

CHAPTER V: HIRING AND EMPLOYMENT GUIDELINES

Section I: The Role of the Director

It is necessary for Conservation District directors to be aware of their responsibilities as employers. It is the Director's responsibility to ensure that every employee of the District has a position description that outlines the duties and responsibilities associated with that position. Directors are also responsible for giving District staff employee evaluations based on those descriptions. Not only are Directors responsible for position descriptions, but they are also responsible for employee salaries, morale, and the longevity of an employee's position.

Directors must fulfill their obligations to their employees. Their decisions affect large segments of the population and extend well beyond the boundaries of individual farms and forestlands. The District will not be able to effectively carry out the Board's vision unless Directors take it upon themselves to play an active role in providing oversight and supervision to their staff and technical workers.

Section II: Recruitment

Recruitment is the process of locating and hiring employees. It is the most important part of building a good Conservation District program. Individuals with the right qualifications will develop into high quality employees. Recruitment is a complex process. Interviews should not be used as the only source of selection and should only be used to narrow down the final selection list. Some combination of the following selection methods is most commonly used:

- References and recommendations.
- Application banks/resumes
- Interviews

Cooperating agencies can be helpful in assisting the Conservation District in selecting District employees. The new employee will be expected to work with and be accepted by the local cooperating agencies.

Because of state and national laws, it is important that correct selection procedures be followed. Review section 701 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 for guidance. It is also important that Conservation District Directors do the following:

1. Develop a job description, work agreement, and individual development plan for new employees.
2. Initiate and participate in the employee selection process.
3. Provide a realistic job preview to an applicant for the Conservation District employee position before the job offer has been accepted. A realistic job preview should include the disadvantages as well as the advantages of the position. See *Appendix D* for Sample Vacancy Announcement.

Section III: Position Descriptions

Position descriptions are important to outline the duties and responsibilities of the District employee and set the basic framework for his/her operations. They also provide for a smooth transition from one employee to another. District employees are encouraged to keep position descriptions updated and current to the point where they accurately reflect their duties and responsibilities. District directors should review position descriptions with their employees at least annually.

In Conservation Districts, there are two basic types of positions: technical positions and administrative positions. In some situations, technical positions are dependent upon the specific grants that the District may have been awarded, and the position description is usually defined within the terms of the grant. Administrative positions, however, are usually more concrete in that the duties and responsibilities of the administrative staff are derived from the needs of the District as outlined in the District's Resource Assessment Plan.

As part of a Director's responsibility as an employer, the development of position descriptions for administrative staff is vital. The following is a checklist that Directors should use for developing both administrative and technical position descriptions:

1. Complete a workload analysis.
2. Develop a list of items or duties to be accomplished by this position.
3. List the skills and abilities necessary to perform the duties of the position.
4. Assign responsibility for writing the position description.
 - a. Check with partner agencies for position descriptions that may be similar for reference and guidance.
5. Define title and purpose of the position, and where job is to be performed.
6. Identify who will provide supervision of the position (i.e. Chair of Operations)
7. Clarify how employee will be evaluated and by whom.
 - a. Establish when the performance reviews are to take place.
8. Provide copies to the full CD board for approval.
9. Provide a copy to the funding source when requested.
10. Develop objective performance standards in qualitative and quantitative terms.
11. Each position duty should have a corresponding performance standard.
12. Standards should be reviewed and agreed to by the District Board of Supervisors.

The following format outlines what a professional position description may look like:

TITLE: The title should be based on the function of the position. This title may vary from Office Manager, District Secretary, and Education Coordinator, all depending on the need that has been identified.

INTRODUCTION: The introduction section should reflect broad general functional areas of the position for the District (e.g., clerical).

DUTIES & RESPONSIBILITIES: This section should lay out, in broad terms, the duties and responsibilities of the position. The tasks should be unique to this position and should not reflect detailed action.

SUPERVISION: This statement clarifies that the District supervisors shall have oversight of the District employee.

CIVIL RIGHTS REQUIREMENTS: Delivery of programs and services is carried out without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age or handicap.

PERFORMANCE REVIEW: This section states who does the performance evaluation of this position, what is evaluated, and when.

(For Examples of both Administrative and Technical Position Descriptions, *See Appendix D*)

Section IV: Personnel Policies

A personnel policy should provide both information on the District's current employment policies and provide insight to the benefits and responsibilities of being an employee. A personnel policy is not a contract. To be useful, it should be reviewed on a regular basis and revised or modified as necessary.

