the makeup of my interview team, I look for

people who already know how to interview. If I'm working with a department or in an organization where people have not yet learned how to ask behavior-description questions, I set aside a half-day before the first interview to teach potential interviewers how to ask questions, and follow up with those interviewers just before the candidate arrives.

I prefer to keep the selection of interviewers consistent when interviewing for the same position, so that I have a consistent set of questions, biases, and approaches to candidates. You don't want to be in the position of bringing an interviewer in at the last minute and having the interviewer say, "Well, I think this person is a good candidate, but of course, I didn't get to interview the others, so I can't compare candidates."

9.2 Prepare the interview team

Your interview team needs to prepare before the interview, and preparation takes time. If you repeatedly use the same people for interviewing, be considerate of the time required of those people both to get prepared and to interview. Time taken away from project work is costly, but not taking the time needed for preparation is worse, because the interviewer wastes interview time by not being prepared.

Here's how I approach the problem: First, I send an e-mail requesting that my interviewers set aside specific times in their calendars for interviewing.

Next, I talk to interview-team members and verify that all members of the team share the same goals for hiring for this job. I hold a quick team meeting to focus people on the similarities