

Chapter 2

How do you select the best if you look outside your organization?

Many business owners make the same overly-optimistic mistake when hiring a No. 2: they review resumes and parade a series of candidates through interviews and then “go with their gut.” This is flawed for more than one reason, but here is the key problem: Candidates lie on resumes & they can be less than truthful in the interviews. The net result is that the owner either spends too much valuable owner-time training the person and explaining

what they need, or the owner eventually searches again for another #2.

Most traditional hiring approaches are flawed and unreliable. Harry Brull, senior vice president of public sector services for Personnel Decisions International (www.personneldecisions.com), says resumes and interviews are typically the least reliable tools for hiring talented employees.

Landing the best candidate requires a strategic, systematic approach. But it should not demand all of the owner’s time. It’s not OK to interview nine people for a job. No one can effectively track nine candidates. Leaders need to narrow the pool to 3-4 candidates for better interviews. Is that possible? Well, it requires leaders to reverse their thinking about the interview process.

Step 1: Sort Applications & Score the Resumes

Start by reviewing the submitted resumes and supporting materials from a pool of candidates and narrow it down to a dozen candidates or less using the lists of hard and soft skills needed and the 5-year vision for the organization. Use the Resume Review Scoresheet

Email Information Tips:

- Identify at least five key issues facing your organization in the five years. Turn those issues into the questions.
- Start each question with “Tell me about a specific time when you had to...” or “Explain your experience with ...”
- At the end of each question, ask for a reference who can speak to that specific experience for the applicant.
- Limit emailed interview to 6-8 questions.

(see appendix 2A).

Then, make those candidates earn an interview.

Step 2: e-mail key interview questions

The traditional face-to-face interview does test the individual's ability to make decisions quickly, but the truth is that most jobs do not require that. The No. 2 spot often calls the individual to think strategically, see the big picture and take a more systematic approach to position the company for future success.

Through e-mail, owners can give the candidates the opportunity to flex their strategic muscles and really communicate their abilities.

Using key objectives the organization would like to achieve over the next several years, owners can craft a series of direct questions that will ask the candidates to describe their experience in each specific area.

Email the candidates and ask them what 24-hour period in the next seven days they would like complete an email interview. Send the questions at their requested time and soon you will find who is experienced in the areas you need and who has the experience necessary to handle the job.

Sample e-mailed Questions:

- Tell us about a time when you had to correct a doctor who was underperforming.
- Out of all the medical information management systems, which do you prefer and why?
- Explain your experience setting up or growing satellite offices for a medical clinic.

Bill Worzala, a candidate for a clinic administration position within a Minnesota medical group, was floored when he first received the list of questions asking him to explain his experience in specific areas and then identify references that could corroborate.

The questions were specific: Tell us about a time when you had to correct a doctor who was underperforming. Out of all the medical information management systems, which do you prefer and why? Explain your experience setting up or growing satellite offices for a medical clinic. Each question called him to go beyond the typically shallow resume and explain his successes.

His heart was pumping. He knew it was do or die time. Forget the firm handshake, eye contact and first words he may say when he first enters the traditional face-to-face interview. His first impression would be in that email. How could he make himself stand out? How could he tactfully answer questions about experience that he knew he did not have?

With time ticking, he read every question, resisting the temptation to provide an immediate answer. When he lacked experience in an area, he explained what he would in that situation. He wanted to show that he was a big picture thinker and was not afraid of a challenge.

Not knowing it, Bill had just made a slam dunk. The email interview does favor the experienced, but does not necessarily undervalue the less experienced. It does evaluate each candidates' ability to work within a deadline, follow directions, employ organization strategies and communicate.

It always amazes me how candidates respond. Some return the questions carefully formatted and spell checked. One applicant stated that he would not participate in this process, but looked forward to scheduling an interview in which he could explain his experiences. Are you kidding me? That response spoke volumes about his style, and his resume landed in the “Thanks. We will keep your resume on file” pile.

Step 3: Score the e-mailed responses

This step provides a good opportunity to engage some key employees in the process. Key employees can use the e-mail Response Worksheet (see appendix 2B) and ask them to evaluate the responses to each of the questions on a 3-point scale with a +, a 0, or a -, giving them the freedom to provide a little “extra credit” and reasoning as they fit. Then owners can tally the columns for a final score and narrow the pool to 3-4 top candidates to bring in for interviews.

But before they do, it’s important that leaders call their references to determine if *each* of their answers is true or exaggerated. The time owners spend here also will allow owners to arm themselves with additional insight and detailed information for the interview.

(Please call Maria Erlandson, Foley Elementary Principal @ 320-968-7286 for her comments re: truthfulness in the references for the e-mailed questions)

Step 4: Conduct a face-to-face interview

When it comes time for the face-to-face interviews, owners cannot revert back to the dozens of surface questions traditionally asked during a traditional interview. Really, what does an answer to a question like “If you were a book in the library, what would you be and why?” really tell you. This is a No. 2 you’re looking for. Dig in deeper.

Owners need to allow the emailed questions to create some of the content for the face-to-face interviews and rely on the Interview Score Sheet (see Appendix 2C) to guide their final decision. Start by choosing 4-5 questions from the emailed list to ask about in more detail during the hour interview. This gives candidates a second chance to respond, but also allows owners to challenge them to get more specific regarding implementation in the owner’s company.

It’s important for the questions to be relevant. If the vision has changed slightly since the emailed interviews, then owners need to craft new questions and let the candidates know beforehand about the change. Then, when candidates arrive for the interviews, give them the new material on paper and let them have an hour to think about the new collection of questions and be prepared to respond during the interview.

While the process stretched Bill Worzala’s thinking, he admits that the emailed interview better prepared him for his face-to-face interview. It gave him time to thoughtfully consider what he would bring to the position and the organization. He was able to spend 30 minutes on his answer to each question – instead of 30 seconds.

After the face-to-face interviews were completed, the medical group owners knew exactly what they were getting and could easily identify who would best serve the organization through its strategic growth cycle outlined in their 5-year plan.

Are you ready?

If you can answer yes to these three questions, you're ready to move forward.

- Have I designed a system that's so tight that people can't get an interview out of you without proving their worth in advance?
- Have I built a way for my key employees to have some input on answers to emails and face-to-face interviews?
- Do I have enough information from semi-finalists to select a No. 2?

Today, Bill still pulls out the email he sent to the medical group and reads his

responses. They provide a path to handling the issues the clinic is now facing. The result: the medical group has been able to successfully execute its expansion plan, opening **x** satellite offices in the past three years and growing its network to **x**. (Bruce: This is just a start. Add any sizable accomplishments here that can have happened under Bill's leadership. Anything happen faster than the industry average because Bill came in prepared, understanding the vision?)

Dawn – please call Bill & get a couple of sentences of data for this part. Thaks!