However it is imperative that the District define each of the different types of employment that the District provides; Temporary workers, Contract Workers, Part-time employees, and Full-time employees. This allows the District to set personnel policies uniquely suited to the various types of employment that the District utilizes.

It is necessary for the District to utilize a written work agreement in articulating the specific and unique benefits, rights, and privileges that each different class of employee is entitled in addition to the standard position duties and responsibilities. It is important to note that while it is up to the District's discretion to frame policy, the policy must be consistent with state and federal labor laws.

In general, there are two types of personnel policies: "Just Cause and At Will." While everything else may remain the same, the essential difference is that an "At Will" policy permits either party, employer or employee, to end the employment relationship at either one's discretion with or without cause. A "Just Cause" policy, as its name indicates, provides that the employer must have good reason for the termination of an employment relationship and provides a procedure for progressive discipline of an employee.

Most Districts operate under a "Just Cause policy." Whatever policy the board decides upon, it is imperative that all members have an understanding of its content and purpose. To view an example of both policies, see *Appendix D*.

Section V: Employee Orientation

Conservation District employees can be expected to be proficient with technical and people skills as well as having the ability to work with independently. It is, however, unrealistic to expect new employees to be completely productive and effective under new and unfamiliar conditions. Some time must be allowed to let the employee become acquainted with the operations of the District and the program they are serving. As such, newly hired employees cannot be expected to immediately understand how to provide high quality, efficient service to the District without an orientation process.

New employee orientation should be provided within the first week of the employee's start date. If no Conservation District staff is available to conduct this orientation, a District Director must provide, at a minimum, the following information:

- Work schedule.
- District pay period calendar.
- Information on the District field office (work stations and equipment, parking, security procedures, etc.)
- District travel and training procedures
- Additional written work rules, policies and procedures unique to the District not included in the Operations Manual.

District employees are hired, and their workload is defined, by District Directors.

Section VI: District Employment Guidelines

Conservation Districts should adopt staff employment policies. The following guidelines must be considered in developing policies:

- Duties of employees must be listed in order of importance.
- Wages must be paid on a regular schedule, at least bi-weekly.
- In some cases the rate of pay is stipulated by a Grant. In cases where it is not, salary must be commensurate with experience, degree, or responsibility and comparable with rates paid by other units of government for similar duties.
- Hours of full-time employees must coincide with regular District office hours, although exceptions should be made for weekend and evening activities.

Section VII: Written Work Agreement

This agreement must be developed between the District and employee to eliminate confusion about conditions of employment and duties. The agreement should include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. A statement affirming the District policy of nondiscrimination by race, creed, height, weight, color, religion, age, or sex in appointments, promotions, compensation, or other actions affecting employees of the District.

Example: "The Conservation District, an Equal Opportunity Employer, complies with applicable federal and state laws prohibiting discrimination. It is the policy of the Conservation District that no person, on the basis of race, sex, height, weight, color, religion, national origin or ancestry, age, marital status, disability, or Vietnam-era veteran status, shall be discriminated against in employment or promotions."

2. A list of duties that employee is expected to perform.
3. Salary rate and schedule and fringe benefits. (Note: Conservation Districts are subject to minimum wage laws.)
4. Working hours and breaks.
5. Disciplinary Procedures
6. A review by the District board. This review should be made annually with the employee. New employees should be reviewed at shorter intervals, typically 3 and 6 months.

(See *Appendix D* for Sample Written Work Agreement)

Section VIII: Employee Evaluations

Employee evaluations are important for the board and employee. They are very useful tools to open communications about job performance, work priorities, and areas where duties may be expanded or improved. The employee evaluation also serves as a concise report of the employee's annual activities to the board. An evaluation is the process by which an employer critiques, grades and scores an employee's general overall performance.

A system of evaluation of the Conservation District employees should be established within the District and the Conservation District employee should be evaluated at least yearly. NOTE: New employees need to be evaluated more frequently and at least every ninety days during their Orientation Period. There are two different types of evaluations:

Informal Evaluation: This process takes place daily or whenever the employer has contact with the employee. It may even be subconscious. The individual employee's appearance, mannerisms and attitudes are evaluated and make up the basis for the employer's general feelings towards the employee. This informal evaluation often includes criteria not agreed upon or included in the formal performance appraisal and it often includes personal characteristics and values, which should not be evaluated. These personal characteristics often make up the style or individuality of the employee, which an employer should not attempt to change. Many times the informal evaluation has a great impact on the employer and employee.

