

How To Interview & Assess Candidates Effectively

~ Sami L. Barry & Wesley R. Miller

The war for talent has clearly penetrated the architecture, engineering and construction (A/E/C) and facilities management sectors. Therefore, candidates are not the only ones who need to make good impressions during interviews. It is also critical for hiring managers to understand the interview process, how to effectively interview candidates and how to “sell” them on their organizations and the opportunities they offer.

As a hiring manager, the impression you make upon candidates directly correlates to your company’s ability to hire high-caliber professionals. Helbling & Associates’ executive search consultants prepare our client organizations for hundreds of interviews with candidates each year. From our experiences, we have developed recommendations for improving your interview process and enhancing your ability to attract and secure the talented professionals your organization needs for continued growth and success in this highly competitive marketplace.

Preparing for interviews: Know what you want in an ideal candidate and understand how to assess those qualities.

Ensure that you have clearly defined the position, determining responsibilities, performance expectations, and the experience and technical competencies of ideal candidates.

Develop the position’s short- and long-term objectives which should support the department’s and the organization’s overall goals.

Assess your company’s culture and determine its ideal employee cultural and attitudinal fit. This includes benchmarking traits of your high and low performers. (Read [The Importance of Cultural Fit](#) and [How To Hire For Attitude & Cultural Fit](#)).

Develop standard questions that will be asked of candidates. Asking the same questions will allow for an accurate comparison. These questions should address candidates’:

- experience and technical competencies
- short- and long-term career goals
- intangibles such as leadership mentality, how they promote team development and how they approach knowledge transfer
- personality characteristics
- criteria on which they are evaluating your company and the role

Create a scoring sheet of how candidates will be assessed on the above.

Review resumes thoroughly and prepare specific questions pertaining to each candidate’s background that will be asked in addition to the standard set of questions.

When scheduling interviews, limit them to three to five per day. Interviewers tend to provide and gather less information when they have conducted too many meetings in a given time period. Also, make sure to schedule interviews during optimal times so that energy levels remain positive.



If there are multiple interviewers, develop an interview structure so that all meetings are performed in the same manner. Otherwise, various interviewing styles will lead to different assessments of the same candidate and results will be less reliable. Interviewers should be prepared to represent your organization consistently regarding: its corporate culture, short- and long-term goals, advancement opportunities and other pertinent issues. Providing similar information will show that there is good internal communication and that objectives are known and shared by all. The first individual to interview candidates can provide a brief summary of company history and growth and detailed information about the position (reporting relationships, potential for advancement, how the position is related to the entire company and how it is instrumental to the company's success).

Schedule significant uninterrupted time for all decision-makers to be available throughout the interviewing process.

Develop a formal interview feedback process that will be followed by all interviewers.

During an interview: Listen and observe first, and “sell” your organization and its opportunity last

Always begin an interview on a personal note. This will help the candidate relax and give you a truer representation of their personality.

You may want to start by outlining how the interview will be conducted. Doing so will put the candidate at ease and there will be less anxiety and intimidation.

As an interviewer, the most important thing you can do is listen to a candidate and observe their body language. Analyze their responses and movements, and notice their energy level, communication skills and the details of what they are saying. Be alert to the tone, speed, and length of their responses.

Consider:

- Are they confident or concerned?
- Do they seem to offer “prepared” or “canned” answers or are they truly thinking about their responses?
- Does your opportunity support their career goals?
- Do they view themselves objectively and are they self-critical in a positive way? These attributes are correlated with their emotional intelligence which is an attractive attribute in today's talent market. (Read [Emotional Intelligence](#) blog.)

Do not make any judgments or opinions for at least 30 minutes. First impression decisions made quickly tend to be based upon personal biases, presentation, chemistry and stereotypes. These abrupt opinions distract from learning a candidate's real experiences, talents and abilities, and can cause costly hiring errors.

If there are multiple team members present in the interview, take turns asking questions so that the candidate can develop a rapport with each individual.

At the appropriate time, address the extraneous intangibles of each candidate such as: commute time, children/schools, leisure activities that may affect schedule, and their spouse's/significant other's support of a career change. Be careful to ask these questions within legal parameters.

Observing Body Language

- ➔ If the candidate is confident, genuinely interested and engaged, they will exhibit good posture by leaning slightly forward in their chair.
- ➔ Fidgeting may indicate that the candidate is nervous or lacks confidence and self-esteem. If they touch their face or lips, they may not be communicating honestly.

Textual Analysis Of Candidate Responses

In one of its recent studies, Leadership IQ, a global leadership training and research firm, performed textual analysis research to assess the differences in language usage between high performers and low performers. In general, results included:

- ➔ High performers will talk about themselves and what they did in first person pronouns (I, me, we). Low performers will talk more in second and third person language, using more third person pronouns (he, she, they).
- ➔ When asked about a past experience, high performers will tell you about a past experience and will use past tense. However, low performers will say more things about what they are presently doing or what they will do (future tense).
- ➔ High performers are more likely to provide answers without qualifiers. Their answers are direct, factual, in past tense and personal. Low performers are more likely to qualify their answers as they might use adverbs to make their answers seem better.

