

Effective Telephone Interviewing

Telephone interviews are a cost effective way of ascertaining a person's suitability for a more in-depth, face-to-face interview. They can also provide a valuable benchmark for comparisons at a later date.

You can sometimes find out quite a lot more than you expect to when the call and questions are unexpected. Your candidate's phone manner and behaviour may not be what you would have expected. Although, in some circumstances, there may be a good explanation, it could be that this is not a one-off. This may be their usual manner when they're not putting on their best behaviour at an interview.

Telephone interviews are also a great opportunity to ask questions before your candidate has done too much interview preparation or got too nervous. You may get information that is immediately helpful or to consider further along the interview process.

The opportunity to get a valuable insight can work both ways, so always expect your candidate to be evaluating whether you and your role sound appealing at the same time. Needless to say, it is just as important to prepare well for a phone interview, as you would for a face-to-face interview.

Preparation

In preparation it's advisable to:

- Screen CVs and make notes on areas you would like to clarify, e.g., a gap in work history, depth of experience in areas of interest, health and wellbeing, salary, etc.
- Work your way through the CV noting down the questions you want to ask next to the relevant section on the CV – this will help you remember specific details at a later date.
- The questions may include finding out about the company and the people they have worked with, the role, what your candidate liked and didn't like, skills and training.
- It's important to find out if they have had any previous health issues and why they left previous roles, so make a note that you need to cover these things, as it can be hard to remember when you have so many points to cover. The answers will provide you with a starting point to compare with the answers from the first and second interview, and ensure the story is consistent.

- Check they are able to speak openly when you ring so that you can make the most of the call. It's a good idea to give them an indication of how long you expect to talk to them. Candidates will usually prefer to call you back or be contacted at a different time if they are at work. It might be a warning bell if they are not at all concerned about a 30 minute call.
- Ensure you are comfortable and well set up to be able to talk and take notes while you are speaking to the candidate (a headset is great for this if you have access to one).

Phone Interview

As with any interview, it's a good idea to spend a short time making the candidate feel comfortable. You can start by thanking them for their time, and explaining who you are, and which role you are calling them about. They may have applied for 20 jobs, so need some information to allow them to distinguish which one you represent.

Key points

- It's best not to talk about your role in any detail prior to asking them all about themselves. Most people are aware it is better to listen and then adopt the information you have given them in their answers if they want to get an interview.
- Open up the dialogue by asking them what appealed to them about the ad or made them apply for the role?
- Ask them why they are looking to move now, and what their ideal role would look like if they could have anything they wanted?
- It's good to get them to run through all or a portion of their career history. What attracted them to previous roles, what they liked best, which aspects they disliked, and why they moved on?
- As you ask your prepared questions, make notes on their answers. At this stage you don't need to make judgements, simply record information for later assessment. If you try to judge at this point, you might find you miss important information or make a decision about something before you have sufficient information.
- Ask them their current salary rather than their salary expectation for a good benchmark and ascertain whether this includes bonus or other benefits. If their current salary is far greater than that on offer with your role, it allows the opportunity to discuss this further and work out if it will be a roadblock to their continuing with the process, if they are otherwise suitable.

- For some roles, it's advisable to enquire where the candidate lives. If they live a long distance from your location, you can discuss the travel.
- For some roles, you might need to ask about immigration status and whether or not they have access to a car if this is required for the role.
- Ask them whether they are applying for other roles, and whether they have had any interviews. If you really like a candidate, and you know they are interviewing actively, you have the option of speeding up the process to avoid losing them, and/or asking them if they can wait to have your interviews before making a decision.
- End the call by thanking them for their time, and reiterating when you will be back in touch to let them know how the process is going. If you have phone screened somebody, it's courteous to call them back to update them, even if they are not successful in going to the next stage. However, this is not always possible/practical. For your and your company's reputation, a polite acknowledgment that the process is at an end is really important.

Selection process

After screening each candidate, it's advisable to make any additional notes straight away while they are fresh in your mind.

Use your job description as a base document to help you consider the priorities for the role as opposed to the 'nice to have' attributes.

One way to quickly get down your thoughts is to write a pros and cons list. If your list of pros is easier to write and lengthier, it's usually a good indicator they are suitable for a further interview.

Another way of selecting is to rate each candidate on a scale of 1 – 5 against the competencies you have already identified as being important for the role. It's best to prioritise the competencies in order to understand exactly what you need for the candidate to be a success.

If your process gets delayed for any reason, it's very important to keep in contact with the candidates so that they know what is happening. You don't want them to become disillusioned and accept another role or pull out. After a phone interview, or booking interviews, you should follow up with email confirmation to make sure there is no confusion when and where a person is expected. A map, information on parking, and website details are also welcome additions.

If you are struggling to find someone to fill the role, or rushing because you are short staffed, be very careful not to ignore warning bells, or potential issues, in an attempt to get

the role filled. If you are concerned you might rush things, or a colleague is rushing, make sure you rely on the documented information taken at each interview, and a good recruitment process, to help you take the time to make an informed and measured decision, even to first interview.