

INTERVIEW MANAGEMENT

The essential guide to interview preparation and debrief



Reducing the Risk of a Bad Hire

Introduction

Introduction

All too often, and increasingly so as the job market swells and candidates have the opportunity to pursue multiple job opportunities, recruiters encounter:

- Candidates dropping out of interview processes in favour of other jobs
- Job offers being declined for reasons not previously discussed during the process
- Hiring managers dragging their feet, when on the face of it, they have met genuine contenders for the job on offer
- Candidates' behaviours appearing inconsistent with their words
- Interviewers struggling to decide which candidate to offer the job to as they don't feel that they have seen "*the one*" yet
- Claims being made at interview by candidates that prove to be exaggerations of their actual capability, once they start work
- Candidates appearing to be unprepared for the interview(s) and not presenting themselves in-line with their CV/biography
- Offers being delayed due to salary budget issues that can lead to candidates taking other positions
- Feedback from candidates that interviews did not provide them with enough detail about the role or the expectations of them if they start
- Candidates not turning up for interviews and going to ground, not returning calls

The above examples are simply that, examples of behaviours and evidence that your interview management process is not robust enough to help you hire the talent you seek.

In the real world, the above events will happen *occasionally* – which can be read, in reality, as *rarely* but some markets experience higher occurrences of these events than others.

To get this under control requires you to measure your results. Consider looking at the following set of measures to then develop a plan to reduce attrition and increase the number of successful hires you make.

Interviews requested • Interviews booked • Interviews attended • Offers extended
Offers accepted • Candidate starts

The above matrices are as important for the internal recruitment team as they are for third party recruiting firms.

Internal recruiters should consider segmenting this information by business function - perhaps the sales and commercial teams will experience different levels of attrition than the support functions.

Introduction

A Few Words About Language

Different businesses will use different terminology through their process. For reference we have included some definitions for certain nomenclature we use through this guide:

Recruiter(s)	<i>Recruitment professional(s), be that in-house recruiters, HR professionals managing the interview process, agency recruiters, headhunters, talent managers or recruitment consultants.</i>
Hiring Manager(s)	<i>Those who are interviewing prospective candidates to join their team</i>
Applicant	<i>A person who is applying for a job</i>
Candidate	<i>An applicant you would define as being of a standard to want to interview them</i>
Contender	<i>A candidate that is worth offering a specific job to</i>
Job Vacancy	<i>A live position a recruiter is seeking to fill</i>
Opportunity	<i>What a candidate would describe a job as, if it met their goals, aspirations and needs</i>

First Things First

First Things First

Before the Interviewing Begins

As with most systems, the quality of the outputs are directly linked to the quality of the inputs. In IT this is sometimes described as the GI:GO principle – Garbage In : Garbage Out. A well qualified assessment of a hiring manager’s goals and objectives from the interview process will help you to provide the right input and potentially create opportunities to consult and add value. The same is true for the applicants you qualify – we don’t want to lose those who are genuine candidates to unforeseen circumstances. Poorly qualified candidates and hiring managers can be a recipe for disaster.

To get the most out of our Interview Management tools, it is recommended that you consider implementing the following qualification processes for hiring managers and applicants you consider to be genuine candidates.

Hiring Manager – Pre-Interview Qualification

There are many hiring managers out there who have never received any formal training on conducting interviews and assessing candidates. This can create potential pitfalls if they are not recognised. Possible contenders can be missed, candidates are not fully assessed and attrition issues are created due to poor fit, capability issues or culture. Formal training may not be possible, or necessary, but we certainly want to ensure that the hiring manager knows what they are looking for, how they will assess the candidates they meet and ultimately decide who they will offer the job to.

To help you, we have put together a set of questions that you can either develop into a question set for hiring managers, an internal checklist for the internal recruitment team, a prompt list to support your job qualification process (you do have one, right?), a guide to assessing and hiring talent or even a mini training session for hiring managers.

Take a look at your current portfolio of live jobs. How many of the hiring managers involved could you answer all of these questions about? What difference would it make if you could...?

