

## INTERVIEWING NEW EMPLOYEES FOR YOUR PROGRAM

By Paul Cummings

As winter rolls on and spring approaches, many of us are thinking about hiring for the summer season. For others, hiring is an on-going challenge. Here are a few tips for conducting thorough interviews. While the list is by no means exhaustive, it includes questions that have been helpful during some of the many interviews we have conducted over the years.

### Preparing for the Interview

Step one for any interview is for you to define the ideal candidate, prepare a job description, and create a list of non-negotiable points or qualifications. This might include criteria related to a potential employee's ability to work with the populations you serve, the willingness of candidates to work for the pay you are offering, or a certain level of proven experience. Your list might also include factors that are less tangible, like the ability of a candidate to communicate a high degree of compassion, general appearance, or a feeling that the candidate will interact well with others on your team. Whatever your criteria, it is better to clarify your expectations on paper for your- self prior to the interview than to go into the interview not having fully identified what you are looking for in your new hire.

### Conducting the Interview

When the interview starts, begin by giving them an overview of the job. Ideally, each interviewee will have received the job description, including pay scale, required hours, etc., prior to the interview. This will ensure that you are interviewing candidates with a true interest in the position.

Answer any questions the candidate may have about the job. He/She will not be prepared to respond to you until they fully understand what they are applying for and it is better to be up front about the expectations than to interview a person for a job that they do not fully understand. Plus, the questions they ask you are great ways to get a sense for the level of thought they have put into the interview and their ability to facilitate information gathering.

### Questions and Methods for Really Understanding the Candidate's Core Competencies

- Be sure you find out how they learned about the job.
- What questions do they have for you?
- You will want them to know the brief history and structure of your company, types of clients that are served, and your hopes for the future.
- Ask the candidate to tell you about themselves and any relevant experiences that make them appropriate for your job. Let this be fairly open-ended so you can get a broad sense of their background.



- Find out why they do this work (if they are already in the field) or why they want to do this work. What do they love about it? Why do they think it has value?
- Ask them to help you understand specifics about: their technical proficiency, ability to manage safety, knowledge of initiatives, low ropes elements, learning tools or models, and experience working with your populations.
- If the interview is for a job that has specific technical skills associated with it (tying knots, working on the computer, etc.), ask them to demonstrate a few of those skills. For example, you might have a rope handy; if they have stated that they are a climber ask them to show you a knot or two.
- If they will be teaching, you might ask them to teach you something. Like “can you teach me how to tie a figure eight knot?”
- Ask them to tell you what they do really well.
- Ask them what they are working on or trying to improve.
- How would they describe their leadership, teaching, or management style?
- How would they describe their style of interaction with students or clients?
- Ask for a specific example of a time when they took a leadership role where safety was a concern.
- Find out if the candidate has any physical or psychological issues that would impact their ability to do the job.

#### If Relevant to their job

- Have they managed a budget?
- Have they managed other people?
- Have they ever grown a business or developed a new business?
- How do they feel about meeting with or talking with parents? Business Leaders? Teachers? Youth leaders?
- Can they give you an example of a client that they worked with from phone interview to program delivery?



- Can they give you a specific example of a time when they worked with a parent/client/teacher/ or chaperon during a difficult situation?
- Can they talk about the current state of the field of Experiential Education? What is working within the industry? Where have they seen room for improvement?
- Can they provide references? Are there any former clients, parents, or teachers that might be willing to provide a reference?

Always!

- Ask for and check several references prior to hiring the candidate.

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