

MANAGEMENT

The Interview Process:

Hiring Top Performers Leads to Top Profits

By Pam Simos, Five-Star Training



Did you know the restaurant industry employs more than 12 million people, making it the nation's largest employer outside of government? At the same time, the food industry experiences the highest employee turnover of any industry, typically, between 100 and 300 percent.

Taking the time to set up a successful interview process will pay off in the long run. Hiring the right employees will slash turnover and hiring costs and will stimulate guest loyalty and create positive word-of-mouth advertising.

The steps outlined below will help guide you to making the proper hiring decisions:

1 Invest in the Upfront Work: Dedicate the proper amount of time throughout the entire hiring process. An established, organized system will allow you to conduct interviews throughout the day. You can risk losing a high qualified employee by limiting yourself with overly-restricted hours. Follow the suggested steps below when beginning the initial work required:

1. Decide what positions need to be filled ensuring you are meeting your budgeted staffing requirements.
2. Establish a job profile with specific criteria. Ask yourself, "What kind of person is best fit for this job?" And, "What type of experience and background should they possess?"
3. Determine a well-rounded set of questions and develop the questions based on information you want to elicit so your candidate meets your hiring goals. Ask open-ended questions that will not provoke a simple "yes" or "no" but instead will initiate conversation. You will formulate additional questions as you begin the interview process. Probe deeper to get clarification as the interviewee replies to your original questions. When a candidate provides a generic or broad answer, don't be afraid to dig deeper and ask for examples. Do not ask any illegal questions relating to gender, age, race, disablement, or any form of discrimination.

Here are three types of questions that will help you retrieve the information you require:

Ice-breaker

The ice-breaker question relaxes the candidate and gives him/her time to warm up before you ask detailed, job-related questions. These questions are easy to answer and not intimidating.

Sample questions: "How is your day going thus far?" Or, "How was traffic on the way in?"

Patrick Pendola, owner of the Whistle Stop Grill restaurant, located in Safety Harbor, Florida says, "Helping the candidate feel at ease is crucial in the interview process. . . the more relaxed and comfortable they feel, the more they will speak freely letting their guard down. This way, we can acquire as much information as possible and take full advantage of the interview process."

Background

The background question gathers more information from the candidate's work history.

Sample questions: "Why did you leave your last employer?" Or, "How long were you unemployed during that hiatus?"

Behavioral

The behavioral question identifies behavioral traits and characteristics about the candidate so you learn the way he or she behaves and what traits he/she possesses.

Sample questions: "Please give me a specific example of a time when you had to conform to a policy with which you did not agree." Or, "Tell me about a recent situation in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or co-worker."

Examine the resume/application to see if there is a potential job fit.

MANAGEMENT continued . . .

2 Scrutinizing a candidate's resume/application will determine if the candidate warrants an initial screening or interview. Here are some suggested tips when examining the resume/application:

1. Be realistic and fair without being too eager to discard a resume/application because of a few minor concerns. Being too critical will limit your choices and shrink your pool of candidates. Think about the position's job responsibility and necessary education level before eliminating resumes/applications. For example, a few typos should not justify ruling out a candidate applying for a job position as a cook.
2. Identify/Focus on your deal breakers and most important criteria first, keeping in mind your established job profile. For example, if part of your profile requires candidates to have previous experience in the restaurant industry, aim to discover this first.
3. Note any concerning red flags or areas that warrant further clarification, and be prepared to discuss them with the candidate. Then, prepare the proper questions that will help you probe further and uncover the clarification you need. Never place any comments in writing relating to discrimination such as, young and cute or heavy set.

3 **Conduct an Initial Screening.** In many situations, it is helpful to the employer to conduct an initial screening on the telephone prior to setting up an interview. The initial screening will help determine if the candidate warrants an "in person" interview. This is a good time to inquire about his/her job history, which is the best indicator of his/her future job success. Some of the areas to inquire about include: Start dates, end dates, and reasons for leaving prior companies. Also, the initial screening is a good opportunity to confirm the number of hours and days the candidate plans to work. Directly after the initial screening phase or later in the interview process, you can call the candidate's references listed on the resume/application. Keep in mind that employers are limited by the law to the type of information they can release about an employee.

4 **Prepare for the Interview.** Being prepared for your interview will demonstrate to your candidate that you are professional and take the hiring process seriously. Be prepared with the following for the interview:

- Notebook
- Pen
- Interview questions
- A copy of the resume/application with notes

5 **Conduct the Interview Process.** While the previous steps are important to perform in the hiring process, the interview process is a solid way to determine if an employee fits well and possesses the ability to be a solid performer in your company. Follow the below steps when conducting the interview process:

1. Ensure your mindset is open and without any preconceived notions
2. Find a quiet location in your restaurant that will cultivate a relaxed environment and one where you will not be disturbed.

3. Do not plan to sit behind a desk. This can create an intimidating situation with you in a power position. Instead, aim to position yourself to be on even ground with the candidate by sitting side-by-side.
4. Upon the candidate's arrival, shake his/her hand and offer him/her a beverage.
5. Be prepared to listen, deliver steady eye contact, and observe body language. Make a note if the candidate turns away or looks at the floor when speaking. Also, note if they display any poor habits like chewing gum.
6. Engage in small talk and ask some ice-breaker questions to relax the interviewee.
7. Ask the interviewee to explain any areas of concern/red flags. For example, if the candidate's application reveals he/she left several jobs after a short period of time, make sure he/she clarifies the reason.

6 **Closing the Interview.** It is important to close the interview on a strong, positive note and end it only after you have acquired all the information you need. To save time, shorten the interview if you are 100% certain a particular candidate is not a good fit. Here are some guidelines in closing the interview:

1. Ask the candidate if he or she has any questions.
2. Explain the "next steps" to the candidate. For example, inform the candidate that you will be interviewing several candidates for the position and you will notify them of their status within a week. It is a good practice to follow up with all candidates, however, if your time does not permit this, you may tell them that you will notify them if they will be considered for a second interview or their credentials/qualifications are a fit to move to the next step.
3. Shake the candidate's hand firmly and thank him or her for interviewing for the position.

Taking the time to hire the right way will help you easily and fairly assess job candidates. Hiring employees who are the right fit for your restaurant will require less time to manage, train, coach, and develop. And most important, assembling a top team will win over your guests and create a memorable experience, resulting in increased profits.

Please Note: Five-Star Training's representatives are not employment law specialists. The above information is meant as a guideline only. Please confer with a labor attorney in your jurisdiction for employment law and legal matters.

.....
 Pam Simos, keynote speaker and founder of Five-Star Training, has more than 20 years of hospitality training experience and a B.S. degree in Hotel/Restaurant Management. Since 1987, Five-Star Training has specialized in reducing costs and driving profits through training. Five-Star Training offers a full line of 20 training services for executives, managers, and staff including 15 seminars, keynote speaking, 12 manuals on CD, management coaching/mentoring, train-the-trainer programs, new restaurant training, and business solutions. Five-Star Training is based in St. Petersburg, Florida. Contact Pam at: Web address: www.five-startraining.com. E-mail: contact-us@five-startraining.com. Toll-free: (800) 385-7827(STAR).

Copyright © 2008. Five-Star Service & Products Inc. All Rights Reserved.