

Interviews - Balancing Science, Art and Romance?

Introduction

Unless you are employing robots, hiring new staff is rarely as easy as ticking off a list of pre-defined specifications. People are complicated. Teams are complicated. Company culture is complicated.

Many large companies use structured recruitment process that require a systematic way of measuring each candidate against a list of pre-defined criteria. Many smaller companies often work on an informal approach focusing on "fit" or "gut feeling" when it comes to choosing new team members. Effective recruitment and interviewing falls somewhere in between.

The Science, Art and Romance

The Science¹

Identifying the key skills, develop accurate job description, identify required experience and qualifications. This is where automated short-listing comes in. This process can reduce the time for shortlisting significantly. The downside of strict criteria is that often you will miss amazing people that don't quite match the specifications, or would be suitable for other roles in your organisation.

A structured interview process including a set list of questions, panel interviews, written selection criteria are also used to ensure the application process is fair for everyone. This process assists interviewers to ask a set number of questions and compare based on those questions, simplifying the process and making all interview uniform.



Both of these processes are helpful to ensure candidates have the basic qualifications, skills and experience, but the structured process itself does not always find the candidate with the best "fit" for a company.

The Art²

The art of an interview falls somewhere between our conscious and unconscious minds. Our unconscious mind is trained to make judgements without us being aware of it. Every person we meet, we make judgements about them within seconds of meeting them, or even just seeing them from across the street. We make these judgements based on a lifetime of experience and influence.

An experienced and trained interviewer learns to understand their conscious and unconscious biases, giving ability to see through first impressions. They can guide questions to dig deep in to the thought process and motivations of a candidate, explore other areas of experience, and assess someone not just on set criteria, but on hundreds of other more subtle clues that can identify the best "fit" for a position.



People are complicated and we all judge people on a huge number of criteria in just a few minutes. You make conscious and subconscious judgements about presentation, personality, voice, eye contact, confidence, humour, likeability, height, weight,

¹ Picture by cornwall.co.uk

² Picture by galeryhip.com

age, nationality, speech, how they talk about other people and companies, challenges and motivations. We judge body language, as it can be contrary to what is said, it can be positive or defensive. Interviewers judge facial expressions and many other clues to assess the quality of the candidate and the truth of their answers.

The Romance

If you are a line manager, and you are going to spend 40-50 hours a week with the person you are going to hire, then you are probably spending a lot more time with that person than your spouse, children or friends.

You don't find a new husband or wife with a checklist. Choosing a new team member is not just about the skills.

In most cases of wrong-hire, it is not the skills, qualifications or experience that were to blame. It is most often issues between people. It is about relationships. It is important that those you chose to join the team, fit with the company culture and ethics. You must find those that can work together towards a common goal. It helps if you like the people you are working with, though being best friends is not essential (and sometimes a negative). The most important thing is that both trust and respect can be achieved.



Many experienced recruiters have developed an excellent "feel" for the interview process. It is a skill, and over time you learn to trust your instincts as well as the structured process. Over the years I would have interviewed thousands of people from all levels of organisations. With that type of database to make comparisons, a recruiter gains great confidence in their ability to identify strengths, weaknesses, relative quality compared to the market and potential issues with candidates. I always tell my recruitment teams that until they have interviewed between 200-500 people from one industry, they don't truly understand the quality of the person they are interviewing in comparison with other professionals in the market.

The interview is a powerful tool in the recruitment process if it is conducted by an experienced professional. The interview process can also be a complete waste of time if conducted poorly.

If your line managers are conducting interviews for key staff, I would highly recommend they learn about their own decision making process, conduct interviews with experienced internal recruiters, or with a recruitment industry professional.

To get the best results out of the recruitment process you must find the balance between Science, Art and Romance

This article was written by Adrian Low, Managing Partner at HRINC.

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