- When was the last time the hiring manager had any coaching or training on how to assess and hire talent?
- When did the hiring manager last interview candidates of this skills set, at this level and successfully hire? (Successful hire means they joined, stayed and performed well!)
- What awareness do they have of the demand and supply of candidates of this skill set, at this level?
- How are they going to assess candidates:
 - Technical capability
 - Attitude
 - Team and cultural fit
 - Value (relative to salary expectations)

(We know that the answer “interview” is probably accurate but you need to get more granular than that to really answer the question)

First Things First

- What will make a candidate become a contender to them?
- How will they present the role, team environment, prospects and overall Employer Value Proposition (EVP) to candidates? Although EVP can often be an overused term how a role is presented to a prospective employee is often the route to developing engagement.
- What support would this hiring manager benefit from to assist them in hiring the right person? Support could be from recruiters, their own manager, peers, HR or could include an interview coaching session or a relevant guide to hiring successfully).

Candidate - Pre-Interview Preparation

With some skillsets proving to be harder and harder to find, plus candidates with good skills and the right attitude even harder to find, when we encounter applicants who meet our hiring criteria we don't want to lose them during the process due to poor pre-interview qualification.

Once you have assessed an applicant as a candidate to present to your hiring manager(s) we would recommend that you review with them:

- What steps have they taken to find their next job?
- What else are they pursuing? What stages are they up to in the process? How does this job compare to others they are looking at?
- What is most important to them in their next job? How will they recognise it when they see it? What will make a job become a genuine opportunity?
- When did they last have an interview? How did it go? What feedback did they get? What did they learn from it?
- Who else will this decision affect? How do they feel about changing jobs?
- What could stop them from taking a new job?
- What concerns do they have about changing jobs? What would make them feel confident to join another business?
- Why do they want to leave (or why did they leave) their current job? What could they do to get them to stay?
- As simple as it sounds – do you know what their salary expectations are and what they are based upon? Do you know what they are earning?*

**We don't believe a salary offer should be based upon someone's current earnings, but their value to the business. Knowing their current salary helps us predict more accurately how they will behave at offer stage and beyond. Money is rarely a motivator and is better considered to be a satisfier.*

First Things First

A set of considerations for you as the recruiter working with the candidate:

- What can you share with them to help them endorse their decision to pursue this job? What is in your candidate pack that you send out? Is it physical or soft copy? What does it say about the experience of working with you?
- What could you share that could influence them to consider it to be an opportunity? How well do your job descriptions read? Does it engage as well as inform? Does it clearly set out how they will be measured as well as telling them what they will be doing?
- What task could you set them to help engage them further with your brand (or your client's)?

We have seen a variety of tasks that have helped increase engagement.

From the simple:

- Prepare a suitability statement or portfolio of work to support their application.
- Speak with current employees from similar backgrounds or who've relocated to join you.
- Engage with your social media channels to discover more about your business and what life is like to work there.

To the more complex:

- Solve puzzles or complex problems prior to interview to then discuss methodology and thinking at interview.
- Visit retail stores (clearly a retail business) to experience being a customer to give feedback at interview.
- How will you make sure that you capture all the information about the candidate to help you with your interview management?
- (Your ATS or CRM should remind you of the important content of your conversations for future requalification and ensuring you create the right experience for the candidates you work with)

A well qualified candidate who feels invested in, understood and engaged is going to be more committed to your business and process. Conversely, the opposite is likely to be true unless their application is driven by strong ecological requirements (unemployment, pressure at work to leave, financial drive for work greater than the need to assess the suitability of a new job, your brand is so strong they would drag themselves over 8 miles of broken glass to join you). This ecological situation is likely to be pushing them towards all of the other places they have applied to work at.

The Process

Interview Management

What exactly is 'Interview Management'?

The interview process itself is not just a routine to administer as a recruiter. It is an opportunity for you to take control and coach your candidates and hiring managers to make the best decisions they can. This coaching is what will help you to identify opportunities to influence those involved and help them feel confident in the decisions they make. Let us be clear – **influence is not the same as manipulation**. Through influence we can help others make decisions that ultimately are with their best interests at heart. Your personal brand will be enhanced when you help people make the *right* decision by challenging assumptions and ensuring all parties feel confident and comfortable.

All of the checklists and forms we have developed are excellent prompts and tools to help you to get the most out of the processes you manage. To really excel it is important to know why we recommend the questions we've developed and understand some of the psychology involved.

