Selecting who to hire is an extremely important decision for your organization. It can be quite expensive if you hire the wrong candidate. Many experts claim that hiring the wrong person exceeds the cost of an annual salary for the position. Despite the importance of hiring, I’ve witnessed numerous instances where managers interview candidates totally unprepared. They tell the candidate to wait a few minutes while they skim through their resume and then they ask random questions during the interview. Needless to say, this is not the recommended approach for spotting and hiring talent.

In this first part of this series on conducting professional interviews I’ll cover how to prepare for the interview. You shouldn’t fool yourself into believing that you are naturally good at interviewing. Everyone needs to prepare in order to conduct a good job interview. If you follow the five steps below you will have come a long way.

1. Schedule time for preparation
   As soon as you have the interview with the candidate scheduled (normally this is at least one week in advance), you should schedule time in your calendar to prepare for the interview. Book an hour for the first candidate since it will take you some time to go through the job description and the questions. For the following candidates you can set aside less time since you have already done a big part of the work.

2. Review the job description
   The first thing you should do when you start preparing for the interview is to go through the job description. If you are the hiring manager you have probably had some input to the job description, or perhaps you have written it yourself. In any case it’s important that you have a clear picture of the position you are going to fill, and it’s also beneficial to be aware of what the candidate knows about the job from reading the description. When you are reviewing the job description think about the qualities a person should have in order to be successful in the job.
3. Prepare questions
When you have a clear picture of the position you want to fill, you should prepare the questions. There are many different types of questions, including:

- **Fact-based questions**: “What percentage of your sales quota did you achieve last year?”
- **Situational or hypothetical questions**: What would you do if you realized your top customer was leaking confidential information you had shared with them in confidence?
- **Stress questions**: You have no managerial experience – why would we hire you to manage our sales team?
- **Behavioral questions**: Tell me about a time when you had to resolve a difficult conflict within your team.

I recommend that you ask behavioral questions. If someone has done something in the past, there is a good chance they will do it again, so it’s a good predictor for how the candidate will behave in the future. Also, in contrast to answers to situational questions where the candidate can freely make something up, fabricating answers to behavioral questions is much more difficult. If your organization doesn’t already have question templates you can use, I would recommend you have a look at Manager Tools Interview Tool. This is a tool that is available to Manager Tools’ premium members only, but I can warmly recommend it. You will prepare the set of questions once for the position, the same questions will then be used for each candidate so that you can easier compare their responses.

4. Learn about the candidate
Now that you have reviewed the job description and prepared the questions that are appropriate for the position it’s time to learn about the candidate – you shouldn’t do it until you’ve completed the previous steps. If you have the qualifications needed for the job clear in your mind you will be able to go through the candidate’s resume and cover letter with the right mindset. Mark anything you think stands out and take notes of things you want to ask the candidate about during the interview. Add these questions to your questionnaire.

When you have gone through the documentation submitted by the candidate, such as the resume, the cover letter, etc. you should do your own online due diligence. There are a lot of sources available online – LinkedIn, Facebook, Google. It’s true that people have separate private and professional lives, but even so I believe that in many cases, what a candidate has chosen to publish online says a lot about their judgment. According to a study, a person’s facebook page can predict future job performance.
5. Wrap up any interview logistics

When you are done with your preparation you should wrap up any logistics that need to be organized before the interview. Do you need to book a room for the interview? Is the interview taking place in your own office or somewhere else? Do you need to arrange for transportation? You want to make sure that you have all the logistics wrapped up so that there are no surprises when the interview is to take place. Remember, it’s just as important for you to make a good first impression on the candidate as the other way around!

Make your job easier

Conducting interviews can be quite challenging, especially if you are ill-prepared. By following these steps you will be more confident during the interview, it will be easier for you to evaluate various candidates and you will increase the chances of a good hire.

If you want to know how you can organize your preparation notes and your questions using Microsoft OneNote 2010 you can watch the video “Prepare and conduct professional job interviews”. In this video I’ll show you how you can effectively organize job interview information using Microsoft Office 2010. Good luck in your preparations!