

Talent Management Perspectives

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How to Properly Vet an Interview Candidate

Kellye Whitney

Talent managers that use a resume as their primary interview tool may be missing key information that will help them better determine if a candidate is the right fit for a position.

To properly vet potential talent, Ron Selewach, CEO of the Human Resource Management Center Inc., said it's important to prepare thoroughly, ask the right questions, understand what the answers mean and look beyond the resume.

Consider Sarah Palin. Some say the former candidate for vice president of the United States was one of the main straws that broke the Republican's bid for office in the 2008 election. Once certain aspects of her background were held up to a strong light, the Democrats began to look more appealing. That situation might have been avoided had the Republicans prepared more thoroughly.

"Without getting into the pros and cons of the candidates, what is highlighted at the very least is that with any important position in the public or private sector, prepare thoroughly," said Selewach. "They had available to them not only Palin's resume but her whole public record. I'm sure the campaign thoroughly vetted her, but unless they made their announcement and the media started digging, it appeared some things came up they weren't fully prepared to deal with.

"Anytime you're selecting a candidate for employment there are four key points that you need. First, prepare thoroughly. You have to have a detailed understanding of the job and what it takes to execute the deliverables — not so much the activities of the job but what's expected on the job. What does it take to execute in good times and bad?

"Almost anybody can be a good manager when things are going well, but what happens when things don't go well? For example, how do you motivate your staff when times aren't so good? How do you enforce an unpopular change or policy? How do you administer coaching to a subordinate when that subordinate is not performing up to snuff? Don't just look at the happy path. Look at the other side of the coin too."

Second, Selewach said talent managers have to ask the right questions in the right way and at the right time. Further, while asking questions in the right way is critically important, it's only half the process. The other half — or the third step in an improved candidate-vetting process — is understanding what the answers mean and also what they don't mean.

"I read articles, interviews and books all the time that do a really good job of talking about preparing for the interview, analyzing the position and asking behavioral interviewing questions and so forth. But I haven't seen any books that discuss how to interpret the answers," Selewach said.

Finally, when vetting potential employees, talent managers have to look beyond the resume. Selewach said the resume is essentially a marketing document designed to help the candidate present his or her best face. That information is not necessarily everything a manager will need to know to determine if that candidate can and will do the job and fit into the organization. Talent managers shouldn't interview solely from the resume. Instead, they should interview from the job requirements.

Selewach said going through resume details minimizes the ground the talent manager can explore in an interview because it basically validates what has been included in that marketing document.

"When we do interviews, we don't even have resumes in front of us," he said. "We interview off what the job requires and what it takes to execute deliverables of that job. The resume is nothing but confirmatory evidence. When you have properly assessed an individual and come to a conclusion, the resume is almost anecdotal." **TM**

Kellye Whitney is managing editor for Talent Management magazine.