A full range of FREE checklists and forms developed to support your recruitment process can be found at:

www.zeroentropynetworks.com/recruiters-essentials

The image shows two overlapping forms. The top form is titled 'CLIENT INTERVIEW DEBRIEF' and contains fields for 'CANDIDATE:', 'CLIENT:', 'COMPANY:', 'REQUIREMENT TITLE:', 'INTERVIEW DATE:', 'INTERVIEW TYPE:' (with sub-fields for 'PHONE', 'FACE-TO-FACE', 'TECHNICAL TESTING'), and several open-ended questions such as 'Debrief to the client constructive feedback from the candidate using the completed Candidate Interview Debrief form.', 'How did they compare to your expectations?', and 'What do they compare with the other people you have seen?'. The bottom form is titled 'RECRUITMENT TRAINING SPECIALISTS' and contains fields for 'CANDIDATE:', 'CLIENT:', 'COMPANY:', 'REQUIREMENT TITLE:', 'INTERVIEW TYPE:' (with sub-fields for 'PHONE', 'FACE-TO-FACE', 'TECHNICAL TESTING'), and several open-ended questions such as 'How would you describe the role?', 'What were the role descriptors to you?', and 'What do you feel you did?'. Both forms include the website 'www.zeroentropynetworks.com' at the bottom.

Interview Management

Interview Preparation

First Interaction

+ Hiring Manager

Once your hiring manager has interviews booked and confirmed in their diary it is important that you ensure that they are fully prepared. There are some fundamental basics that we want to make sure are covered:

- Have they booked a suitable interview room? Is it set up to create a welcoming environment? Sat across the desk from the interviewee can create a more formal feel to the interview compared to seating at the same side of the table with the interviewee.
- When are they going to re-read the CVs before the interview and consider specific questions to understand more about the candidate's experience, background and career?
- Have they prepared reasonable and relevant questions to ask during the interview? Have they decided what they need to know by the end of the first interview to make an informed decision about the candidates they are meeting?

Having covered these we can then ensure our hiring manager knows enough about the candidates, beyond their biography. Beyond the basics we want to ensure the hiring manager knows:

- **More about the candidate's goals and objectives** that we discovered during our initial qualification call at application stage. Giving this insight to the hiring manager can help them to present the position they have with more relevance.
- **Other steps the candidate has taken to find their next opportunity.** Knowing what they have done and where they are up to helps the hiring manager remain informed and understand what their role is going to be compared to by the candidate, during and after the interview.
- **What the candidates' key drivers and motivators are.** By discussing each candidate individually the hiring manager can then be prepared for meeting the candidates as individuals rather than preparing to meet the CV.
- **How the candidate is likely to make decisions.** The frame for the hiring manager is presented like this:
"If you like this candidate, this is what it will take to secure them – they are interested in hearing about X, they would be interested in seeing/hearing/meeting Y to help them feel confident that they are making the right decision".

Finally, consider how you have generated the candidates you are arranging for the hiring manager to meet. Those who are the 'passive candidate' (common term that does not really help hiring managers understand the candidate's ecology) may not be as hungry for a job as those they meet who have perhaps been more active in their job search. A preparation for potential interview behaviour may help the hiring manager understand the need to engage with different candidates from different sources with differing approaches.

The big thing to stress in this to the hiring manager is that this is designed to help them be more informed as to what they will need to do to get them on-board.

Interview Management

In terms of timing, to prepare a hiring manager to meet with three candidates is likely to take 20 minutes. This investment helps reduce lost time further into the process that can be far more expensive, increasing the time taken to hire.

We would recommend that this preparation with the manager is done with enough time for them to reflect and plan so a minimum of 24 hours before the interviews. Make no assumption that because a hiring manager has been managing for many years that they know how to interview effectively. Even your experienced hirers will benefit from good quality insight as to the candidates they are meeting with.

Agree a timetable as to what will happen after the interviews and when you will speak to discuss the candidates met. If the candidates are all being met in the space of a couple of days then a single call to debrief will work. If there is greater distance between them then a conversation after each interview will be required.

