

PUT APPLICANTS AT THEIR EASE

You want to generate an atmosphere and a situation in which applicants will talk in their most open manner. It is important to put them at ease, to relax the atmosphere, and to find some common interest or experience that creates a personal rapport. Notice how you use your body language, smile when you first meet the interviewee; offer them a coffee; sit the candidate at right angles rather than across the barrier of a desk - all these things help to create a relaxed atmosphere.

If you intimidate the applicant they will be less forthcoming, and you will end up with less information. Some interviewers are deliberately intimidating - they use military interrogation techniques, stand behind applicants to ask questions, use an aggressive manner, deliberately ask a question as the interviewee lifts the coffee cup to their lips and so on. This approach is counter-productive, as it simply encourages the applicant to clam up.

A further point: there have been legal cases covering unfair intimidation at interview, so not only is it poor technique, it could land you in trouble too.

Many interviewers are intimidating without realising it - they never smile, they interrupt just as the interviewee starts to answer a question, or they write notes continuously while the applicant is talking (you have to take some notes, but they should be brief, and fleshed out only after the interview has finished). It can be easy to fall into this style of interviewing without knowing you are doing it. Make sure you are not guilty of any of these bad habits.

ENCOURAGE THEM TO TALK

If you want to encourage applicants to talk, you will need to know what you want them to talk about - in other words you will need a plan or structure to follow, or you'll be floundering. There are many ways of structuring a selection interview, but really the most important thing is simply to have a structure and stick to it for all interviews. You could start with getting the candidate to describe their current job or a current interest/hobby. One of the most effective is:

Past, Present and Future

To do this you pick a suitable point in the applicant's career and work forward. The point you start at will vary, you might ask a school leaver to start at around at 11 or 12 but you would hardly go back this far for a 45-year old senior manager.

First, get the applicant talking about their earlier career and previous job, then move on to their current views, attitudes and judgments relating to work, and finally discuss their future aims, career objectives and so on.

You'll notice that this format involves starting with the applicant's past. As they tell you about themselves you start to build up a picture of them, rather like a jigsaw puzzle. Most applicants will be happier and more fluent talking about their past than about many other areas, so you will have the chance to pick up plenty of clues which you can follow up in subsequent questions.

You will also find that because applicants find this a relatively easy topic to talk about (they're only giving you facts, not ideas) it makes a good starting point for putting them at their ease. For both these reasons, whatever structure you use it is always a good idea to start off asking about the applicant's history.

There are certain guidelines you will need to follow to keep the interviewee talking freely and openly:

Let Them Do the Talking

It is far better to find out about the applicant before you tell them too much about the job, otherwise they can modify their answers. You want to know about them, so let them tell you; they should be doing about 75% of the talking. Towards the end of interview you will have to talk a little more, to give them the information they need to form an opinion of your organisation and the job on offer.

Listening

Listening has everything to do with how we use our brains, not just our ears, to take in the messages we are getting. It is an ability not just to hear, but to listen actively to:

- What is being said
- How it is being said (including the tone of voice and the body language)
- What is not being said. Good listeners will practice to ensure real understanding.

In other words, listening is an active skill which requires the work of the eyes, ears and brain.

Learning to Listen

Here are some tips on how to develop better listening skills:

- Start with a very open mind, like having a blank sheet of paper.
- Be aware of the potential bias and fight it.
- Develop excellent eye contact with people speaking to you – look into them, not just at them.
- Stop yourself saying things such as “I see” or “yes, indeed” or “that’s interesting” when you don’t mean it.
- Listen out for the real message being given. Get behind the words. Watch body language to judge if what is being said is really meant.
- Don’t cut people off or try to interrupt. This could be an old habit which takes time to break.
- Learn just to listen – leave judging, instant interpretations and your own thoughts until later.
- Don’t work out your next question, whilst trying to listen to the current answer.

Session 2

Planning for an effective interview

Purpose
For delegates to be able to plan both person profile and job specification for the interview.

Section	Purpose	Directions
1	Trainer to explain to delegates that they must have a thorough understanding of the job that they are interviewing for. Explain that interviewers must understand the difference between what is 'Essential' and what is 'Desirable' for the position.	Manual pg. 3
2	EXERCISE 2.2: Circulate HO 1, ' <i>Job Self Analysis</i> '. Delegates to complete this exercise. <u>AIM:</u> for delegates to understand what is required in breaking down the specific components of a job; allow 10 MIN. Discuss with delegates how easy/difficult they found analysing their own jobs, and the importance of getting it right for a successful interview.	HO 1
3	Refer to ' <i>The Selection Process</i> ', Manual pg. 3; discuss with delegates the proposed structure and how this relates to the positions that they interview for. Not all the stages in the selection process will be applicable to them. Emphasise the importance of 'a standard process' within an organisation, to ensure uniformity and fairness in all interviews.	Manual pg.3/ SLIDE 6
4	Refer to ' <i>The Interview: Prepare</i> ' Manual pg.3-4. Explain to delegates the importance of creating both a job specification (skills and qualities required to do the job), and person profile (personal attributes the successful candidate will need). Circulate HO 2, ' <i>Person Profile Sample</i> ' explaining that this is an example that can be used to plan and prepare questions for the interview.	Manual pg.3-4 / HO 2 / Slide 7
5	EXERCISE 2.5: Circulate HO 3, blank ' <i>Job Specification/ Person Profile</i> '. Delegates to plan a job specification and person profile for either a future interview they will carry out (you can use Optional HO a., ' <i>Developing a Job/Person Specification</i> ' if delegates do not have a specific interview to plan); allow 10 MIN. Delegates will be using the completed forms later in role-play.	HO 3 Optional HO a. / Slide 8-9

Timings 60 minutes

Special instructions
You may find this session runs easier if you ask delegates to bring with them completed job descriptions of positions that they interview for (if you supply pre-course instructions to your delegates) or you may supply typical job descriptions that delegates can use on the course.