If the employee makes a bad impression with the employer, it is often impossible for that employee; no matter how good their actual work performance, to meet the expectations of the employer. Conversely, if an employee makes a favorable personal impression, substandard performance may be overlooked.

This informal evaluation process is a "two-way street." The employees also evaluate the employers. The employees are asking themselves, "How am I treated?" "Is my opinion respected?" "Am I getting paid what I feel my time is worth?" "Does my employer understand my needs?" If the employees are dissatisfied with the answers to these questions and others, they could be dissatisfied with their job and their work output may reflect this dissatisfaction.

Formal Evaluation: The formal evaluation process helps to objectively quantify and qualify many of the informal evaluations that take place. It also helps to clarify those characteristics the employer has a right to question. The formal evaluation lessens the impact of the informal evaluation and it also encourages the employer and employee to identify and discuss strengths and areas needing improvement. The goal of the formal evaluation process is to set up open communication between the employer and employee that allows employees to know how their work is perceived and how they are performing based on predetermined criteria. It encourages growth of the employee and a better understanding of employer's responsibilities to their employees. For a formal Employee Evaluation Template, see *Appendix D*.

Section IX: Employee Supervision

Supervision is the process of directing and inspecting the performance of employees. Good supervision consists of the following as a minimum:

1. Clear direction as to what is expected of the employee in regard to all aspects of the job, including personal conduct, interaction with the public and fellow workers, quantity and quality of work.
2. Regular feedback on performance, indicating good work and also where improvement is needed.
3. Demonstration of personal concern, fairness and respect for the employee.

While an employee is ultimately hired by the Conservation District, the employee must often work under the guidelines of an overseeing agency or funding source (i.e. MDEQ, MDNR, grants, etc.) which at times may be a source of confusion. It is important that District staff understand clearly the proper chain of command with the Director as the employer and the administrator as staff supervisor.

Section X: Employee Discipline

It is the role of the Director and the Administrator to ensure that the employees of the District maintain professionalism and perform at their best. In the event that Disciplinary action is necessary to address performance or behavioral problems with the employee, the following steps are recommended.

Verbal Warning

A verbal warning issued immediately following an offense, can be a successful tool in correcting undesirable behavior. To ensure the effectiveness of using a verbal warning, incorporate the following steps:

- Discuss the matter in a setting that is both comfortable and private.
- Be clear that the conversation is an official disciplinary action.
- Specifically target the behavior/performance that is being addressed.
- Remind the employee of the rules and behavioral requirements pertinent to the matter at hand.
- Outline the consequences of repeated offenses.

Written Warning

If a verbal warning has already been issued and the performance or behavior problems persists, a written warning may be effective. Please see *Appendix D* for an example Letter of Warning.

Suspension without Pay

Typically, the next stage in progressive discipline after a written warning, this action may be taken. The terms and conditions of the suspension are to be at the discretion of the Director.

Section XI: Staff Board Liaison

A member of the District board should be designated as the contact (liaison) person for employees and immediate supervisor. In addition, the liaison should keep the District board apprised of the employee's progress or effectiveness as well as any employment situation that may need attention. Performance reviews should be conducted by the personnel liaison and the supervisor and take place outside the context of a public board meeting or a closed session.

Section XII: Legal Requirements

By law, a District must provide all employees with Workers' Compensation, unemployment compensation insurance, and a surety bond, if the employee is entrusted with district funds and/or equipment. Provisions must be made for deductions of state and federal income taxes.

Section XIII: Compensatory Time

Under the Federal Fair Labor Standards Act, compensatory time or overtime pay is granted according to the following guidelines. (Caution: these guidelines are subject to interpretation by the federal Department of Labor). For a guide of the Fair Labor Standards Act, visit <http://www.dol.gov/elaws/flsa.htm>.

