

The Employer's Guide to Effective Interviews

Sarah Sawyer: Welcome to This Week's OK at Work with myself, Sarah Sawyer, and my colleague Russell Berger, both attorneys at Offit Kurman. And today we are talking about interviewing candidates. So obviously interviewing is very different depending on the industry, depending on what your needs are.

There's an art to it, and obviously there's some things you need to be mindful of when you're interviewing. But it can be a really intensive process to try to figure out who you're gonna hire and, how you're gonna interview, who's gonna interview, all of those things.

And depending on if you're in growth mode or where you're at, you might be doing a lot of that. So what are some things that employers need to be considering when they are interviewing candidates that are just kind of pillars of interviewing, Russell, regardless of industry?

Russell Berger: Yeah. Well, because we're lawyers, I'll put this one first, and then we don't have to talk about it the rest of the way. But, don't ask questions that are against the law or [00:01:00] likely to lead to a claim of discrimination. So all the, questions about, you know, protected classifications and, we see it sometimes, the family planning questions.

Um, don't ask those questions because the information you're gonna gather is only gonna lead to someone saying, "Well, I didn't get this job because you asked this question and you got this information. You didn't like the answer, and you discriminated against me." So hard no, stay away from those.

But more generally, I think, it's really important, particularly in the interview process itself to, or leading up to the interview itself to understand what you're actually looking for in terms of the personality and the fit. Obviously you know skills.

And a lot of job postings will say, like, "Proficient in X, Y, and Z," and the person either is or isn't, and that's a pretty black-and-white type question and analysis. That's fine and that's part of it. That's important. But, you should also do the homework to assess like what kind of person or personality types are we looking for in this role?

And, that's not necessarily to [00:02:00] be entirely exclusive but, there's just certain skills that might be important for any specific role. In some roles like, a high degree of resilience. If you're in a sales role, maybe it's extroversion and confidence.

If you're in an internal role, and, in a quality control type role, maybe it's, like that fastidiousness and, quality orientation. There's certain like personality traits that you might decide are more important for certain jobs than others.

And it's more of a fit question than it is a competency question. And you want to try to discern those during the interview process. And one of the things that you can't do or is gonna be ineffective is to just come right out and say hey, this is a sales job. Do you like being around people?

Are you extroverted? 'Cause, the person's got, any sense at all about what the job is they're gonna give you the answers that you wanna hear. And they're just gonna mirror back the leading question. So you don't wanna do that. Instead you wanna ask experiential questions.

You wanna think about what situations might this person have been [00:03:00] in that are similar to this job, and ask them how they've handled it. Tell me about a time when is a good way to open up to storytelling from a candidate being interviewed. And I think you really wanna get the person talking.

And then you wanna listen and ask good follow-up questions.

Sarah Sawyer: Yeah, I think what you're really hitting on, Russell, is that both from a liability perspective and from a getting what you need from a practical perspective is really being helpful in planning ahead. 'Cause it's easy to say, "All right, we just need to move forward.

I need to talk to these people. I'm good at talking to people. I can just get in here and ask people questions and get what I need." But really the more thoughtful you are and the more that you plan ahead of time on what you're looking for the better off you are just to, avoid accidentally doing something that might cause you a challenge down the road, either from a practical or a legal perspective.

But also just so that you can be on the same page. 'Cause sometimes, it's not just one person interviewing, it's multiple people. It might be a team. And you are gonna be, like, looking to check several different boxes to make sure that person is a good fit, as you alluded to.

So the more planning you can [00:04:00] do ahead of time to really have an understanding, obviously have a good job description. And sometimes that changes too through the process, right? So sometimes having those conversations, I think that's another thing is you wanna have that right approach of having some planning, but not being too rigid in the sense that you might get in there and start talking to people about the role, start interviewing candidates and realize, oh, I thought we needed this, but actually now that I'm talking to people and thinking this through and we're interviewing, I think we actually need something different and we need to evolve or change that.

Or maybe the needs of the business evolve during that process, or you find a candidate that maybe checks some boxes you weren't expecting, and maybe that changes the scope of the role. So having the flexibility to be open-minded while also staying tuned in enough to make sure that in these very small windows of time, an hour interview here or, a follow-up interview there, that you're getting enough of what you need from the process.

Russell Berger: Yeah. That's right. You gotta work through the process to learn about the person. And interviewing can sometimes be a balance of both selling the person [00:05:00] on the opportunity and the job that you're offering but it's also gotta be a vetting of, are they competent and are they gonna be a good fit?

Are they gonna make sense in the role that we're offering here?

Sarah Sawyer: Well, thanks, Russell. We'll see you next time.

Russell Berger: Thanks, Sarah.