

Tips and Techniques for Interviewing and Hiring Employees

By Marcia Watson Wasserman

At one time or another, every company needs to hire a new employee or replace an existing one. The following are some tips and techniques to help you hire the right candidate for the position.

- Before you start the process, make sure you have an accurate job description of the position you want to fill. If your old secretary performed certain duties (e.g. took face-to-face dictation), you need to re-evaluate the job duties and see whether they have changed. Perhaps you are using a voice-activated dictation software program like Dragon NaturallySpeaking and no longer need to dictate to a secretary. Take the time to list the essential functions of the position and create a job description for the position, or update your existing job description to more accurately reflect the position's job duties. Being clear about what qualifications and job experience the position requires, will assist you in finding better candidates.
- Once you have received resumes, review them carefully to determine how well they fit your job description. Then, try to narrow the resumes down to the 5 or 6 that appear to most closely fit your requirements and arrange interviews with those candidates.
- In addition to accepting resumes from job applicants, it is important to have them complete a detailed employment application form (that complies with both Federal and State law as to what you can ask a job applicant) when they arrive for the interview. The employment history section of the form should include not only the employer's name but also: inclusive dates of employment, starting and ending compensation, position and duties, the reason for leaving and whether the termination was voluntary or involuntary. It should also inquire about periods of unemployment and the reasons for unemployment. Since a resume typically does not include the reason for leaving a position or discuss periods of unemployment, important information about an individual's work history can be gleaned from an employment application form.
- When the time arrives to interview the candidates, make sure you objectively evaluate each candidate and take notes of the interview. It is important to allow the candidate an opportunity to talk about his or her qualifications and job experience. Often, the interviewer will spend most of the interview talking about him or herself without learning enough information to determine whether the candidate is a good fit for the position. The easiest way to learn about the candidate is to ask open-ended questions during the interview. Ask questions such as: What are your career goals? What areas would you like to improve upon? What involvement with the community have you had? Do you

prefer to work for a large company or a small one and why? Tell me a difficult problem you experienced at your last job and how you solved it.

- After you have concluded the interview process, carefully review the resumes, job applications and your notes. Narrow the candidates down to the top 2 or 3 and begin the process of reference checking the finalists. Make sure that you have written authorization from the candidate to obtain references from previous employers. Learn to read between the lines with respect to references. If the candidate only gave the name of a co-worker at a prior job, rather than his or her immediate supervisor, it might indicate that the individual had a problem with that supervisor. This should be considered a red flag.
- Once you have selected the person you think you want to hire, it is critical to conduct a background check of that individual (after you have obtained the appropriate authorizations from the applicant to conduct a background check). Background checks often reveal important information about an applicant, e.g. that the applicant does not have the college degree he or she indicated.
- When you are ready to extend a job offer to the finalist, it is acceptable to offer the position over the telephone. However, an employment offer letter should also be sent to the applicant setting forth the terms of employment such as: job title, starting date and time, rate of pay, overview of benefits, etc. The more that is communicated before your new employee starts the better the orientation will be to the new position.