Effective Candidate Selection Processes to Identify and Secure High-Caliber Talent

Honer & Associates

Hiring top-caliber IT candidates dictates that organizations must structure, plan and execute efficient candidate selection (interviewing) processes.

Conducting well-planned and efficient interviews becomes crucial when acquiring A-level talent. Unplanned interviews allowed to progress "organically" will deliver sub-par results. However, for many companies, this represents the norm, with no real proactive planning or strategy implemented through the entire interview process. A lengthy and onerous interview process turns candidates off and leaves job offers lying on the table.

When processes and decisions drag, unnecessary objections come up – causing less interest. Other companies show interest, irritation levels increase, stress builds, and situations change.

An interview process that occurs on a planned, concise schedule allows the candidate's enthusiasm level to build with each completed step. The candidate's treatment during the selection process ties directly with their intuitive feelings about the role and company. Candidates feel valued for their time, talent, and possible contribution. If a candidate leaves the interview with a good, intuitive feel, there is an excellent chance they will accept a realistic offer.

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Removing all traces of subjectivity from the process, thoroughly training interviewers, requiring interviewers to provide data-based feedback, and establishing clear, finite interview "stages" creates a planned, concise selection process.

Remove subjectivity

The purpose of an interview is not to hire someone on the spot, but more importantly, to gain actionable data. The right questions need to be planned and asked so hiring decisions are not based on first impressions. First impressions are about subjectivity – instinct or a "feeling in the gut" – and hiring decisions must eliminate subjectivity. Suspend first impressions and focus on gathering data to be used later when comparing candidates during the feedback stage.

Train everyone involved

Interviews must be conducted by a trained interviewer and surprisingly, this happens too often. Many times, management "assumes" everyone involved knows how to conduct an interview, but in reality, few have received formal training.

Untrained interviewers mimic other's styles, do a Google search for the most frequently used questions,

or simply "wing" it. During the feedback stage, they report their opinions, providing limited facts, little experiential data, and no indicators of patterns of performance. They provide information that is lacking any usable content.

Effective interview questions focus on extracting data dealing with candidate performance, experience, competencies, motivations and track record. However, simply asking those questions is not enough. Interview training teaches interviewers the types of questions to ask, how to ask them, ways to listen to answers, (and most importantly) how to formulate appropriate follow-up questions designed to gather more information. In other words, interview training teaches people to effectively "peel the onion."

Require Interviewer Feedback Based on Data

All interviewers must rank candidate interviews, calibrate those rankings, and provide detailed feedback. This needs to happen immediately following the interview(s), and must include ***data-based*** insights.

Many times, untrained interviewers provide feedback justified by first impressions, intuition, and opinions of the candidate, providing little data to justify their feedback. It is up to the person running the calibration session to disregard opinions / feedback without data.

When feedback is provided with supportive data, decisions become easier. Especially in an interview process where several interviews are conducted by different interviewers, and one opinion can derail the entire process.

The interviewer needs to be prepared, and the process may be made more efficient by having a knowledgeable employee discuss the company and the employer brand.

Establish Interview Stages

Interviews need to be broken into stages. This provides the focus needed on areas where as much data as possible can be gathered.

- **Screening stage of the interview.** Here, candidate track record, experience and competencies are validated. Make this a highly structured interview with broader-based questions (and their answers), planned in advance. This makes the interview easy to calibrate and candidates easy to compare. Consistency remains the key ingredient here.
- **Performance stage of the interview.** The candidate meets subject matter experts, the people who know / understand the job and know what success looks like in the role. If need be, these subject matter experts can assist with crafting suitable questions and answers.
- **Candidate-driven stage of the interview.** This is where the candidate is sold on the organization, culture and career opportunities. It is difficult to know what is important to and motivates a candidate. The interviewer needs to be prepared, and the process may be made more efficient by having a knowledgeable employee discuss the company and the employer brand. This means everything for passive candidates, they already have great / good jobs and may be hesitant to leave their current role for an uncertain opportunity. Therefore, the interviewer needs to remove as much uncertainty from the candidate's mind as possible with viable and detailed information.

There is no problem with having multiple candidates go through the screening process and then waiting a couple of days between each round of interviews. However, the next round of interviews needs to adhere to a preplanned timetable.

If you have questions about hiring proven performers, please contact me directly at mike@honerandassociates.com.