

Interview Preparation Checklist

Selling Points: Think through the following discussion points prior to the interview, so you can articulate “why you” and “why your firm” throughout the interviewing process. If there are multiple individuals involved in the interviewing process, share this Interview Preparation Checklist with all involved.

- Complete this sentence: “This position is the opportunity for someone to _____.”
 - The reasons need to be beyond ‘work with great people’, ‘take the next step in your career’, or ‘work in a great environment’ – what does this position allow someone to do above and beyond what they might have the opportunity to do currently?
- What are the primary reasons someone would join your organization instead of another company?
- What is the career path for this individual?
- What in-house resources do you have that give people a competitive advantage? What external resources?
- How does your company differentiate itself from other competitors in your niche?
- Do you have a success story of someone in your organization in a similar role?
- What sort of company related functions do you do on an annual basis? Any spontaneous events? Do you or the staff ever meet for after work get-togethers such as barbeques, softball games, golf tournaments, night at the movies, bowling night, fishing trips, or celebration of a completed project/client?
- What involvement do you and/or your organization have in the local community or in other charitable organizations?
- What special programs do you have that accommodate family activities?
- What is the tenure of your senior staff? What benefit does that provide a new associate?
- What is the training program for this new associate? Think through initially, as well as continued development.
- What future growth plans do you have for your firm? What opportunity does that create for someone? Where do you see your niche heading/evolving?
- Consider including some testimonials of others on the team – what this opportunity has provided them (where they came from, where they are now)...
- What associations, networks, or boards are you/your firm affiliated with?
- What are you most proud of in terms of the work that you’ve done or impact you’ve made for your clients?

Interviewing Don'ts:

Questions such as the following, or any other area which is not specifically related to the evaluation criteria for the position or any others that could violate EEOC:

- Do you think you are too old to accept an entry level position?
- How many children do you have? Are they healthy?
- Do you have a child care problem?
- Who did you vote for in the last election?
- Have you ever been arrested?
- Do you belong to a church? What kind?
- Have you ever been treated for drug/alcohol abuse?
- What languages do you commonly use?

Don't make the candidate wait for an extended period of time in the lobby, or listen to you wrap up a phone call or meeting.

Failure to establish rapport with the candidate. The interview never gets off the ground - resulting in no substantive discussion about the applicant and his/her qualifications.

Failure to have a strategy. Lack of an interview system or an understanding of what information needs to be elicited can lead to an inappropriate and counterproductive interview.

Briefness of interview. An interview that is too brief is usually superficial, yielding little valuable information about the candidate.

Overemphasis on initial impression. First impressions are not necessarily true indications of typical behavior. Avoid making final decisions early in the interview before you have gathered appropriate information.

Unconscious biases of preferences. Don't allow one specific trait or characteristic to influence your overall evaluation of a candidate. Common areas of unconscious bias include sex, age, race, physical handicap, physical characteristics (weight, height, etc.), and dress.

Reliance on intuition. Conclusions based on intuition are irrational and invalid. Only a complete understanding of what an applicant has done in the past will help to predict what he or she will do in the future.

Look at your physical office space through a new lens. What does someone entering your space see and experience?

Interviewing Do's:

- Send an email with the smallest details handled: where to park, how to find the office suite, how much time to set aside, who to ask for, etc.
- Give the candidate a bottled water without them having to request it.
- Sit in a private conference room if possible. If not, turn off your computer monitor, silence your cell phone, and decline all incoming calls.
- Have a copy of their resume already printed and on your desk. Give them some printed materials to review in return.
- Complement them on *something* – no matter how small.
- Be acutely aware of your body language and what it is communicating to the candidate. Leaning back in your chair with arms folded, or resting one leg on top of your knee can convey a negative image. Sit upright with your torso facing the candidate, or lean forward slightly in your chair and lightly clasp your hands in your lap or place them near your knees.
- Take notes – it shows you are listening. Don't take too many notes – it makes a candidate feel like they are in a therapy session.
- Practice the 50/50 balance: talking versus listening. Whoever talks the most feels the conversation has gone the best – make sure it's the candidate. Resist the three-minute-rule: it's human nature to base your opinion about a candidate on the gut feeling you develop during the first few minutes of the interview. To some extent, that tendency can be harnessed as a kind of intrinsic sixth sense, but have faith in the process as a whole.
- Ask questions in a way that will give actual answers. A question such as "what is your greatest weakness" will rarely garner an honest answer – ask instead "what kind of feedback have you received from past managers, both in terms of strengths as well as what you've been encouraged to do differently?"
- Assign some homework or follow-up steps of what they can do to continue to proactively pursue this path – review homework, watch introductory training videos, read certain industry-relevant material.
- Clearly articulate next steps of what they should expect from you following the interview.