1. It is strongly encouraged that for each Grant a District receives, Job Descriptions should be created in accordance to the Grant. These Job Descriptions should then be submitted to the Department of Labor for review. If the Grant is a State Grant, then the job Descriptions should be submitted to the Michigan Department of Labor. If the Grant is a Federal Grant then the Job Descriptions should be submitted to the United States Department of Labor. Other duties as assigned should be reflected in the work agreement.
2. If the position is a professional position, meaning that the requirements for the position are a four-year degree or experience equivalent and the nature of the position (based on the job description) is professional where the individual uses independent judgment in decision making or providing recommendations, then the position is eligible for the compensatory time on an hour-for-hour basis. NOTE: Most Districts provide for a 1 to 1 compensation for those not covered by the Act. Districts may do this if they so desire, but they are not obligated under the law to do this.
3. If the position does not require a degree or experience equivalent, and the job description does not require the individual to use independent judgment, meaning they work entirely under the technical direction of another individual, then the position is eligible for compensatory time **or** overtime pay at the rate of one and one-half hours for each hour of overtime. If the position is eligible for the one and one-half times rate, it must be specified in the working agreement if this is going to be given as time or pay.
4. Limits on accumulation and use of compensatory time within a certain time period may be set by the District and defined within the working agreement.
5. A flex schedule is allowable. For an individual who falls within the guidelines of (2) above, then a flex schedule of 44 hours one week and 36 the next is allowable, as would any combination of hours to equal 80. If the individual falls within the guidelines described in (3) above, then a flex schedule is allowable; however, any hours worked over 40 within one week must be compensated for at the one and one-half times rate. Again, these arrangements must be described within the working agreement.
6. If the individual falls within the guidelines of (3), you may avoid compensating at the one and one-half times rate by requiring no work over 40 hours per week and allowing for shift of time during a 40 hour week. For example, if the individual works 2 hours extra one day, they must take off 2 hours some time during the 40 hour week. This will allow for compensation on an hour-for-hour basis. This arrangement must be described in the working agreement.

7. If an individual feels they are not being adequately compensated for overtime worked, they may make an appeal to the federal Department of Labor under the Fair Labor Standards Act. An investigation will determine if the individual was justly compensated, based upon the requirements for the position and the type of work performed by the position. If the District is found to have undercompensated the individual, any additional time that should have been given to the employee could be reimbursed at the rate of "treble damages," that is, three times what was otherwise owed.

Section XIV: Fringe Benefits

Full-time employees typically receive:

1. Overtime pay for those employees covered by the Federal Fair Labor Standards Act who work in excess of 40 hours per week. Those employees not covered by the Act are not entitled to any premium compensation. NOTE: Most Districts provide for a 1 to 1 compensation for those not covered by the Act. Districts may do this if they so desire, but they are not obligated under the law.
2. Reimbursement for mileage for personal car used on District business.
3. Paid vacation time based on length of employment.
4. Accumulated sick leave to a desired maximum.
5. Health insurance assistance.
6. Paid holidays are the decision of the Board.
7. Social Security coverage for those contributing Districts. Districts not enrolled may wish to consider doing so as a benefit to the employee.
8. Consideration for a retirement program.

Regular part-time employees typically receive:

1. Social Security coverage.
2. Mileage reimbursement.
Vacation and sick leave proportionate to full time (40 hours a week).

Section XV: Interviewing Guide

It is extremely important for a Conservation District to find the right person for the job. This is the most important decision a board can make for the success of a program. Districts are faced with this critical task with an ever-increasing frequency. It is imperative that Districts are fair and objective in hiring of staff. Not doing so is illegal and precludes the District from finding the most qualified person to fill the job. The following is intended to assist Districts in conducting interviews that aid in making the best selection based on job-related questions.

The Interview

An interview is the part of the selection process in which agency personnel meet with an applicant to exchange information about a job and the applicant's qualifications for the job. In its narrowest sense, it includes only the personal discussion, and not the applicant's resume and references that are equally as important.

However, the interview process normally involves correspondence or telephone contacts with applicants, which also provide opportunities for exchange of job or qualification information. Therefore, many of the principles applicable to the interview are equally pertinent to the other steps of the process. Care must be taken to assure that the job information provided to the applicant is not presented in a way that might discourage otherwise qualified applicants. The interview, and arrangements for it, is part of the selection process. Therefore, the process must provide for a fair and objective evaluation of the applicant's qualifications for the job.

The Pre-Interview Contact

The purpose of the pre-interview contact, in addition to providing for the scheduling of an interview, is to also supply the applicant with enough basic information about the job to permit the applicant to decide whether an interview will be mutually beneficial. If a written interview invitation is used, this basic information should be included on the correspondence to the applicant whenever possible. Suggested items to be included are:

1. Name of job (class title).
2. Beginning pay rate.
3. Work shift hours and schedule.
4. Location of work site.

5. Qualifications or any special requirements.
6. Short description of duties.
7. Person to contact for interview arrangements.
8. Other information helpful to an applicant deciding whether to request an interview.

