



## 6. Personal Interviews

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# Personal Interviews – How to Handle Being One on One

Perhaps the most important part of the hiring process is the personal interview. Personal interviews are interviews that take place in a more personal setting – one on one with the applicant – and they are both the most informative and the most mistake riddled portion of recruitment.

So what is it about personal interviews that makes them so difficult, and how can you improve your ability to complete the personal interview in order to make sure you're hiring the best candidate?

## Problems With Personal Interviews

Personal interviews are valuable, but imperfect. Part of that perfection is built into the hiring process – you can't exactly put someone to work and see how they do, so no matter what all components of recruitment are going to come up a bit short.

But there are also several mistakes that hiring managers make when they're completing the interview. These are mistakes that could be avoided, but do require a conscientiousness that can be difficult for people to manage. Mistakes include:

- **Biases** - It's very easy for personal interviews to have biases that impact the hiring process. From a person's looks, to their voice, to their mannerisms, there are often things that can sway your opinion of an applicant that go beyond their abilities.
- **Imperfect Questions** - Many personal interviews also tend to lack questions that are focused on whether the person is a great potential hire. Often the questions seem useful, like "how would you handle workplace conflict?" but they may not be targeted to the job or require the person display knowledge of their abilities.
- **Lack of Rapport** - The person you're interviewing also needs to know and trust you too, otherwise they won't feel comfortable. Comfort is an important part of getting the best answers, and if you're unable to create the bond your applicant may be answering in a way that is outside of their personality.
- **Nervousness** - Personal interviews can be hard for people. You're the one with the power, and yet that doesn't mean there isn't something nerve-wracking about knowing you're meeting with a stranger and judging their every move.

The solution to these is simply knowledge. You can't always overcome your biases, ask better questions, generate rapport or prevent nervousness. But if you at least keep them in the back of your mind as potential issues, you can find better ways to address them and can ensure they're not affecting how you hire in a negative way.

## The Right Questions

Personal interviews do need to involve asking the right questions. But defining the right questions can be difficult. Since all industries are different, you need to use your experience. However, generally the best structure is the following:

- **Rapport Questions** - Start with some rapport questions, which are background questions and softball questions so that the person gets off to a good start.
- **Basics** - Ask any of your basic questions that you like. For example, a question about their greatest weaknesses, their education, how they address deadlines, etc. Don't ask too many though, as these are too easy to prepare for and not necessarily informative.

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- **Job Specific** - Now it's time to ask job specific questions. Make sure you're asking questions that recognize job differences. People's previous jobs often differ, so you're really looking to see if they seem like they can learn, and if they understand or can understand the concepts of the job.
- **Critical Thinking Questions** - Remember, not everyone is going to be trained in the job, but may still be someone that can learn. One way to test that is to challenge their intelligence and critical thinking. Ask them curveball questions that really require a thoughtful answer to gauge their intelligence and ability to think on their feet.
- **Closing Questions** - Make sure you close with a few more basic questions and/or follow up on anything they've said. You want to close out on a high note, both because you want them to be excited about the prospect of working for you and because there are often other interviews and you want them to feel hopeful.

It's generally best to mix all of these types of questions, if possible, in a personal interview. Sometimes time constraints make it difficult, but ideally a personal interview needs to be more well-rounded in order to maximize the amount of information that you can get on the applicant and make a better decision.

### Being a Friendly, Confident Interviewer

When you're interviewing, you're also representing the company. You want the person you're interviewing to fear you enough that they think of their answers and don't control the interview, and you want to make sure that you're appearing friendly and representing the company as best you can.

Confidence, friendliness, and stature aren't exactly easy to achieve. It's something you

may need to work on. If it's something you're not comfortable with, try mock interviews.

- Ask a few friends to play the applicant.
- Treat them exactly as you plan to talk to the applicant.
- Have them answer questions honestly.
- Have them provide you feedback when you're done.
- Repeat.

Mock interviews are not a complete substitute for an actual interview, but they are a valuable way to at least get used to the process.

When you meet the applicant, you should also start strong. Make sure that you're talking loudly and confidently within the first seconds of the personal interview. Give a firm handshake, and talk as though you're as confident as you're hoping to be.

### Making the Best of an Interview

Personal interviews are your main opportunity to actually get to know a candidate, and not simply see what they look like on paper. But they need to be completed correctly. It's something that you shouldn't expect to be excellent at right away, but with the right direction and experience, you will be able to ace the personal interview and easily nab the best candidate.

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**Recruit Shop Pty Ltd.**

PO Box 824, North Sydney NSW 2059

ABN: 39 911 832 202