+ Candidate

Candidates are often far more prepared before an interview if they are being represented by a third party recruitment agency. If you are an internal recruitment professional using the services of a recruitment partner then we strongly advise that you work closely with your agency to understand what they do to prepare the candidates your hiring managers are meeting.

When preparing your own candidates – either as an internal recruiter or agency there are, as per the hiring manager, some basics to consider:

- Do they know where they are going, how to get there, where to park, the security process on arrival and the need to set off early so that they are not rushing to make their appointment?
- Have they read and absorbed the job description? Have they re-read their CV to consider relevant experience and involvement to demonstrate their capability to deliver?
- Have they considered some of the basic questions that they are going to be asked?

“Why do you want to work here?”

“What do you know about us?”

“What do you enjoy in your work and why?”

They may not be questions that you think they will be asked but thinking about the answers will get them in the right head space to be interviewed and reduce the potential ‘umming’ and ‘ahhing’ and simply poor grade answers.

- What do they want to find out from the manager that they are meeting? Are their questions that you can answer for them that might not be relevant for the manager to answer at first meeting?

All of the above is pretty routine and helps a candidate feel ready.

Interview Management

To take this further we want to help the candidate get the most out of the interaction and make good decisions. So we want to prepare them further to consider:

- How will they know if it is the right position for them? What will help them to make a balanced decision about the role?
- Give them some insight as to what the hiring manager is like in terms of style, background and personality. If the hiring manager is a very serious interviewer, tell them! A surprise is a reaction to an unforeseen event. Remove unnecessary surprises from the process.
- Discuss their application and what the hiring manager has said about the candidate – what parts of their CV are they most interested in, the experience that they have that the interviewer is likely to focus on.
- Share the concerns that may have been highlighted. Make sure the candidate recognises that concerns are not a bad thing, help them to think about how they could deal with those concerns if they are brought up in the interview (and how they could deal with them if they don't!)
- Agree with them what will happen after the interview and the communication loop that ensures they call you to discuss how it went as soon as possible afterwards.

Interview Management

Second Interaction

The second interview is likely to follow a different format, with a different agenda. No longer is the hiring manager seeking to discover if the candidate is a contender. The goal now is about endorsing the candidate's contender status and developing greater fluency of the candidate's fit, value and ultimately deciding if they will be offered.

+ Hiring Manager

Much of the preparation of the hiring manager will cover similar elements to the preparation before the first meeting. If there are more interviewers involved then they will need to be brought up to speed as to each of the candidates' suitability, capability and current situation.

Ensure that you prepare your hiring manager to consider:

- Any concerns that the candidates may have about:
 - The job on offer
 - Their own fit based on experience or culture
 - The business as an employer
 - The fear of change

All candidates have concerns at some point through an interview process. Some hiring managers may not have had these concerns shared with them in the past so it is important for them to understand that knowing them is better than not knowing. If a candidate has concerns it shows that they are putting serious thought into the position. Knowing the concerns allows the hiring manager to deal with them during the second interview either directly or indirectly.

Has the hiring manager decided what they need to see/hear/feel during the interview to decide if the candidate is worth offering the job to?

What thoughts have they had regarding salary? How are they going to approach the subject of money and remuneration during the interview? Discuss the conversations you have had with the candidates about money, their expectations and ensuring that the hiring manager is focused on finding the best candidate.

Go back through the candidates' feedback from the first interview and the hiring manager's own interview feedback. Remind them of their initial thoughts and help them remember why each candidate is coming back to see them.

Discuss the difficult stuff – what is going to happen if none of the candidates are worth hiring. What are the options? What will the impact of that be on the team, business and workflow? As part of this make sure that everyone is clear on what the minimum expectations are to consider a candidate worth hiring. Bad hiring decision can often be made when “the best of an average bunch” is hired. This needs to be in balance with the avoidance of hiring “perfect”.

Interview Management

Candidates as Contenders

Candidates who are being asked back for a second interview are now much more likely to be considered contenders. This can sometimes affect the candidates own thought processes with a potential shift in power. The candidate has gone from pursuing the job to now feeling as though they are being pursued by the employer. Assessing this shift needs to be part of your candidate preparation. Make sure as you prepare your candidate for the second interview that you cover the basics (again as per the first interaction).

