

## How to Screen Your Candidates

As recruiters, we have a natural tendency to go easy on our candidates, especially during the first screening. We'd prefer to treat them deferentially, as if they were royalty and we were Barbara Walters. To avoid confrontation, we ask superficial questions and accept clichés for answers. Or worse, we simply tune out the answers we don't want to hear.

Unfortunately, there's a downside to "fluff" interviewing: We end up working with a lot of poor-quality job seekers who can potentially wreak havoc on our performance—and our reputation as recruiters.

### Are You Playing Hardball—or Softball?

Every time I screen a candidate, I try to apply a healthy dose of scrutiny. If the candidate's free of defects, great. But if the candidate fails the litmus test, you could be in for a bumpy ride in the form of a turndown, a falloff or an accepted counteroffer. By tightening up the initial screening process, you can save time and avoid a lot of headaches down the road.

To help you decide whether a candidate gets the red light or the green light, consider these four factors:

1. Time frame. Is the candidate ready to accept a new position now? If not, file the person away for future use or use the candidate as a source of new referrals. A typical time frame question might be, "If I set up an interview next week, and the company offered you the right job, would you be able to accept the job, turn in your resignation and start your new job at the end of this month?"
2. Profile. Does the candidate possess the skills and work history needed for a job you're trying to fill? If so, fine. If not, come back to the person when his or her skills are in demand.
3. Motivation. Can the candidate give you a sufficiently good reason for changing jobs? If not, you may find yourself stuck with a tire-kicker or recruiter-manipulator. With the exception of certain circumstances (such as a spousal relocation or imminent unemployment), people only change jobs if there's something they desperately want and can't get at their current job, or if there's something they have at their current job and can't deal with.

To find out if a candidate is money-motivated, remember this simple rule: The only acceptable reason for changing jobs for more money is if the increase in pay will materially change the candidate's lifestyle or self-identity. If it won't, the "more money" candidate should be quarantined and filed under "MONEY ONLY."

4. Urgency. A person may be genuinely motivated to make a job change, but unless there's a sense of urgency, you may end up coddling a whiner or enabling a serial interviewer. Try to discover the tipping point that pushed the person from "passively disgruntled" to "locked and loaded." If you can't find the urgency, you may be better off working with someone else.

By asking the right questions, you can get your candidates accurately—and quickly. And by spending more of your time with the winners, you'll make your clients happy and your bottom line healthy.