

3 Ways to Strengthen Your Interview Effectiveness

You Are Playing with a Stacked Deck

Without preparation in the areas below, the interview “deck” is indeed stacked against you. Expectations, lurking beneath your awareness, can blind you to important aspects of the applicant. You might unknowingly allow an applicant’s group membership to create a distorted impression of him or her. And, then, there is the resume, reading like the benefits section of a new-product press release while giving you the impression that you are getting hard facts.

Stepping in any one of these hard-to-spot potholes can result in a misleadingly positive interview impression.

1. **Review Your Expectations** If you expect an applicant to be strong, then, without being aware of it, you will tend to interpret the applicant’s behavior in a positive way that reinforces your expectations. And you will also tend to rationalize away anything that you see that doesn’t look as positive as what you expected to see.

Tip – Pause before beginning an interview and ask yourself, “What am I expecting of the applicant?” Am I expecting him or her to be super smart, highly knowledgeable, and very polished? Or am I expecting too little of this particular applicant and, as a result, may not ask strong enough questions?

Bringing these expectations to mind before the interview can help you avoid falling prey to them.

2. **Avoid Over-Generalizing** Countless times a day we generalize from a set of facts to a likely outcome without giving this process much thought. For example, seeing reasonable tenure in an applicant’s job history gives us reason to think that the person will be a steady employee, when it might not be the case.

Here’s another example: when an applicant belongs to a group we have strong feelings about we might over-generalize about his or her values and attitudes. That is, we can attribute to the applicant some of the negative associations we

have about the group. Doing so can lead us to conclusions about the applicant's suitability that are unfair.

Tip – The tendency to automatically generalize to the worst impression of an applicant based on group membership can distort your view of the applicant and lead you to assume the worst about the person. Simply reminding yourself that you have biases that are not at the top of your awareness, and trying to become more aware of them, can help you avoid over-generalizing.

3. **Don't Believe Everything in the Resume** Resumes are like obituaries. They put a positive spin on what are often ordinary achievements and leave out any mention of mistakes, instances of poor judgment, and other human failures.

The applicant's motivation is to create a document that will make him or her appear to be exactly what you are looking for. Providing an objective, factual and representative recitation of his or her job-relevant work experience, education and training is a lower priority, particularly if the real picture of the person's past differs from the one painted by the resume.

The companies that provide background checks on applicants say that over half of the educational and business-related achievements on the resumes they see have been altered either a little or a lot. The actual three years of college becomes a college degree and job titles are either "Manager" or "Professional," regardless of whether such titles are appropriate.

Tip – View resumes as little more than an exercise in creative writing by the applicant. Beware of being seduced by misleading job titles such as "President", "Professional" and all the "C" designations ("CEO", "COO", "CIO", etc.) Focus instead on what the person's responsibilities were and how many people reported to him or her.

Verify all claims on the resume that are important for the job in question. College education is easy to verify with a call to the university's registrar. Also, be careful about assuming what even a verified degree, particularly one from a highly regarded university, means. In every graduating class, someone is at the bottom of the academic ratings. He or she may have the diploma, but not the education or brainpower it suggests.

Hire in Haste, Repent at Leisure

This is the business version of the old saying, “Marry in haste, repent at leisure” and the basic idea is as true in a hiring situation as it is in matrimony. Here is an easy-to-remember way to help you slow down and get a clearer picture of the applicant. Use the acronym, “STOP.”

S – for Stop – Give yourself time to prepare for the interview. What areas do you want to focus on?

T – for Think – What expectations are liable to shape your interpretations of the applicant’s behavior?

O – for Odds – The odds are slim that the applicant has all of the negative attitudes associated with a group he or she is a member of. Ask open-ended, job-relevant questions about attitudes that concern you.

P – for Padding -Where is the padding in the resume (the exaggerations, false claims and puffery)? Verify! Verify! Verify!