In addition cover:

- Any new faces they are going to meet that may be part of the second interview, their remit in the business, their agenda for the interview and what they are like as an individual.
- How they feel about the position and how it has started to crystallise in their mind as a genuine opportunity for them.
- What they are going to need to see/hear/feel to know that it is right for them.
- Discuss with them their concerns and what it will take for them to put these to bed.
- Their thoughts on salary and remuneration. What is the minimum they think they would need to say yes?
- How this role compares to other positions they are pursuing. Make sure you know where they are up to with each of the other opportunities they are looking at and what timescales they are working towards. If they get offered your position and the others, which would they accept? What reasons do they have? If the decision is money, ask them the question again whilst “putting money to one side”.
- Agree again a communication loop to make sure that you hear from them as soon as possible after the interview.

Interview Management

Interview Debrief

First Interaction

+ Candidate

We have been very deliberate with our nomenclature. It is important to consider this call (good debriefs can be done face to face, especially if you are in the same location as the interviews) to be a debrief rather than a feedback call. Feedback calls are more passive and simply require taking notes about someone's experience. A debrief is more proactive and involves asking good questions to discover information and evidence.

A good debrief needs to be done as soon after the interview as possible so that information is fresh and time has not allowed memories to become distorted or too generalised. We also want to talk to our candidate as they are forming their opinions rather than after they have made decisions.

Open questions to get your candidate talking freely, accompanied with good note-taking by you so that you have real content to share with your hiring managers.

- **How did the interview go?** Often the answer to this can be laced with ambiguous adjectives. Good listeners recognise the importance of questioning the meaning of adverbs, adjectives and hyperbole. If it went well, then discover what the evidence they have to make them feel that way. The more content you have the more you then have a candidate self-actualising their experience and thoughts on the interview.
- **What are their thoughts now, having met with the hiring manager?** How was the role described to them?
- **How does it compare to:**
 - Their expectations
 - Other roles they are pursuing
 - Their current position

By discussing this we get our candidate talking out loud about their thoughts. This can help them to make decisions better and gives us insight as to how they think. Discovering *what* people think is really important, discovering *how* they think is invaluable.

“If you could do the interview again, what would you do differently?” This helps us to test the candidate's self-awareness – what do they think they did well? What could have gone better? If the hiring manager highlights errors or potential weaknesses and the candidate is satisfied they did everything they could, to the best of their ability, then they are not likely to be the right fit. If they have the self-awareness to recognise errors and can clearly communicate what they believe would be a better answer or stronger evidence then there could be mileage in getting both parties back together again.

There are three powerful questions that can also help create greater levels of commitment from the candidate:

- Can you do the job?
- Do you feel that you want the job?
- If you were offered, based upon what you know now, would you take it?

Interview Management

A good debrief will help a candidate develop their opinion as they talk to you. Your questions will help to influence their decisions so that they ultimately make the right decision as to what is best for them. We are not there to manipulate them, more to help coach them to a decision. Certainty is what will help a candidate get through some of the concerns and fears they may have about change.

Discover what concerns they may have and how they are going to resolve them. Now they have seen the hiring manager, their concerns may have been alleviated, endorsed or simply changed. What would need to happen in a second meeting for them to feel more confident and comfortable that it is the right position for them?

Now that it is more real, we want to find out how they now feel about the prospect of leaving where they work. They are one step closer to resignation (if they pursue to completion) how does this make them feel? What could happen at work that might get them to stay? Let's not get too assumptive that a counter offer is going to be financial. Although most agency recruiters believe that counter offers are financial (candidates find it easier to say they are staying for the extra bit of money rather than the fear of failure) rarely is it the money that seals it, it merely sweetens the decision for a moment.

+ Hiring Manager

The debrief with the hiring manager is *after* we have debriefed the candidate. Hiring managers can sometimes want to hear the candidate's feedback first. In our experience this is often a good sign – if they like a candidate they will want to make sure that is reciprocated before they reveal their thoughts.

A good debrief with a client shares the content of our debrief with the candidate whilst debriefing the hiring manager on their thoughts. Again, if we can do this soon after the interview we can find we are talking to the hiring manager as their decisions are being made, rather than after. This gives us opportunities to help them make good decisions through good debrief questions.

