My Job Interview Method

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The Employee Attraction™ Workbook]

EmployeeAttraction.com

My own interviewing process

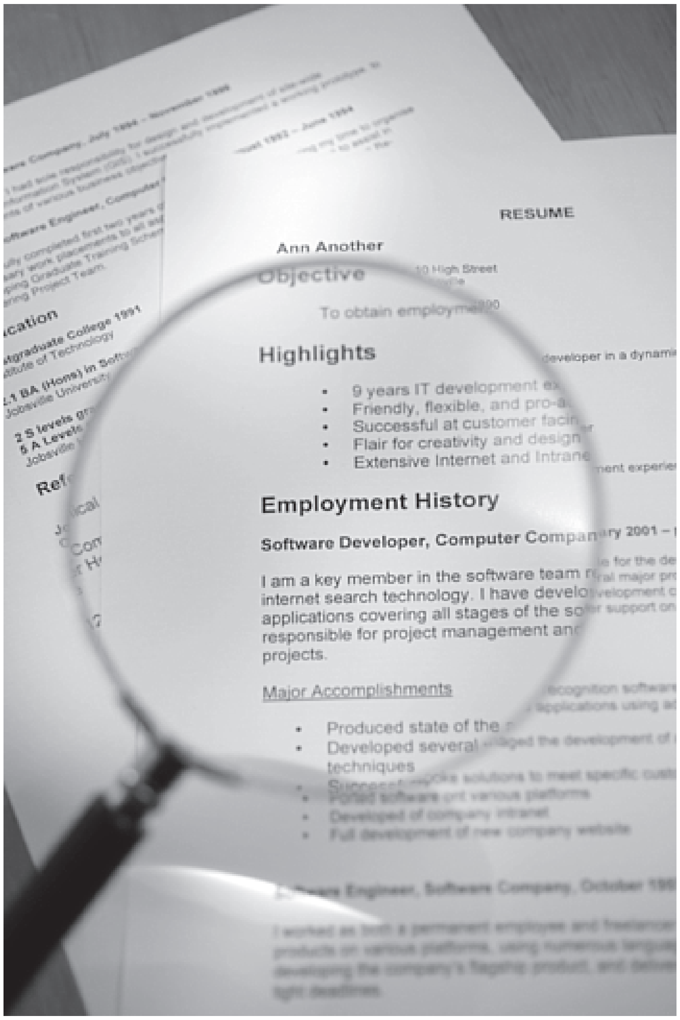
In our competitive market, in a month of actively looking for someone, usually only one or two people will make it to the third interview. Taking a month or more to select the perfect person for your agency should be expected.

I frequently get asked by other agents exactly how I manage to select great employees, so here is my specific process in detail. While it may seem laborious and involved on paper, it actually flows very smoothly, because we have a polished system in place. Keep in mind that there are many variables depending on how positive our response is at any given point in the process.

1. PRE-SCREEN BY PHONE Linda, my office manager does a pre-screening over the phone with general questions designed to determine if the person is a reasonable possibility. If the applicant passes this screening, Linda makes an appointment for them to come in and meet with me. If by chance, the person is a highly qualified prime candidate, then I may have Linda join me on the first interview.

2. FIRST INTERVIEW After filling out an application, I always have them sign a Hold Harmless Agreement (Page 156). During the initial interview, I spend a few minutes on ice breaker questions that are still designed to tell me things about the person. By asking if they had any trouble finding my office, I can usually learn how familiar they are with my territory, how far away they live (and calculate their potential commuting challenges), how well they follow the directions Linda gave them, etc. Someone who is flummoxed just getting to the building will never survive the intense training required in the insurance industry.

While I try not to make snap judgments about people, there is no denying that I am processing my initial impressions, based on professional appearance, demeanor, how articulate they are, confidence level and so on. Then I segue into behavioral-based questioning. This interview lasts from 10-60 minutes.



At that point, if I feel this is a viable candidate, I tell him or her that we'd love to continue the discussion with them, but that I want them to take a day or two to think about whether or not what we have to offer matches up with the ideal job they are looking for. I tell the applicant if they are interested to call Linda and schedule a second appointment. I also urge them to come prepared with all their questions—for me or anyone on my team. I let them know that they'll have an opportunity to sit down with any member of my team and have a candid conversation. I say that I want this placement to be a win/win for everyone and that I want that person to be so happy that they never want to leave. By requiring them to call us back, it shows me whether or not they can take the initiative. There is a lot of phone work in this business, so if someone can't even call back for another interview, they are not a good fit.

During the interview I review their application and look at the salary range they requested. If I am interested in the person, I also make a point to let them know that their request is within the range we would offer for that position. Over the years I have learned that when an experienced person asks too little for their time, they most often have some kind of confidence issues, which will be a detriment in working with clients. Conversely, if they ask more than I was planning to offer, and if I can verify they are actually earning that much, then I'm inclined to match it, because my experience shows they do have the skills I'm looking for. What is more typical, is to start someone on a 60-day review at a negotiated salary and see if they really are at the level they need to be to qualify for the higher amount. I also tell them that this will be a 3-part interview process.

