

Mistakes managers make when conducting interviews

When managers conduct job interviews, they have to walk a very fine line. They have to be polite, but assertive. They have to listen well, but always be thinking about the next question. They have to probe beyond those stock answers, and they must be aware of the illegal questions out there too. Business Management Daily's Pat DiDomenico describes the five most common mistakes managers make when conducting interviews.

Mistake #1: Talking too much. Don't deliver a monologue about the job or the company. This is your chance to listen and to learn. Aim for an 85-15 split: 85% of the time you're listening, 15% of the time you're talking. Also, don't rush in to break those awkward silences. Give the applicant plenty of time to respond. You want to listen as much as you can; let those silences go. Those silences also give you a chance to see how applicants handle pressure situations.

Mistake #2: Failing to prepare. Don't quickly scan a résumé for the first time just before you sit down with the interviewee. Take time to review it beforehand, and think about what you want from the new employee. Preparation will help you keep the interview on track and determine whether a candidate is qualified or not.

Mistake #3: Asking questions off the cuff. A loose approach is not good for interviews. At best it can be uninformative, and at worst it can be legally dangerous. Prepare a list of question ahead of time and stick to them. You can still dig deeper into an applicant's answers once they answer the question, but managers often get in trouble when they wing it in interviews. Have your list of interview questions and stick to it.

Mistake #4: Not knowing your legal limits. Interviews can be a legal minefield. Make sure everyone involved in the interview process understands what they can and can't ask during the interview. This includes employees that you bring in just for a minute to meet the applicant. Avoid questions like these: Are you married? Are you divorced? How old are you? Do you have any children or intend to have children? What are your daycare plans? Do you own or rent a home? Do you have any debts? Do you suffer from any illnesses or disabilities? These types of questions can all trigger discrimination lawsuits, so stay away from them. Every question should revolve around one central theme: How well could this person perform the job at hand?

Mistake #5: Being blinded by personal preferences. Maybe you're both baseball fans or you have kids at the same school. Avoid letting common interests like these bias your feelings one way or another with the outcome, especially if those interests are irrelevant to the job. Just because you both run marathons doesn't mean this person can keep up the pace at work.

By avoiding these mistakes, you'll conduct an effective interview, end up with the best applicant, and keep yourself out of legal hot water.