



# the HIRING game

by Dr. Denis L. Cauvier

Searching all options,  
including the Internet,  
can be very beneficial

ILLUSTRATION by David Moore

**In** TODAY'S TIGHT labour market, contractors need to become employers of choice. That means having your shop perceived by tradespeople as nothing less than a great place to work. The human resources implications for any shop that achieves this are many-fold. First, the shop will not experience the high degree of costly staff turnover currently experienced by most players in the construction industry. When staff are productive and happy they are less likely to jump ship for the sake of 30 cents more an hour. An additional benefit, is that any investments made in staff selection, training and development are later enjoyed as higher profits because the staff stays onboard longer.

The second advantage of being an employer of choice is that when recruiting for new skilled labour, the corporate goodwill associated with your business will attract passive job seekers, individuals who are currently employed but who are also on the lookout for the right opportunity with the right shop. If one company's reputation stands out above the rest, then various tradespeople will jump at the opportunity of being the one to fill a vacant position. Consider the following in a tight job market: Do you really want to be focusing on the few unemployed tradespeople out there? You have to ask yourself what caliber are these people that can't seem to find work in this current market and would you really want them as part of your team?

Looking for the perfect employee is like any job; it's much easier if you have the right tools. With the labour market being so tight, it's forcing companies to fine-tune their recruitment process. What better tool to turn to than the computer, specifically the Internet. Web site recruitment, or online recruitment as it is more commonly referred to, is a reality and is quickly becoming the cost-effective alternative to print and other media advertising when it comes to recruiting skilled labour.

Today, more than 20 million prospective job seekers have turned to the Internet to try to find that perfect job by sending their resumes online to potential employers. That's up from 500,000 in 1996. By late 2003, it is predicted that 95% of all companies with more than 50 employees will integrate some form of online recruiting into their overall recruitment strategy.

Like the fisherman who ditched the rod at the side of the riverbank for the factory freezer trawler and fishing nets, contractors need to shed the traditional mindset of hiring and embrace the advantages of information technology (IT) in staff selection. As contractors and business owners know, the traditional hiring process requires time to sift through applications, pre-screen candidates, then start the preliminary interview process.

Online recruitment can save time and money by pre-qualifying and pre-screening candidates before interviews are even scheduled.

Through standardization, resumes and job applications can be received in a format designed by the employer to meet his/her own needs. Online recruiting also enables prospective employees to surf the Internet for that right job that fulfills their needs. Not only can they mass distribute resumes but, through company Web sites or interactive recruitment networks, potential employees can also find out about a company's structure, job descriptions, information and/or links to relevant construction companies and job related sites.

To an employer, choosing the right online recruitment provider or agency is crucial to the success of its online recruitment strategy. The following questions can be used as a guide in selecting the right online portal to meet your recruitment needs:

- How employer-friendly and applicant-friendly is the e-recruitment service?
- Is the traffic (local or international) on the site targeted to your construction hiring needs?
- Does the database offer quality as well as quantity?
- Are the ads timely and editable?
- Does the service offer links to other relevant Web sites, provide online management of short-listed prospects and secure data transmission?
- Does the site provide someone for tech support?

Sound intimidating? It need not be. Online recruiting isn't the destination, it's merely a tool, a means to an end which is hiring the right person in the most time- and cost-effective manner. Once the company has successfully attracted qualified applicants, the next stage is to determine which potential employee would be the best choice. While there are dozens of methods of selecting the right person, I feel the most effective method is the employment interview.

#### FIVE BASIC INTERVIEW FORMATS

INTERVIEWS ARE commonly conducted on a one-to-one basis between the interviewer and the candidate, however, group interviews are sometimes used. One form of group interview is to have the applicant meet with two or more interviewers. This allows each interviewer to evaluate the individual on the basis

of the same questions and answers. Reliability is therefore improved.

Another variation is to have two or more applicants interviewed together by one or more interviewers. This saves time, especially for busy executives. It also permits the answers from different applicants to be compared immediately. The format should correspond to the position you're seeking to fill, as well as the interviewing procedures adopted by your company. There are five forms of interviews: unstructured, structured, mixed, problem-solving and stress-producing. The most appropriate of the formats depends on the position you're trying to staff, the philosophy of your company and your style preference.

The unstructured interview allows for the development of questions as the interview progresses. Due to the lack of control with this approach, reliability suffers since each applicant is asked a different set of questions. This can lead to overlooking areas of an applicant's skills or background.

In the structured interview, questions are standard and pre-determined. This allows the interviewer to cover specific areas while identifying the candidate's personal strengths and weaknesses. Specific answers regarding an applicant's qualifications and experience can be obtained with this approach. While it improves the reliability of the interview process, it doesn't allow the interviewer to follow up on interesting or unusual responses. One disadvantage to this method is that the interview ends up seeming mechanical, conveying a lack of interest to candidates who are used to more flexible interviews.

The mixed interview is the most widely used interviewing technique. It's a combination of the unstructured and structured interviews. With this format, the interviewer follows a pre-determined plan but deviates from it to query important details.

Problem-solving interviews focus on a problem or series of problems that the candidate is expected to solve during the course of the interview. Both the answer and the approach taken by the applicant are evaluated. This format is limited in scope yet it has one advantage: it reveals the applicant's ability to solve a variety of situational problems. The actual interview might consist of 10 scenarios. For example, the interviewer asks, "Suppose you notice the secretary

make a copy of a computer software program, and then place the disk into her purse. What would you do?"

The stress-producing interview is effective when staffing positions that involve high levels of stress, such as a police officer. The purpose of this format is to put the applicant under pressure to determine how well he/she can cope.

