

Interviewing tips for hiring good managers

CareerBuilder.com conducted a job satisfaction survey in 2004. A whopping 32 percent of those responding said they were dissatisfied with their supervisor's overall work performance. Having problems with management is one of the most common reasons that people have for leaving a job, according to post-exit interviews. In times of economic or job stress, shortcomings in management skills are accentuated, leading to more leadership time spent on putting out behavioral fires.

When your county is interviewing to hire or promote a manager, the following questions can help increase the possibility that you will select a person who has the right mix of personnel management and task management skills.

1. *How would you describe your management style?*

The ability to recognize personal traits, including strengths and weaknesses for a particular job, is a key trait of good managers. Asking questions to uncover management styles is crucial for interviewers. While some employers use personality tests to evaluate traits, asking a candidate a variety of questions about their ability to handle project details, sell ideas, and resolve ambiguous problems can also identify good management traits.

2. *What would you do in this situation?*

Rather than allowing the applicant to tell stories about themselves that are pre-selected to make a certain impression, take an active role in formulating and asking questions that are drawn directly from real-life challenges in the job. This allows you to find out how much the applicant knows about day-to-day factors influencing decision making and also allows

you to test their ability to make sensible judgments in novel situations. Solicit possible scenarios from coworkers, employees or the former incumbent.

Don't forget, though, that some types of questions may put modest or highly analytical applicants at a disadvantage. Is a quick and colorful response to a verbal question, or an ability to self-promote, really an essential job duty? Or are they merely traits that make interviewing easier for you?

3. *How do you handle conflict between employees? Or with another department or team leader?*

The success of a department or operation depends on teamwork. One of the important duties of a manager is to facilitate, coach, and manage team relations. If you consistently ignore the abilities of applicants on these issues, you can expect that no matter how well the individual manages the finances, costs will arise from unresolved personnel disputes.

If the applicant is unable to identify a specific process or checklist of steps for resolving disputes, it may be an indicator that he or she either hasn't had much experience doing this, or won't be a good role model for training their employees to do it.

4. *What types of quantitative measurements do you use to evaluate your management success?*

Ask the candidate about the retention rate, injury rate, absence rate, or overtime rate in their current department or operation. A good manager looks for quantitative clues to employee problems as well as focusing on interpersonal relationships. Even if the employees seem happy, a 30% absence rate

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indicates some sort of problem. Certainly not as much work can get done as if the place were more fully staffed.

4. *Do you have any questions for us?*

Most of the time this question is left to the last few minutes of the interview. By this time, the applicant is aware that you are rushed; some applicants have even been told that they have 3 minutes to ask questions! If this is how you conduct management interviews, you are guaranteed to hire managers who are abrupt, rushed, and will miss important details. Conversely, you will find out a lot about the candidate's ability to analyze, plan, and seek out factual support for initiatives by the quality of questions they bring to the table.

5. *How much actual personnel management experience do you have?*

How can you possibly hire a good people manager without knowing how much actual personnel

management they have done? Find out how many written employee evaluations, interviews, and terminations the candidate has conducted or participated in. Ask the candidate what kind of employee management training he or she has had.

Most interviewers focus on the qualifications, education, and skills for the job—which usually is the candidate's job experience related to his or her technical or professional knowledge. Yet a candidate can be a highly qualified accounts manager or mechanic and never have dealt with staff issues, or worse, have developed a poor method of dealing with them.

For more information on interviewing and hiring, contact CTSI at 303-861-0507.