

The Human Dimension

Five steps to a successful interview:

- 1) Prepare.
- 2) Greet the applicant and put them at ease.
- 3) Listen.
- 4) Encourage the applicant to ask questions.
- 5) Close with information about plans for making a decision.



How to Conduct Successful Employment Interviews

The employment interview is the most common selection tool turf managers use when hiring new applicants. Success in interviewing depends upon preparation and proper execution of the interview process. An informal, unplanned interview process can easily lead to a selection mistake. In other words the wrong person gets hired. Following a few basic steps can increase chances that the interview process will be successful. In today's tight labor market, effort directed at attracting the right person for the job is well worth the extra time and effort.

Step 1

Step 1: Prepare. To prepare for the interview create a list of characteristics that are essential for job performance. Characteristics such as job knowledge mechanical skills, interpersonal skills and work habits can all be evaluated during the interview. Do not try to identify every possible characteristic that might relate to the job, instead choose four to six characteristics you think are most important.

Based on the characteristics you have identified write a list of questions that will elicit information that will help you predict the future job performance of the applicant. Use open-ended questions rather than questions that require a simple "yes" or "no" answer. Include in your list several probing questions that will help you find out as much as possible about the applicant. Figure 1 provides suggestions for questions that can be asked during the interview process.

Once you have developed a list of five to seven questions that are performance based it is important to use the list in each interview so that each applicant has the opportunity to answer the same questions. This formalizes the interview process and allows you to get the same information from each applicant. This step is critical to insure reliability in the interview process. It increases the chances that the right candidate will be chosen. Only by requesting the same information from each applicant will the interviewer be able to fairly compare each applicant.

The final step in preparation is to develop a rating system to score the answer to each question. A scoring system is extremely helpful when you attempt to summarize and interpret information from a number of interviews. For example, if you use a one to five scoring system and score the answer to each question you'll have a quantitative way to compare candidates after all have been interviewed. This process helps to formalize the interview and make it a better predictor of employee performance.

Step 2

Step 2: Greet the applicant and put them at ease. It is natural for a job applicant to be nervous at an interview. Obviously the more formal the interview the more relevant this issue is. It is important to make the applicant feel as comfortable as possible. The more you do to alleviate tension, the more meaningful the interview will be. A handshake, a friendly smile and possibly a tour of the work facilities are a good start. Make it a priority to find a quiet comfortable place for the interview to be conducted without interruption.

Step 3

Step 3: Listen. Open the discussion but encourage the applicant to do most of the talking. An interviewer who dominates the conversation or answers questions for the applicant will learn very little about the perspective employee. Ask open-ended questions that require an explanation rather than a "yes" or "no" response. With this technique the interviewer is likely to get the candidate to open up and provide more valuable information. Based on what the applicant says, make a note of any follow-up questions you want to ask later in the interview.

Step 4

Step 4: Encourage the applicant to ask questions. So far the applicant has been responding to questions. At this point the applicant should be encouraged to ask questions. Be

patient in allowing time for the applicant to get his or her questions formulated and asked. You should answer the applicant's questions in a straightforward manner. Be positive in describing your business and sell the position.

hired for the position. Using a planned systematic approach to the interview process is likely to lead to employment of the best possible candidate.

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Step 5

Step 5: Close with information about plans for making a decision. Be specific about what happens next, when you will complete the interview process and when you plan to be in touch with the applicant. Be sure to follow through with all applicants.

When the interview process is completed assemble all of the information and make the best evaluation regarding who is most qualified for the job. Remember to resist personal biases and focus on job performance. Based on the interview, the application, reference checks and any other performance-based information make the final decision regarding who will be



Figure 1.

Sample Interview Questions

This list of questions is intended to provide ideas for developing your own list of interview questions.

1. Job-Related Questions:

- What skills do you bring to a turf maintenance job?
- Can you work 6 a.m. to 3 p.m.?
- What experience have you had with mower operation and maintenance?
- Describe any formal education or training in horticulture.
- Describe work experiences from previous jobs that would be relevant to this job.

2. Probing Questions:

- What did you like most about your last job?
- What did you like least about your last job?
- How well did you get along with your supervisor and coworkers on your last job?
- Why are you looking for a new job?

3. General Recruitment Questions:

- What is your salary/pay expectation?
- When would you be available to start?
- Do you have any questions for me (us)?

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