Timing and Method of Contacts

Although there often may be a need to fill a position promptly, consideration should be given to the needs of applicants to arrange their schedules. When a written invitation to interview is used, a reply time of not less than 5 days should be allowed, whenever possible. Use of a written interview invitation is encouraged, if possible. In some instances however, the only practical method of contacting applicants may be by telephone. Telephone contacts are acceptable, provided a reasonable effort is made to contact eligible applicants. A single attempt to reach an applicant during the normal hours of 8 to 5 would not justify removal of an applicant's name for failure to respond.

If repeated attempts to reach an applicant by telephone are unsuccessful (especially if the attempts were made at various times on more than a single day, including efforts beyond normal working hours), it is reasonable to request that the person be eliminated from consideration for the specific position being filled. It is best to keep a record of the attempted telephone contacts, including dates and times called, in case there are any claims by applicants that they were not given consideration for a position.

Planning for the Interview

The persons who will conduct the interviews should be sufficiently familiar with the job to list the skills and knowledge needed for successful performance. It might be helpful to the interview to separate these into the following categories:

1. Those that are desirable but may not be absolutely essential.
2. Those that are critical to acceptable performance.
3. Those that are not only critical but for which a high degree of the trait is important for top quality.

In preparing such a list, both the position description and class specifications may be an aid to listing the required characteristics. An additional source for identifying the characteristics of a specific position could be the previous orientation period service rating factors, if relatively recent and available.

Employment Consideration Legalities

Recent court decisions have defined some specific areas that must clearly be avoided in making the hiring decision. Questions in these areas are generally illegal:

1. **Citizenship** - You may ask whether an applicant has appropriate legal status to work in the U.S. You may not ask of what country the applicant is a citizen.
2. **Political Beliefs, Race, and Religion** - The Civil Rights Acts of 1964, as amended, the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972, and the Constitution of the State of Michigan prohibits consideration of these factors in making the hiring decision.
3. **Age** - You may ask if an individual is 18 years or older. You may not ask the person's age or date of birth. If an individual is at least 18, age cannot be a consideration in whether or not to hire, except where a minimum age is part of the job specification.
4. **Arrests** - You may not ask about arrest records. Arrest without conviction does not prove any wrongdoing. Any assumption that an individual who has been arrested is guilty of wrongdoing is unfair, unfounded, and unconstitutional.
5. **Marital Status, Number of Children, and Family Planning** - You may not ask questions related to these subjects.
6. **Stigma** - You cannot refuse to hire someone on the grounds that, in your judgment, they may not be accepted by customers, clients, or co-workers because of a deformity, disability, race, height, weight, sex, or age.
7. **Type of Military Discharge** - You cannot refuse to hire an individual who has received a discharge that was other than honorable.
8. **Institutional Grounds Confinement** - You cannot refuse to hire on the grounds that an individual was confined to a correctional or a rehabilitation institution or that the individual is or was under the care of a doctor for physical or psychological therapy.
9. **Friends or Relatives** - Policies of employing only one marriage partner in an agency are held by EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Council) to have a discriminatory effect on employing women. You should not refuse to hire individuals on the basis of their having friends or relatives already employed in the agency. However, close relatives working in an employee-supervisory relationship may not be desirable. Remember that this section is concerned with areas that are illegal to consider in the interview. Ask yourself if the questions you ask are necessary to find out whether the person can do the job. If not, do not ask those questions. For

example, you may not ask the interviewees how many dependents they have since this information has nothing to do with the ability to perform the duties of a position. However, once an individual is hired, this information would be needed for health insurance purposes.