#### STRUCTURE OF THE INTERVIEW

THE STRUCTURE of an interview can best be described in five stages. Each stage has its own purpose and is intended to accomplish certain goals. An awareness of the purpose of each stage and the goals you're trying to accomplish makes the entire process smooth and effective. The five stages that each interviewer goes through are: preparation, opening, exchange of information, closing and evaluation.

##### Preparation

YOU MUST PREPARE yourself prior to the interview. Specific questions must be developed in advance, questions that will help you determine the applicant's suitability. At the same time, some consideration should be given to what questions the applicant is likely to ask. Since the interview should also be used to prepare top applicants to accept subsequent job offers, interviewers need to be able to explain job duties, performance standards, pay, benefits and other areas of interest beyond the scope of the specific job opening.

##### The Opening

DURING THE OPENING, the interviewer and interviewee get acquainted, and the interviewee is put at ease. This will help the applicant converse more freely, and you'll likely receive answers that accurately reflect the true characteristics of the applicant. The interviewer should always explain the procedure that will be followed during the interview. This serves to put the candidate further at ease by letting them know what's generally going to happen and about how long it will take. The candidate will also be reassured to know that there will be an opportunity to ask questions towards the end of the interview.

##### Exchange of Information

THE BODY OF the interview is the assessment period. Here, the interviewer fulfills

the primary objective of gathering the information that will help determine whether the applicant fits the job. The way the exchange of information is conducted is crucial. The interviewer needs to ask appropriate questions, solicit pertinent responses and constantly evaluate the applicant's verbal and non-verbal expressions.

### The Closing

AFTER YOU SOLICITED all the information you need to make the hiring choice, it's time to end the interview. Here, both the applicant and the interviewer have a chance to meet some of their objectives. The applicant has an opportunity to find out what they want to know about the position, the organization and prospective co-workers. The interviewer, in addition to answering the applicant's queries, has the chance to further evaluate the applicant's values, and to sell the candidate on the company and the job, if appropriate.

Let the applicant know when you expect to make a decision and how he/she will be contacted. Being clear about the steps you intend to take will set the applicant at ease about the waiting period that follows the interview. Be careful not to say anything that could be misconstrued as a job offer.

### Evaluation

IMMEDIATELY following the interview, the interviewer should record specific answers and general impressions. A post-interview report is a checklist used to record the interviewer's impressions.

### WHAT ARE THE BEST QUESTIONS TO ASK?

SINCE THE CRUX of the interview is the exchange of information, your effectiveness as an interviewer is extremely important. For many people, asking critical questions can be the most difficult part of the interview.

On the surface, questioning may appear to be a simple skill. However, effective questioning can take many years to master. It's unprofessional to initiate an interview without a strategy for obtaining the information you need. The position you're trying to fill will determine the kind of information you will want to collect. By reviewing the job description, you can familiarize yourself with the qualifications the position requires. It's advisable to follow a pre-planned progression of questioning. This

will reduce the probability of confusing the applicant with random questions. Typically, the progression goes from work history, to educational background, to personal and professional goals.

### Open-Ended Questions

AN OPEN-ENDED question is one that allows for an expanded range of responses. It allows you to glimpse how the applicant thinks, gauge the applicant's communication skills and scrutinize the applicant's ability to organize his/her responses.

Questions that begin with the words who, what, where, when, why and how, solicit open responses. Open-ended questions might also start with a phrase such as "Tell me ...". An open-ended question is one that's impossible to answer it with Yes or No. Also, it does not suggest to the applicant what specific kinds of information the interviewer wants. It does not suggest what the interviewer considers important, nor does it imply that a given answer will be considered correct.

When using this questioning technique, you may be asked by the candidate, "What exactly would you like to know?" Your response should be: "I don't have anything specific in mind. Feel free to say whatever you like."

When asking open-ended questions, be prepared for some silence on the part of the applicant. A pause of a few seconds is normal. This allows the candidate to collect their thoughts to form an answer. You may need to rephrase questions or probe for more detail if you don't find out what you're after.

By encouraging the candidate to answer in their own way, you place the responsibility for carrying the conversation on the applicant. The 70/30 rate of communications applies during the interviewing process, with the interviewer speaking no more than 30% of the time. By listening and observing the rest of the time, one can learn new things about the candidate.

After asking a sufficient number of open-ended questions, it's time to close the interview with such comments as, "You've given me a good review of your background and experience. I've enjoyed talking with you and I appreciate what you've shared with me. It'll help us make our decision. Before we close, what else would you like to cover? What would you like to ask me about the job or organization or anything else?"



Once you've taken care of the candidate's concerns, you can end the interview. At this point in time, the applicant starts to relax because the interview is drawing to a close. Just before the candidate leaves my office, I will ask one final question: "Why should I hire you?" I ask this question because I'm very interested in how the candidate will react and how quickly they can summarize their strengths.

Several years ago, I had a contract to hire security guards for a maximum security national political conference. There had been numerous rumors of pending picketing and related disruptions. It was critical that I select a staff who would react very well under pressure. I remember interviewing this 23-year-old, 6'3", 230-pound body-builder type who had ample experience as a uniformed guard. As the interview came to a close, I asked him, "Why should I hire you?" This question caught him so off-guard that he became flustered. He immediately broke down and actually sobbed in my office. He couldn't find the inner resilience to compose himself. Although I felt like a heel for making this grown man cry, the test had been beneficial because it proved this person didn't possess the necessary stress management skills to succeed at the position for which he was applying.

Hiring decisions should be suspended until all the interviews are completed. Many contractors make the mistake of automatically weeding out applicants immediately after the interview is over – sometimes even sooner. Resist the impulse to do this and keep an open mind. ☐

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Dr. Denis L. Cauvier, is the president of Dr. Denis L. Cauvier Seminars International. He has more than 14 years of practical experience as a senior corporate executive and business owner.