Then if the candidate is someone I'd like to pursue, I will ask him or her to take the Wonderlic test and the Kolbe A profile, which takes about 45 minutes total. I send them on their way with a copy of my book, *Finding joy In Your Job*, which usually makes a big impression. It also underscores my branding, which I have woven into the interview and shows that I am, indeed, committed to creating a workplace where people actually enjoy working.

3. FIRST EVALUATION If the applicant is already working for or has worked at a State Farm agency, then we check their history and qualifications before we set the first interview date. If that's not the case, then this is the point when we go over their resume and check references. While most current or previous employers won't disclose details, we still verify employment. If I find someone who is willing to discuss the applicant with me, I fax them the signed Hold Harmless Agreement. With that document, most small business owners will talk to me. Here's a question I always ask: "If you discovered Mary had some work habits that weren't effective, what happened when you approached her to discuss them—was she receptive?" Then I might ask some questions about her emotional intelligence.

With larger companies I have to be more innovative. I'll say: "I know you can't divulge details of Mary's employment history with me, but generally speaking, if I was considering hiring someone with Mary's attributes, how would you rate that person's coachability on a scale of one to five?" That usually gets me the most important fact I need. **Coachability is a paramount trait.**

I also score the Kolbe and Wonderlic tests and evaluate how I think the candidate would fit on my team. I meet with my office manager, and we decide what lines of questioning we will both pursue in the next round. Linda is especially gifted at behavioral interviewing, and we plan ahead which topics we want to explore in depth so we can each ask the candidate variations on the same theme. Later we can compare answers to evaluate the candidate's emotional intelligence.

4. SECOND INTERVIEW Assuming the person calls back for a second interview, we ask them to bring in their most recent pay stub. We do this because it is human nature to inflate your salary, and this creates a reality check for all concerned. This time I answer all their questions one on one, then dig a little deeper with more behavioral questions. Again, if I decide this is a really great prospect, then I may call Linda into this interview. Based on the results of the tests and the reference check, I will know what areas I want to probe further. After that, usually another team member will take the applicant into our atrium for coffee and a chat. They will encourage the candidate to ask whatever questions they like.

While they are out of the office, Linda and I confer again and share impressions. Because the third phase is costly in both time and money, only very strong candidates make it to that round. Those that do are asked to take the Hogan Assessment, which is the final test I give to help me determine suitability. While the applicant is taking the test, I check in with the team member(s) who chatted with the candidate and get their feedback. Afterwards, I tell them that we'll give them a call once we get their results back, or if it's someone I really want to go after, we'll make the appointment right then.

5. FORK IN THE ROAD If at this point, we decide that the candidate is not a good match, then he or she is sent a gentle rejection letter. We don't like to hurt people's feelings—you never know who else they might know who *would* be a great prospect, so a fair number of people receive the letters.

Dear Applicant:

We would like to thank you for the interest you have expressed in the employment opportunity at our agency. We have considered a number of candidates with a variety of skills, and after reviewing your credentials, we have decided to pursue other candidates who we believe match our needs more closely.

Thank you again for considering this opportunity. Please accept our best wishes for your success in finding a suitable position.

Sincerely,

Agent Name

For those continuing on in the process, I order a Hogan Assessment. When you sign up at their website you can choose your own consultant to work with. I call Darrell Beck, a professional hiring consultant, who sets up an online Hogan assessment for my candidate. After the test is over, it is sent directly to Darrell, who scores it and returns it to me. Then we discuss the candidate by phone, and Darrell interprets his or her score, strengths and weaknesses. He also helps me develop additional lines of questioning to aid me in making my final decision. **You can contact him at www.darrellbeckandassociates.com .**

If Linda and I feel that we should pursue someone, then we discuss the offer I will make and what other questions we'll ask. This is also when everyone in the office is brought into the loop, since the likelihood is now high that I'll be offering a position to someone. In truth, there have been occasions when my team has dissuaded me from pursuing someone because they saw something that I didn't. The times when I ignored their advice, I usually regretted it. If you've been looking for someone for a long time, it can be so appealing to just settle on any feasible candidate and be done with it. That, however, is not the path to greatness. It is the path to mediocrity—or worse—and will surely cause stress all around.

6. THIRD INTERVIEW During the final interview I like to have Linda present, because I want to establish her as a person of authority and as the person who will be the new hire's main contact. Although I have an open door policy, I train my team members to try and resolve any questions or issues they may have with Linda first. Because Linda is trained, capable and experienced, most issues are resolved in short order. During the third interview we answer any lingering questions and ask more of our own, based on Darrell's input. If the candidate successfully allays our remaining concerns, then I will decide to make an offer on the spot. In my experience, people who are decision makers will be ready to say "Yes" at that time.

7. UPON HIRING When someone does accept my offer, I am naturally relieved to have the search over and excited about the new possibilities this person will bring to our team. I make a point of bringing the new hire out into the main office area and announcing to everyone that we have a new team member. Celebration and excited chatting ensue—let the bonding begin! Because I have involved my team in the process, they are as happy about the outcome as I am and can genuinely welcome the new person. On the first day of work, I have them sign a Non-compete Agreement, explaining that it protects me from anyone stealing my customer list. I say that it takes a lot of money to develop our clients and they are owned by the agency. I also let them know that if they ever leave, the only clients they will be allowed to take with them are family members. In addition, I point out that this will take the pressure off of them if they ever decide to move on to another agency, because the next agent might pressure them to bring some of my clients with them.