Legitimacy of Considerations

The following areas may be included in the interview if they have been shown to be requirements for successful performance on the job. This would mean that they would be part of the minimum qualifications and specifically listed in the class specification. Consideration of any of the following factors when they are not directly related to the job may result in charges of discrimination:

1. A requirement of a professional license that is not directly related to the job is discriminatory. This would also apply to other kinds of education and/or experience requirements.
2. An interviewer may not refuse to consider for hiring a visually or physically disabled person unless it can be shown that the disability would prevent the person from performing the duties of the position. A disabled person should not be discriminated against because of architectural or work barriers that can be changed. For example, a ramp can be constructed or files changed so they are accessible from a wheelchair.
3. Questions about convictions for criminal offenses should be avoided where possible. They can only enter into hiring decisions when shown to be related to job performance. Note the distinction between arrest records that prove nothing (their use is clearly illegal) and convictions, which may be valid barriers to employment for certain positions.
4. Saturday/Sunday work requirements may serve to discriminate against certain religious denominations. Employers are obligated to make reasonable accommodations for the religious needs of employees.
5. Questions about mobility, job location, and travel may serve to discriminate against women, older workers, or the disabled.
6. Inquiries concerning presence of, or treatment for, disease should be avoided. You may ask about communicable diseases. Speculation about potential use of sick leave or health insurance benefits may never be considered.
7. Minimum height or weight requirements for employment, where such requirements are not related to the job, have the effect of excluding higher percentages of women and certain minority groups, i.e., Hispanic and Asian.
8. Discrimination based on sex is clearly illegal in interviewing for most positions. Only in extremely rare cases can sex be considered job related. For example, selective certification on the basis of sex may be acceptable for some correctional or mental health treatment positions. Sex must be proven to be job related if it is to be an element of the selection process.
9. Normally, a person's credit record or garnishment record should not enter into the interview. In those cases where bonding is a prerequisite to hiring, such questions may be appropriate.
10. Requirement of a driver's license or the use of one's own car may be considered to be discriminatory against young or physically disabled persons, unless it can be shown to be necessary to perform the duties of a position.
11. English fluency may not be a consideration unless it is proven necessary for the job.

Other Barriers to Fair Employment

A good interviewer must be aware of other kinds of issues. We have discussed some factors that must be job related, and others that are also illegal, but there are other considerations that are even more difficult to handle. Subtle personal biases and the personal interaction that occurs between interviewer and interviewee are critical factors in an interview.

- **Personal Biases** - Interviewers sometimes go into an interview with stereotyped ideas about people who are "different" from themselves. This type of prejudgment immediately establishes monumental hiring barriers. Regardless of how faulty the reasoning and unfair the result, these kinds of obstacles are the most difficult to deal with because they are difficult to identify and prove. People involved in interviewing have a responsibility to be aware of any personal attitudes they may have that will affect their objectivity. Try to view these attitudes as obstacles to good interviewing and work to overcome them. It is normal to form a general opinion about an individual in a very short time. An interviewer must continue to make judgments throughout the interview rather than rely on initial impressions.
- **Perpetuation of Discrimination Through Over Reliance on Past Employment History** - There are certain aspects of a person's employment history that have traditionally been viewed as negative. Rejection based solely upon these factors can represent an unfair and discriminatory hiring barrier. Included here are traditional "performance indicators" obtained through job history analysis such as absenteeism, job turnover, periods of unemployment, and under-employment.

Every interview is different, and you must use your own judgment in determining what will be “key factors” in a particular hiring decision. Strive to base your hiring decisions on the interviewee’s actual skills and abilities. You should consider the following possibilities before assuming that a particular employment history indicates a lack of ambition or talent:

1. Younger workers are usually the first to be laid off in slack times.
2. Job dissatisfaction and turnover may have been caused by discriminatory practices of past employers.
3. Older workers may have been forced into “early retirement” without regard to skills or abilities.
4. Workers may have been unemployed because of obsolete skills, when all they needed was minimum job restructuring or retraining.
5. Capable people who have been convicted of a crime, or institutionalized with mental disabilities, may have had a long period of unemployment.
6. People may have been unemployed or under-employed because of the economy.
7. Women, who have chosen to raise a family and not enter the work force for an extended period of time, may have been unemployed or under-employed.

A related subject is the use of questions about “career plans” in the interview. The common assumption is that an individual’s career plan indicates something about initiative or ambition. Initiative and ambition are not seen the same by everyone. Career planning questions may be viewed as an affront to women returning to the labor market after having raised a family; a young person may not have thought about career planning; an older person may be embarrassed by the topic. The connection between these ill-defined concepts and an interviewee’s description of plans for the future is questionable. Since career planning has no proven relationship to a person’s ability to perform most jobs, it should probably not be used.

Conducting the Interview

Deciding how to ask questions is just as important as deciding what questions to ask. The way you begin the interview will set the tone for what is to follow. Your first comments should be designed to establish an atmosphere in which the interviewee is comfortable and feels able to converse freely.

