

THE GENDREAU GROUP

REVENUE STRATEGISTS

New Hire Team Interview and Selection Process

Whenever a team's future success necessitates hiring a critical new member, one who is **self-motivated and a team player**, we recommend an interview and selection process that is:

- **Team-oriented** – involves all key peers whose own success will depend on the candidate's success
- **Purposefully stressful** – designed to reveal otherwise hard-to-detect strengths and weaknesses
- **Structured and rigorous** – examines the full range of knowledge, experience, skills and talents that will be required for this person to be successful in this role

Based on our 25+ years of hiring, managing, and consulting experience, we have found that organizations that use a team approach to interviewing and candidate selection tend to make **much smarter hiring decisions** than when decisions are made by individual managers based on one-on-one interviews. In this document we describe the new hire interview and selection process we developed, have used ourselves and that we frequently recommend to our clients.

The Interview and Selection Team

We typically recommend that candidate selection teams include **four to eight peers** whose success will depend on the candidate's success if that person is hired. Selection teams may also include one or more highly-regarded future direct reports or subordinates. (Note: In general, we suggest that no more than three levels – peers, direct reports, and the future manager – be represented on a selection team, although we always recommend that new hire candidates be accorded the opportunity to interview with or at least meet higher levels of management whenever possible.)

Once selected, each interview team member must understand and acknowledge the following:

- **The entire team will be responsible** for ensuring both a successful interview process and a successful candidate selection.
- **Each individual on the team will be responsible for making a HIRE/NO HIRE decision** at the conclusion of each interview – a responsibility that each member must take very seriously.
- **Each team member will have specific duties** that he/she will be asked to complete in advance of an interview in order to be ready to conduct the interview and make a HIRE/NO HIRE decision.
- **Team members should treat each other as co-equals** who will function under the leadership of the hiring manager or designated facilitator.

Hiring managers and senior management who employ a team selection approach must also be prepared to support the process and the decisions of the team, and to act only to approve or veto team decisions.

Preparing for a Team Interview

Team preparation is critical for the team interview process to work well. After a selection team has been identified, the hiring manager must ensure that each selection team member fully understands the requirements of the position for which the candidate will be interviewing.

After being briefed on the needs of the position and the background of the candidate, team members should each prepare and submit **3-5 interview questions** focusing on critical issues that will help determine if the candidate can handle the requirements of the position and, equally important, do so within the cultural norms of the organization. These questions should be submitted to the hiring manager at least 24 hours prior to the group interview.

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The hiring manager then reviews and **groups the questions into up to six categories** that reflect the requirements of the position and the needs of the interview team. Typical categories include:

- Organizational and Multi-tasking Skills
- Negotiation and Conflict Resolution
- Teamwork and Communication
- Delegation and Management
- Technical Expertise
- Subject Matter Knowledge

Next, the hiring manager **assigns responsibility for each category** to one of the interviewers, generally based on the interviewer's respective experience and knowledge – not necessarily based on current areas of responsibility.

In addition to assessing **knowledge and accomplishments**, the interview team must also be prepared to evaluate the **critical skills and talents** a candidate must have to be successful in the position for which they are applying. Therefore, whether the need is for sales skills, negotiation talent, research capabilities, analytics prowess, technical expertise, leadership talent, or whatever else, the interview team must prepare both **questions and tasks** that are specifically designed to give the interview team the opportunity to evaluate the candidate's command of required knowledge and skills and the depth of his/her experience and talents.

In addition, to the extent possible, the team should be prepared to ask the candidate to answer questions and perform tasks that will demonstrate how well the candidate can **address problems that really matter** to the team and the company.

For example:

- If a candidate needs to be highly self-discipline and organized, the team lead might ask the candidate to show (not just describe) how he/she organizes the currency or even the entire contents of his/her wallet.
- If a candidate needs to be a great presenter, speaker or facilitator, the team should be prepared with an in-meeting task that will give the candidate the opportunity to demonstrate their particular level of skill and talent at presenting, speaking, or facilitating.
- If a candidate must be good with numbers, the team should be prepared with a task that will force the candidate to prove that he/she can analyze a balance sheet or handle whatever types of numbers matter in the organization.
- If a candidate must be a good writer, the team should ask the person to bring samples of his/her writing and then, in the meeting, ask the person to describe how he/she went about the process of writing these pieces.
- If a candidate must be a good researcher or analyst, the team could give the person a research task and ask them to map out on a white board precisely how they would structure their work.
- If a candidate needs to be a great programmer, the team should consider having examples of code for the person to critique, correct, and improve.
- If the candidate needs to be good with business planning, the team might summarize an existing plan the company is considering and then ask the candidate for their observations and recommendations.

Note: Certain tasks may require that the candidate execute an NDA. It will be up to the team to ensure appropriate levels of confidentiality, and also that the team not inappropriately or unintentionally put the candidate or other members of the team or organization in awkward positions.

Finally, the team should assemble to **review the questions and planned activities, and determine if there are any critical gaps**, and if so, how these will be addressed. Team members should also ensure they have all required background information on the candidate, and that they have no scheduling conflicts that may preempt their participation in the interview as scheduled.

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Conducting a Team Interview

We have found that interview teams get the best results when candidates do not know in advance that their interviews will be conducted using a team approach. We have also found that candidates reveal their strengths and weaknesses more fully when they do not know the identity of the hiring manager, or if they do – even if just by name – when the hiring manager does not participate directly but only observes during the group interview.