We want to make sure that we cover:

- **What are your thoughts on the candidate(s)?** Debrief the hiring manager on each candidate one at a time rather than as a group. You will get more meaningful feedback and insight.
- **How did they compare to:**
 - The project need?
 - The rest of the team?
 - Your expectations?
 - Other candidates?
- **What does the hiring manager think of the candidate in terms of:**
 - Team fit
 - Potential for development and growth
 - Immediate impact and capability
 - Attitude and values

Interview Management

Clearly all of the above leads into a natural flowing discussion during which the hiring manager can openly discuss the pros and cons of each candidate and develop balanced decisions on each relative to the role (rather than end up comparing candidate to candidate without coming back to the original requirement and their suitability for the role).

Again, three deliberate closed questions can help us to gain commitment to each candidate:

- Do you believe that they can do they job?
- From your initial meeting, do you believe they have the right attitude and you can imagine working with them?
- Based upon what you have seen, would you offer them the job?

An agreement in principle can then be reached as to which candidates will be called back for a second interview and their status as being genuine contenders confirmed.

Interview Management

Second Interaction

+ Hiring Manager

Debriefing after the second interview is likely to take us towards a decision as to who is going to be offered and to decide if there is a second choice candidate who would be hired if the first choice does not accept.

Our debrief with the hiring manager again needs to be focused on each candidate individually rather than as a group of candidates together.

We need to ensure that we discuss in depth each candidate to help the hiring manager 'think out loud' and ratify their thoughts on each person. Our debrief needs to cover:

Having met the candidate for a second time, what are your thoughts on them as a potential employee? Our hiring manager will often want to hear the candidate's feedback as part of this debrief. Good debriefs with our second interview candidates will again help our client make the right decision and provide them with discussion material – the right candidate is, in part, the candidate who wants the role and demonstrates the right attitude to joining the team.

What are their thoughts on each candidate, relative to:

- The immediate impact they will have
- The candidate's attitude, assessed through their engagement in the interview, their questions and their general behaviour
- Their technical ability to do the job and their likelihood to perform to the right level
- Their long-term value to the team
- The candidate's development needs and how long the role is likely to keep them interested and challenged
- The value of the candidate relative to their salary expectations

Having debriefed the hiring manager on all of the candidates they have seen for second interview discuss the candidates and decide who will be offered the position.

Close the debrief with the hiring manager on a decision. If the hiring manager needs more time to think then it is important to set a time when a decision will be made. Time to think also gives competitors time to engage and hire the candidates that you have seen.

Interview Management

Conclusions and Final Thoughts

The goal of a well-structured interview management process is designed to help a recruiter coach their hiring managers **and** candidates to make good decisions. Influence is about looking after the best interests of everyone involved **NOT** manipulating people to make decisions that they will later regret.

Too frequently we have seen the wrong candidate get hired as the hiring manager has not been clear on what they wanted to hire, how they were going to assess candidate suitability or they have let non-hiring based factors influence their decisions:

- External recruiters pushing them into the wrong decision because it was good for the agency.
- Internal recruiters guiding the hiring manager to hire the less suitable direct applicant as there is no fee attached to them.
- Hiring weak clones of themselves rather than candidates who can deliver and add value.
- Hiring the technically capable without thought to the right attitudes, habits or values.
- We've also seen too often candidates reject jobs that they later wish they had taken because:
 - They did not feel that they had been interviewed fully enough to believe that the hiring manager could accurately predict their ability to do the job.
 - They accepted another job that was sold better but turned out to be less suitable for them long term.
- External recruiters pushing them to take offers that had been extended with a "bird in the hand" mentality.
- Concerns not being aired and shared so certainty was reduced that the role, company or environment was right.
- Fear of failure was greater than confidence of success as not enough time was spent helping the candidate become comfortable with the decision process.
- Candidates resign, only to agree to stay as not enough time was invested to help them recognise the potential outcomes at resignation and think about what is most important to them long term.
- Lack of insight for candidates in the thought processes of hiring managers through the process.

Reading this guide will give you a greater understanding of the process you are managing and recognise the influence opportunities available to you. It will also help you to ensure you hire the right people who can accept jobs with confidence that they are the right opportunities for them, can get through the resignation process and start their new job!