

From the Sidelines



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How to interview job applicants

IN A FEW PAGES we have an article on the job prospects of recent turfgrass program graduates and one about strategies for success and significance in your work life. Here we share some thoughts from the other side of the table, courtesy of Patrick McGuiness, who presented at this year's STMA Conference on "Hiring the Right Person." McGuiness is a consultant, speaker, author, and attorney as well as a First Lieutenant and Judge Advocate in the US Army Reserve.

"The interview process is one of the most important tools you have when hiring. How many times have you had a candidate that looked incredible on paper turn out to be a dud during the interview process? Here are some questions you can ask to point you to the right candidates for the positions you are trying to fill."

1. Have a level playing field.

It would be unfair to give one candidate a bunch more time than another to explain the qualifications. So, set a time limit for each interview and stick closely to it. However, don't put a stopwatch on the table that just makes things unnecessarily awkward. Create a comfortable interview environment for all the candidates. You want people to be at ease at first when they are being interviewed so that they feel comfortable opening up to you when they answer questions.

2. Prepare ahead of time.

Have specific questions planned for each interview ahead of time. If you are using a panel to interview candidates, assign each question to a specific person so that the interview flows smoothly. Often interview questions end up a lot like bad job postings. The questions are too easy to anticipate, such as "Tell me about a time you faced a challenge, and how you overcame it." Whenever you have questions that are anticipated by the candidate, you are going to get 'canned' responses that do not give you much insight into what the candidate is really like.

3. Ask good questions.

Ask questions that will give you clues about the candidate's ability to perform well at the job you are hiring for. Don't ask leading questions; instead try to keep questions neutral so that you can find out how the candidate honestly feels, not how they think you want them to feel. For example, if you ask "Would you be able to start at 7am every day and work weekends sometimes?" of course the candidate is going to say yes. Instead, try asking "What would your ideal work schedule look like?" While the answer they give may not match your hours exactly, you will get insight into the candidate's work ethic, and whether they researched your organization.

4. Pause and pay attention.

While you are working within a timeframe, don't jump to the next question whenever there is a lull in the candidate's response. Take a second and pause before starting the next question. Often this pause will spur the candidate to keep talking and expand on what they have already said. This will give you further insight into the candidate's level of preparedness. Make it a habit to add this silent pause before asking more questions. You will be surprised how candidate's fill the space you create. ■

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