How to differentiate and “sell” your organization and its opportunity

After all questions are asked of a candidate, now is the time to “sell” your organization and its opportunity. Be aware of your own energy level, be convincingly enthusiastic and keep in mind that highly-qualified candidates will probably be interviewing with other companies and will need to be attracted.

Make the candidate feel special and show your excitement about the potential for them to join your team.

Describe the role as an opportunity and not just as a position with responsibilities. Elaborate on how it impacts the department and entire organization.

Be honest about the challenges of the role. Candidates respect honesty as they know every company has areas that need improvement.

Outline how the role is incentivized and its bonus structure.

Discuss the organization’s:

- Financial status and profitability
- Ability to differentiate itself from the competition
- Planned growth strategies
- Structure and the opportunity for advancement
- Succession planning
- Corporate culture
- Growth opportunities and any unique training offered
- Special benefits (i.e. 401k matching, paid time off, flexible work hours)

Think about why you enjoy working there and express that to the candidate.

Discuss the characteristics of your most successful employees.

Show them the work environment of the position.

Prepare information for the candidate to take home and review (i.e. company brochure, benefits information)

Other ideas:

Meet the candidate outside of the office (have lunch or coffee) to make the interview more personable.

Give a tour of your office and introduce the candidate to some employees. (Make sure the office is prepared for an interviewee to visit.)

If the interview goes well, allow the candidate to call you (the hiring manager) directly with questions.

If appropriate, A/E/C firms may consider taking the candidate to a job site to see how your company operates (site organization and safety measures) and to meet employees. Similarly, owner organizations may want to provide the candidate with a tour of their campus and/or facilities.

5 Things Candidates Tend To Care About

Fit: How do my professional goals, strengths and values fit with the company's vision, needs and culture?

Family: Does this create trauma for my family and does it support us? How will this change impact my family?

Autonomy: How much autonomy will I have in the position? (When it comes to executives and managers, they want to operate without being micro-managed. They want to develop their own leadership strategies and prove their worth.)

Money: What is the company's financial strength? Will I have an opportunity to achieve my goals?

Environment: What is its work environment like and will I enjoy it? Do its team members share my same values?

Source: Who (by Geoff Smart & Randy Street)

Industry-specific ways to differentiate your organization during interviews

A/E/C firms can discuss:

- ▶ What makes [organization] different from other industry key players.
- ▶ Short- and long-term objectives for growth.
- ▶ Backlog of work.
- ▶ Current and planned technological initiatives.
- ▶ Initiatives to streamline the design and construction process.
- ▶ Plans to offer alternative project delivery methods to adapt to owners' needs and wants.
- ▶ Strategies for maximizing the pursuit of target markets and new vertical or geographical markets being explored.
- ▶ How [organization] performs succession planning.

Institutions and other owners can discuss:

- ▶ Current sustainability plans and future goals.
- ▶ Alignment of information technology and facilities to effectively manage utilities, buildings, capital projects and budgets.
- ▶ Plans for improving energy management through strategic procurement, production and distribution practices, and/or the initiation of commissioning and decommissioning programs.
- ▶ Alternative project delivery methods that are being considered for capital projects.
- ▶ Short- and long-term capital programs and building initiatives (including green building).
- ▶ Financial commitments for capital projects and maintenance initiatives.
- ▶ Support of administration for facilities management efforts.

After an interview: **Maintain momentum of the selection process**

Immediately following interviews, take a few minutes to write down a summary of your thoughts. Do not wait or many important details will be forgotten. Make specific notes that will help to distinguish candidates from each other. If there were multiple interviewers, make the process more efficient and productive by having a meeting within a few days of the interviews to discuss potential candidates.



After selecting final candidates, check references and conduct background checks as soon as possible to expedite the process.

Keep candidates informed of the hiring timeframe and their status.

Make final decisions within a reasonable time as high-caliber candidates may be entertaining multiple offers. Delaying a decision can cause a candidate to view you and your organization as indecisive or disinterested, and it may result in them accepting an offer with another organization.

Be prepared for the selected candidate's first day of employment. This shows your company's professionalism and enthusiasm for the new hire.

To read more articles about talent and career management and the A/E/C and facilities management sectors, subscribe to Helbling's quarterly newsletter and blog at:

W: helblingsearch.com

B: blog.helblingsearch.com

HELBLING & ASSOCIATES, INC. RETAINED EXECUTIVE SEARCH
Construction • Facilities Management • Real Estate • Engineering

RESPONSIVE

Motivation and urgency to fulfill your needs

RELIABLE

Comprehensive and accurate market intelligence

RESULTS

Performance that exceeds your expectations

RESOURCEFUL

Extensive network of contacts in your industry

RELATIONSHIPS

Consulting based upon trust and commitment

PITTSBURGH

WWW.HELBLINGSEARCH.COM

724.935.7500