After the interviewee is relaxed, you can begin to discuss the position and to ask the questions that will give you the information you need to make a hiring decision. The specific questions will vary depending upon the requirements of the job and what you already know about the interviewee. You should frame questions in a way that will stimulate the individual to talk. There are two general approaches to asking questions:

Direct questions. Direct questions must be used to obtain factual information such as, “What college did you attend?” or “How long have you been working as a stenographer?”

The misuse of direct questioning can distort your assessment of the individual you are interviewing. For example, if you want to find out about the interviewee’s “attitude” toward working with numbers for a clerical job which requires this work, you might say: (*Direct*) “You do like to work with numbers, don’t you?” The misused direct question tends to elicit a “yes - no” response from an interviewee. As asked above, it will probably get you a “yes” when the interviewee’s attitude may be very different. (*Open-end*) “How do you feel about working with numbers?”

Open-end questions. The open-end questions are more likely to stimulate the interviewee to talk a bit more about attitudes. Therefore, to obtain such information, the questions should be rephrased. Some other examples of open-end questions you may find useful are:

1. What did you like most about your last job?
2. What part of your previous jobs did you have the most trouble learning?
3. What jobs have you liked the least, and why?
4. If we hired you, what do you think you would like most about the job?
5. This agency’s major concern is natural resource conservation; how do you think you can contribute to our goal?

Besides questions, there are other sources of information that are available to you during the interview. Sometimes an interviewee may digress in response to a question. This digression may lead you into areas of discussion that you may not have thought of before and that may be very helpful in assessing the interviewee’s ability to perform successfully. Don’t always cut them off immediately, but see where the discussion is going first.

There may be situations in which you will have to ask questions even though the interviewee seems nervous about discussing that topic. As long as the topic is job related, you should not hesitate to try to find out what you need to know to make a hiring decision. Almost everyone wants to look as good as possible and people may embellish on their

experience and ability almost unconsciously. If you need to probe for negative or more factual information, do so as long as the topic is job related. If the interviewee seems upset by this, you should explain that a fair evaluation depends on your being sure of everyone's abilities and knowledge, and that you need clarification.

The timing of your questions is also important to maintaining a relaxed atmosphere where information can be easily exchanged. For example, it may be appropriate to ask interviewees about transportation arrangements for getting to work. With a physically disabled individual this should not be your first area of questioning. It is more relevant and certainly more tactful to first explore the basic qualifications for the job.

Listening to the Answers

You must be able to listen as well as talk. In order to listen, you must concentrate on what the interviewee is saying.

1. Do not think about the previous or next interviewee while the present interviewee is talking.
2. Do not think about the next question while the interviewee is answering.
3. Do not make up your mind about the interviewee before the interview is over.
4. Do not conduct the interview in a busy, noisy office. Instead, find a relaxed and comfortable environment that will facilitate your ability to concentrate.

To be fair and objective as part of the selection process, an interview must have meaning. If you do not listen carefully, you are wasting your time and the interviewee's time. More importantly, you are not carrying out your part of the selection process.

Interview Follow-Up

Good interviewers should let interviewees know the results of their interview. Many times the simple fact of having been interviewed sets up expectations on the part of the interviewee. They may even make some tentative career decisions based on these expectations. It is a good personnel practice, as well as common courtesy, to inform interviewees when they are not selected. Where possible, each interviewee should be sent a personal letter. No matter how it is done, the point is that you have an obligation to people you have interviewed to notify them of the results of their performance in this step of the selection process. In such instances, when proper interview follow-up does not occur, applicants are left with a poor image of the District as an employer.

Interview Summary

The interview is one of the most critical points in the selection process. This section has been developed to help improve that process by providing suggestions for making it meaningful and job related. Although a fundamental reason for this section is to foster selection of applicants using job-related criteria, another important reason for its development is to improve the manner in which applicants are treated in the interview process.

Section XIV: Mandatory State and Federal Employment Posters

If you are a Michigan employer, State and Federal labor regulations require you to post appropriate legal notices in conspicuous places within your business establishment.

Failure to Post the Above Notices in Conformity With State and Federal Laws May Result in Substantial Civil or Criminal Penalties.

Information regarding these posters and the accompanying state and federal regulations are available by contacting: State of Michigan Department of Energy, Labor, and Economic Growth Telephone: (517) 335-0400 Website: http://www.michigan.gov/dleg/0,1607,7-154-27673_32352-42129--,00.html