

10 Things You Should Know About Candidates You Interview

By Howard Adamski

Interviewing candidates and gauging their fit for a culture and position is one of the most indispensable tasks you perform before making a hiring decision. Below are ten points in key areas that you should investigate for each candidate you interview:

1. Complete compensation details. Understand exactly how the candidate's current compensation program is structured. This means more than the candidate's base salary; the base salary is just part of the overall package. Be sure that you ask about bonuses; if, how and when they are paid out, stock options or grants that have been awarded. Compile a complete list of benefits and how they are structured and know when the candidate is up for his or her next review, because this can alter cash compensation.
2. Type of commute. Commute is a quality-of-life issue and discussing it is important. A ten-minute commute against traffic is very different than taking the car to a train and having to walk five blocks to the new organization. If the commute to your organization is worse for the candidate than it is in his or her existing job, bring it up and see how the candidate responds. If the commute is better, use it as a selling point. By all means, be sure that you understand the candidate's current commute and how they feel about the new one.
3. The "what they want vs. what they have" differential. Most candidates do not change jobs just for the sake of changing jobs. They change jobs because there are certain things missing in their current position that they believe can be satisfied by the position your organization is offering. This disparity is called the "position differential" and it is the fundamental reason a person changes jobs. Know what this position differential is and you will be able to know if you have what the candidate is looking for. If so, you will be able to develop an intelligent capture strategy when it comes time to close.
4. How they work best. Some candidates work best if left alone, while others work best as part of a team. It is your job to know enough about the organization's philosophy and the way the hiring manager works to see if the candidate will either mesh or grind. Beware of recommending hiring a candidate who does not fit into the current scheme, because, at times, style can be just as important as substance.
5. Overall strengths and weaknesses. Be sure to get some understanding of the candidate's strong points and the candidate's limitations. All of us have strengths and weaknesses (even John Sullivan has weaknesses, but he won't tell me what they are). Our role is to identify them and be able to present them to the hiring manager. Hint: Ask what functions the candidate does not enjoy performing. We are seldom good at things we don't like.
6. What they want in a new position. Everyone wants something. Find out what the candidate wants in a new position. Be sure to do whatever is necessary to get this information. Feel free to pick away during the interviewing process with open-ended questions until you have all of your questions answered. It is difficult to determine whether a given hiring situation has a good chance of working out if you do not know what the candidate is looking for in a new position.
7. Is the candidate interviewing elsewhere? This is big; I don't like surprises and neither do hiring managers. I always ask the candidate what else they have for activity. If the candidate has three other companies they are considering and two offers are arriving in the mail tomorrow, this is absolute need-to-know information. If the hiring manager

wants to make an offer, it's time to advise them as to what the competition looks like and move this deal onto the express lane, fast.

8. What it will take to close the deal. This is a first cousin of #6 above but it is more specific and flavored with a "closing the deal" mentality. #6 relates to what the candidate wants in a new position, but this one quantifies that want. For example, if the candidate wants more money, this is where you will assess how much it will take to close the deal. As another example, while #6 will let you know that the candidate wants to work on different types of projects, this one will tell you exactly what types of projects those are.
9. Can the candidate do the job? Even though, as the recruiter, you might not be able to determine if this is the perfect candidate, you should exit the interview with an opinion as to whether or not the candidate can perform the functions of the position. Furthermore, that opinion must be based upon information that was unveiled during the interviewing process and not just a gut feeling. It has to be based upon what the candidate has successfully accomplished and how that aligns with the needs of the current position. If you can't offer a solid opinion on this one, you need to dig deeper until you have a solid case for why the candidate can or cannot do the job.
10. Will the candidate fit into the culture? Predicting the future is tricky business, but someone has to take a shot at evaluating a candidate's chance for success. Not everyone that is capable of doing the job will have a successful run at the company, because culture does play a role in candidate success. For example, the culture of a buttoned-down insurance company in Boston is very different than the garage culture of a software startup in the valley. If you have a reason to believe that the person is the wrong DNA for an organization, it is imperative that you raise the issue.

There are few things hiring managers or hiring teams value more than solid candidate feedback based upon a well-executed interview. Gather this information and take one more step towards attracting world-class talent.

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