

Conducting Interviews

Conducting interviews is part of being a manager. As Culkin and Kirsch (1986, p. 118) point out, there are several types of interview that any manager is likely to be involved with at some point.

1. Selection interviews (e.g., to decide which job applicant or candidate for promotion to select).
2. Performance appraisal interviews (e.g., to review with an employee her/his job performance).
3. Counseling interviews (e.g., to assist an employee in dealing with a job-related difficulty).
4. Disciplinary interviews (e.g., to inform an employee of disciplinary action being taken)
5. Exit interviews (e.g., to gather information from an employee who is leaving the organization).

There are a number of considerations that apply to all these interview types.

- Above all else, remember that the interviewer must establish and retain control over the interview. This doesn't mean being bossy or domineering, but it does mean knowing the purpose of the interview, its intended outcomes, and how to achieve them.
- Plan the interview:
 - Have specific objectives (e.g., information to be collected, points to be agreed on).
 - Select a suitable style for the interview (e.g., relaxed or highly structured, formal or informal).
 - Think through the desired sequence of events.
 - Select the topics to be discussed.
- Control the environment in which the interview takes place. If the interview environment is distracting or unbusinesslike, it will be difficult to accomplish the interview's purposes.
 - Avoid interruptions and other distractions as much as possible.
 - For selection, performance appraisal, and exit interviews, a neutral setting (e.g., a meeting or conference room) is usually best. Disciplinary and counseling interviews may also be held in a neutral setting, but are sometimes more effective if held in the supervisor's office to demonstrate authority.
 - Arrangement of furniture should be considered for its psychological effects. Placing a table or desk between participants may create a barrier and can indicate oppositional relationships; no furniture between participants may leave participants feeling exposed and uncomfortable. In any case, participants should be able to maintain eye contact easily and have at least three or four feet distance between them.
- Certain techniques have proved their value in all interview settings.
 - Use the person's name early in the interview and occasionally thereafter.
 - Maintain eye contact with an individual when speaking or listening to her/him.
 - Summarize what has been said and agreed on from time to time. This is especially helpful to prepare a transition from one topic to another.
 - Provide verbal or visual feedback to indicate understanding of what the person says. This may encourage the person to say more or offer additional information.
 - Restate the person's ideas in your own words. There are four reasons to do this (Culkin &

Kirsch, 1986, p. 120):

- To confirm understanding of what the person has said.
- To help the person sort out in her/his own thoughts just what has been said.
- To indicate attention to and concern for what the person has said.
- To stimulate further comments by the other person.
- Acknowledge the person's feelings and emotions. Unless this occurs, it may be very difficult to agree on desired behavior changes or problem solutions.
- Pause from time to time – for between four and six seconds – to prompt further comments by the other person. This is particularly effective when he/she is uncomfortable or reluctant to talk.
- Strike a balance between being friendly and professional. The appropriate balance will depend on the purpose of the interview.
- Observe the other person for signs of nervousness, discomfort, or tension:
 - Failure to maintain eye contact when speaking to you.
 - Narrowing of eyes, especially at corners.
 - “Tightness” at corners of the mouth.
 - Shifting of weight, unexpected hand gestures, jiggling feet, etc.

The Selection Interview

Interviews are among the most important sources of information about applicants because they allow you to observe and interact with applicants directly. To maximize the usefulness of interviews, however, they must be carefully planned. This also allows you to avoid difficulties that can be caused by discrepancies between interview formats and procedures used with different candidates for the same position.

- The following steps should generally be followed when planning selection interviews.
 - Develop an appropriate itinerary to be followed with each interviewee and ensure that everyone who must meet with interviewees (e.g., benefits, payroll) will be available at the scheduled time.
 - Provide each interviewee with relevant information and materials in advance (e.g., copy of the interview itinerary, job description).
 - Use an interview guide to provide structure, ensure adequate attention to significant topics, and consistency across interviews. Write out major questions word for word.
 - When preparing the interview guide, ensure that all questions are *job related*. No questions on the following topics are permitted, directly or indirectly:
 - marital status, names or ages of dependents.
 - spouse's name, age, occupation, or place of employment.
 - national origin, ancestry, or lineage.
 - existing pregnancy or plans for having children.
 - race or color.
 - age (except a general question to determine that the interviewee is *not* a minor when that is relevant).
 - religion.

- Structure the selection interview along the following lines:
 - Open with some brief informal conversation to set the tone and make the interviewee at ease.
 - Explain the interview structure or format to the interviewee.
 - Ensure that the interviewee has the necessary information about the job (e.g., job description including job specifications and qualifications, amount of autonomy, place of job within the overall organization structure, normal working hours, frequency of unusual working hours, travel). In some organizations, you may be expected to provide information on benefits; in others, this will be done by a benefits specialist. You may also be expected to discuss salary ranges.
 - Using the interview guide, ask questions and collect information from interviewee. Follow up on interviewee's answers as appropriate and time allows.
 - Invite the interviewee to ask questions.
 - End the interview by summarizing the next steps in the selection process, including an intended decision date and roughly when the interviewee is likely to hear from the organization.
- During the interview, make brief notes that will jog your memory later. This keeps your attention on the interviewee and does not distract the interviewee while answering your questions. Once the interview is over, return to your notes and rewrite them, expanding on your observations. Try to be as specific as possible when identifying strengths and weaknesses, including evidence.
- Do not rate applicants during an interview and avoid making comparisons among applicants. Wait until all interviews have been completed. Doing this helps minimize the inevitable contrast effects, that is, the tendency to assess one applicant based on the contrast with preceding applicants. Each applicant should be evaluated on her/his own merits.

Reference:

Culkin, D. F., & Kirsch, S. L. (1986). *Managing human resources in recreation, parks, and leisure services*. New York: Macmillan.