

# Successful Interview Strategies Lead To Hiring Great Candidates

**G**etting yourself and your organization prepared to conduct interviews is an important process. Anything you can do to make your candidates more comfortable during the interview has real value. If your organization takes the steps necessary to make your candidates as comfortable as possible, it will set your organization apart from other places they may be interviewing.

Consider this as well: you likely expect the candidates you are going to interview to be very prepared before showing up for an interview. After all, just think about how well you prepared for past job interviews. As an employer, you should give interview prep the same level of importance that you expect your candidates to give it. Invest as much time as needed to be sure you're fully prepared to conduct quality interviews. Too often, members of a selection team "hire a resume" rather than the actual person. They bring in a candidate with exceptional credentials, are mesmerized by the individual's accomplishments or skills, and then simply fail to pay attention to the other details that matter during the interview process. You can avoid catastrophic hiring mistakes by being



organized, setting up processes, and using professional, behavioral-based interviewing techniques.

## ORGANIZE THE SELECTION TEAM

Know who is in charge of specific aspects of the interview process. Addressing these issues before you begin your search will help you be more organized from the outset and will ensure fewer surprises throughout the selection process. In addition, you, your selection team, and your organization as a whole will appear more organized and professional in the eyes of candidates.

Look over the following list of questions as early in the search process as possible. Put the initials of each selection team member next to the line items for which they're responsible. If the responsibility for some tasks is split, put both initials and the percentage for which each person is responsible. For example, HR might be responsible for 80% of one task with the Hiring Manager responsible for the remaining 20%. Once responsibility for each task has been assigned, share the list with the other responsible parties. If there is disagreement or confusion about responsibilities, work it out before beginning the interview process.

### Before Interviews (Sample List)

- Who's in charge of leading the Alignment of Expectations exercise?
- Who's in charge of conducting the information-gathering process and getting the search prep questionnaire completed?
- Who's in charge of creating the Opportunity Marketing Piece?

### During Interviews (Sample List)

- Who's in charge of deciding who's going to lunch with candidates – if time permits?
- Who's providing the relocation and benefits summary information to candidates?
- Who's explaining any bonus or incentive compensation, vacation, 401K, and/or other benefits details to candidates?

### After Interviews (Sample List)

- Who's responsible for making sure interview follow up forms are collected from the search selection team?
- Who's going to follow up with the candidates who were interviewed and ensure that all of their follow up questions are answered?
- Who's going to conduct reference checks?

## LAY OUT THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

While many people will be involved in the interview process, they will not all come in at the same time. The company president and top leaders will not meet every candidate, just the finalists. As the Hiring Manager and HR representative complete screening – with the skills survey, grading sheet, phone interviews, and first round face-to-face interviews – the pool of candidates gets smaller and more focused. Only A-level candidates are invited back for final interviews with top-level executives.



**Patrick B. Ropella**  
*Chairman & CEO, Ropella*  
Tel: (850) 983-4777  
Web: [www.Ropella.com](http://www.Ropella.com)

Patrick Ropella is Chairman & CEO of the Ropella Group an international Executive Search, Leadership Transformation, and Corporate Consulting firm. He authored the book and web-based training program, *The Right Hire – Mastering the Art of SMART Talent Management*, and has seen his content featured in many trade magazines, business publications, and industry journals. Patrick regularly speaks at webinars, career fairs, and conferences.

## Round One

The Hiring Manager and HR representative should be the primary two people who conduct the first phone and/or face-to-face interview. Round One is the “get to know you” stage, and also the stage in which you will clear up any remaining questions or eliminate any red flags gleaned from the resume and skills survey. Round One should be a balanced interview between selling/courting the candidate and gathering surface-level information. The goal is to screen candidates for minimum requirements and determine who should move on to the next round.

## Round Two

In this round, you look at candidate strengths and weaknesses and assess which candidate will be the best cultural fit. Round Two is a good time to begin the peer interview process, which is a valuable relationship building and assessment tool. Peer interviews give the candidate a chance to ask questions they may not have felt comfortable asking leaders in Round One interviews. If peers do not approve a candidate for hiring, it is vital that the leadership members of the selection team follow their advice. The peer interview process dramatically improves the odds of success during the new employee's first 90 days and beyond.

## Final Interview

During this stage, it is important that you get senior leadership buy-in and demonstrate to the candidate that all hires are important. The president – or at the least a top leader – of the organization should check for any final red flags and answer any remaining candidate questions. This last interview should include the hiring manager as well. In this final meeting with the hiring manager, all remaining interview and candidate questions should be fully answered; those involved should make sure the candidate – and the selection team! – understands all objectives and expectations for the first 90 days; and everyone is in complete

agreement. This final alignment conversation should always take place before the offer is extended, and definitely before the candidate finalist is asked to make his decision.

## USE BEHAVIOR-BASED INTERVIEWING TECHNIQUES

Now let's take a look at interviewing techniques that are designed to help you find out more about a candidate's abilities to function in the open position. Skills and experiences are important, but the underlying character and behaviors of an individual are much more useful ways of evaluating a candidate's likelihood of success. If a person has the right behavior, aptitude, and attitude, skills can be taught and training supplemented to meet the needs of your specific position.

Behavioral analysis is based on asking open-ended “Who,” “What,” “When,” “Where,” “How” and “Why” questions. Particularly important are those questions that are wrapped around evaluating talents, work ethic, courage, ego, persuasiveness, etc. The key to making this work for your particular open position is to predetermine what behavioral traits you need for the ideal candidate and what traits you'd like to avoid. Then design and select questions that will drive the interview toward gathering the information needed to evaluate the candidates.

Behavioral interviewing is based on the premise that past performance is the best predictor of future performance. Ask the candidate questions that provide them with the opportunity to tell you about a particular past performance, experience, or skill. And ask the candidate to incorporate as many specifics and details as possible into that tale. For example, if you want to know how creative a person is, ask, “How have you been creative in your work in the last 60 days?” Or, “What have you done at work that you'd describe as a creative project? Why was it successful?” The candidate's response will help you predict how the candidate might perform similar job skills required in your organization.

An effective way to gather answers to behavioral questions is to use the EAR model. The EAR contains an Event, Action, and Result. When candidates are answering your questions, listen carefully and make sure their answer includes each of the EAR elements.

**E:** Event, example, or problem the candidate experienced;

**A:** Action the candidate took in response to the event or situation;

**R:** Result (outcome or effect) of the actions the candidate took.

## GETTING THEM TO LOVE YOU: COURTING AND SELLING TOP CANDIDATES

Remember that you should always be courting candidates and selling your opportunity. You'll never know for sure who you're going to select or hire until you have a final accepted offer. Turn-downs happen all the time. Courting and selling your candidates is a great skill to have. If you work on perfecting it on every candidate, you will be better at it when it counts the most.