The interview team should **assemble approximately 15 minutes in advance** of the interview to review the process and interview guidelines.

When the candidate is brought into the room, **team members should introduce themselves by name only**, and, without using titles, each should describe his/her area of responsibility and how the candidate will be expected to interact with and contribute to the team and the company, if the candidate is selected to fill the role for which they are interviewing.

Following introductions, the facilitator should initiate a **round robin Q&A** during which each team member will be given the opportunity to ask questions relating to their assigned category and to follow-up with questions relating to other categories. During this process, each team member will be expected to **take notes** on the following:

- The candidate's responses, demeanor and behavior
- Appropriateness for the position
- Fit with the culture of the organization
- Ability and willingness to contribute to the success of the team – not just his/her individual success

In addition to evaluating knowledge, talent, and experience, interview teams should also be prepared to test a candidate's **abilities to manage interpersonal and team interactions**. One technique we recommend is as follows: At some point during the interview, we recommend that someone be designated to ask a particularly challenging question, one which requires the respondent to provide a lengthy answer. As the candidate begins to respond, someone else should be prepared to interrupt and ask an equally or more challenging question. After the candidate has answered the second question, he/she should be asked to return to the first question, restate it, and complete the answer. This will help the team evaluate how the candidate handles interruptions, shifting topics, and multiple agendas – things that are typical of most work environments*.

Another technique we have used tests a candidate's **observational talents and ability to deal with surprises** and requests that are out of the ordinary. At some point, the facilitator asks the candidate to turn their chair around and face the wall or a corner without explanation. Someone then asks the candidate to describe one of the interviewers in as much detail as possible (e.g., eye color, complexion, hair style, attire and jewelry). If attention to detail is a desired attribute in a candidate, the facilitator should make certain to push the candidate to remember and describe as much detail as possible. In addition to evaluating how observant the candidate is, the team can also evaluate how well the candidate is likely to relate to the team, and how well they may be able to describe personal characteristics and handle interpersonal issues that may be potentially sensitive.

We also recommend that at least two interview questions **require the candidate to stand and address the group** or conduct a white board exercise. The objective here is to determine if the candidate can smoothly transition from sitting to standing, how competent they are thinking on their feet, and how comfortable they will be doing an extemporaneous, unplanned presentation to an unfamiliar audience. Even if the candidate is unlikely to have to present or speak in front of a group in the role for which they are interviewing, it is worth knowing in advance how well the person might perform if or *when* they may be required to do so.

* Note: *At the end of these kinds of interviews, we suggest that the facilitator or manager explain to candidates that certain interruptions were both planned and purposeful, and to apologize for any activities or behaviors that may have seemed inappropriate or rude.*

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Concluding a Team Interview: The Hire/No Hire Decision

Immediately prior to the conclusion of the interview, the facilitator should give the candidate an opportunity to ask any unanswered questions he/she may have about the position or the interview process. In our experience, we find that **the best candidates always have questions that show enthusiasm for the opportunity** and their willingness and desire to contribute to the company mission or team's success. Having no questions or asking primarily questions about perks and benefits are almost always red flags that the team should consider during evaluation.

After answering the candidate's questions, the facilitator should **ask the candidate to leave the room** and wait where he/she cannot hear the interview team.

Then, beginning with least senior or dominant persons on the team and working around to the most senior or dominant and with the hiring manager last, the facilitator should ask each team member the following two questions:

- What did you observe about this candidate that leads you to believe he/she will be successful in this role?
- What did you observe that leads you to believe he/she will not be successful in this role?

As each person responds, no one else may speak either to disagree or support the speaker's opinion. Clarifying questions may be asked if necessary after a respondent has completed their answers.

After each team member has had the opportunity to respond, the facilitator then conducts a round robin poll during which each team member must declare either **"HIRE" or "NO HIRE"**. Again, the least senior or dominant members go first, and the hiring manager goes last. This process mitigates the likelihood that more influential or senior members will sway the more junior or less out-spoken members.

If the majority of the team declares "NO HIRE", we recommend the candidate not be hired even if the hiring manager is in favor of this person. If the majority declares this a "HIRE", but the hiring manager declares "NO HIRE", we generally recommend against hiring the candidate. However, the hiring manager must also fully explain his/her rationale and thought process to the team.

During deliberations, the candidate is asked to remain on site in case there are questions that require follow-up. As soon as deliberations are complete, the facilitator should immediately notify and thank the candidate for their participation.

In general, we recommend informing "NO HIRE" candidates immediately after the interview about the team's decision. In some cases, we think managers can and should **provide constructive feedback** to help the candidate understand why they were not selected and how they might address shortcomings as they continue their quest for employment elsewhere. This process, however, needs to be managed carefully and in accordance with each firm's HR rules and regulations.

Candidates recommended as a "HIRE" will almost always require senior management approvals, background checks, credit checks, and other steps prior to being offered a job. The facilitator should simply thank the candidate for their time and **let them know when they should expect to hear a decision**. The hiring manager should then ensure that next steps happen accordingly.

After a Candidate is Hired

To ensure that members of the selection team continue to have a stake in the success of the hiring decision they have made, we recommend that the new employee's manager ask representatives from the selection team to participate in **informal coaching sessions** with the new hire for a period of up to six months from date of employment, typically with sessions scheduled at two-weeks, thirty-days, three months, and six months.