Improving the Interview Process: 7 Steps for Long-term Care

White Paper

Source. Evaluate. Interview. Give feedback. Gather feedback. Compare results. Finally — make a hiring decision. These are the 7 steps of the hiring process for most organizations, but they don’t tell the whole story for long-term care facilities.

The interview process is not black and white for any industry, but hiring in long-term care is especially challenging. High turnover, a wide range of positions to fill, and grueling resident care requirements are just some of the contributing factors.

One trend that is impacting hiring practices in long-term care facilities is the flailing U.S. economy. The recession spurred many to view the healthcare industry as an opportunity for stable employment. According to the Wall Street Journal and the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the healthcare industry added 31,300 new jobs to the U.S. economy in July 2011 – a larger increase than most other industries. For some organizations, the increase in openings combined with high unemployment rates led to a flood of unqualified applicants.

To thrive, long-term care organizations must consistently hire talented staff members who are service-oriented and will thrive in their facilities. To do so, interviewers need to make sure their process is as efficient and effective as possible – especially in light of the current economy, the increase in unqualified applicants, and the truly unique long-term care workplace. In this white paper, we will outline simple improvements for each step of the process.
1. Align the Interview with the Job Description

Make it easy for candidates to evaluate your organization and make sure you’re attracting qualified candidates. It starts with the job description.

“Write thorough job descriptions that specify the exact qualifications,” advises David, Szary, Founder of LEAN Human Capital and The Recruiter Academy. He recommends HR professionals “add pre-qualification questions based on the non-negotiable requirements for the position to screen out unqualified individuals.”

Long-term care organizations often face a two-pronged complication: (1) a high volume of applicants, (2) many of whom are not familiar with the unique challenges that employees face daily. Make it easy for applicants to understand the job responsibilities before they apply by involving those who understand the role best. Hiring managers and their staff should be involved in the selection of dimensions and characteristics for the role, and then apply those to the job description.

Lydia Ostermeier, the Director of Nursing Recruitment and Patient Care Services at Indiana University Health and NAHCR President, feels that partnering with hiring managers right from the beginning is critical. “Increase emphasis on top talent and assume the responsibility as recruiters in the HR community for assisting and being a strategic partner with hiring managers to hire for the right fit.”

Start the Conversation with Social Media

Sourcing the best talent means being accessible to the best talent. The HealthcareSource and ASHHRA HR Initiatives Survey results, which surveyed 234 healthcare HR professionals, showed that 30% of the respondents chose “social media for recruitment” as one of their top HR initiatives for the coming year. Unless long-term healthcare organizations get on board, they risk missing out on prime candidates, especially within the younger generations. Many forward-thinking long-term care healthcare organizations are using social media to their advantage. According to Jodi Weiss, Senior Recruiter at Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics, social media can help show the world what a competitive and cutting edge facility you are, which is the ideal impression to make before a candidate comes in for an interview.

Some healthcare organizations can now add a job search tab to their Facebook page that links directly to their applicant tracking system. Children’s Mercy Hospital and Clinics recently began posting jobs on Facebook through their applicant tracking system, Position Manager®. To read more about how organizations are embracing social media for sourcing and interviewing, visit the HealthcareSource Blog.
2. Be Consistent and Look for Cultural Fit

While many organizations have adopted behavioral-based interviewing methods, it can be problematic if executed without a consistent approach. This is especially true for team-based interviews because different interviewers walk away with different impressions of the same candidate.

Once you find those candidates who look good on paper, using behavioral-based assessment technology could be the best way to pre-screen candidates before they move forward in the interview process. These tools provide a consistent interview guide with questions designed to find the right personality and cultural fit for the position and for your organization.

“Consistency in the interview process is critical,” noted Mark Wiersma, Assessment Division Manager for HealthcareSource. “Using a structured interview process ensures that candidates will be asked job-related questions built around critical job competencies.” From a risk management perspective, consistency and a structured interview guide is imperative. “Good questions mean good data,” said Mark.

To avoid asking “yes or no” questions and questions that lead candidates to give you the answers you want to hear, Mark recommends using the SAO method to obtain answers that demonstrate behaviors. The interviewer should take notes and listen for 3 components within the answer to the question:

**Situation (S):**
The situation or task facing the applicant

**Action (A):**
The actions the applicant took

**Outcome (O):**
The results or changes caused by those actions

The interview process should always be centered on hiring candidates who are an excellent fit for your organization – using a structured interview guide helps facilitate this. Miranda Maynard, Employment Supervisor at EMH Healthcare, recommends recruiters “use a behavioral-based, pre-employment assessment solution to help ensure they’re ultimately going to hire the right people.”

Jodi Weiss advises recruiters to “[base their] behavioral-based interviewing on the organizations’ culture and values. No matter how talented a candidate, it’s not a good match if he or she won’t fit in with the culture – screen applicants for cultural fit. After all, you can train someone who is the right culture fit but the opposite is not true.”

**Benefits of Behavioral Interviewing Methods**

Behavioral description or behavioral consistency questions ask the candidate to describe how he or she behaved in previous relevant situations. Because past behavior can be considered the best predictor of future behavior in the same kinds of situations, these questions are particularly helpful. They are most useful when they probe for specific details about how an applicant behaved in previous situations. For example, to evaluate if an applicant is caring or compassionate:

Please describe your most rewarding experience helping others.

- What was the situation?
- Exactly what did you do?
- What motivated you to do this?
- What was the outcome of your efforts?
The healthcare HR professionals we interviewed highlighted 5 key errors that prevent healthcare organizations from hiring the best person for the job:

1. Undefined job expectations
Failing to define what characteristics you’re seeking make it impossible to come up with appropriate screening and interviewing questions. Do your homework before you create the job description to avoid vagueness.

2. Ignoring the rules:
Ignoring the interview guide and hiring a candidate anyway based on a “gut” feeling can be a mistake. A gut feeling is important and shouldn’t be completely ignored, but make sure you implement an interview guide at the same time for consistency.

3. Lack of education
Many organizations roll out methodologies but don’t support their implementation through proper training. Always rely on transparency throughout the process and provide training for hiring managers on how to use the interview guide.

4. Naivety
Falling for the “I want to get into healthcare to help people” response. To thrive in a service-based industry and competitive market, long-term care organizations need to focus on hiring customer oriented individuals who also have the competencies to succeed – not just the desire.

5. Talking too much
You shouldn’t spend more time speaking than the person you’re interviewing. Hiring a candidate when the interviewer does most of the talking can lead to inadequate hires. Make sure you’re selling and not telling during the interview.
4. Evaluate Your Performance

The healthcare organizations who contributed to this white paper average the following for staff-level recruiting:

- **15-30 minutes for a screening interview with a recruiter**
- **1 hour with a hiring manager**
- **1 hour for a peer interview**

Healthcare HR professionals can access in-depth benchmark metrics from LEAN Human Capital and directly compare their own performance against peer organizations.

Miranda Maynard is one of two recruiters at EMH Healthcare. In 2010, she and her colleague interviewed 800 people to fill 350 positions; compared to organizations of a similar size, they determined EMH was on track, with a successful “interview to fill” ratio. By developing quality, efficient hiring processes, EMH can now focus on interviewing only those candidates who seem to be a good fit.

Lydia Ostermeier agrees, “Participate in benchmark surveys such as those from LEAN Human Capital to identify strengths and weaknesses in your processes. Then re-define your processes if necessary to incorporate standardized best practices and support more evidence-based selection.”

Here’s an example of benchmarking data from LEAN Human Capital compared to internal data provided by over 1200 healthcare organizations that utilize Position Manager®, an applicant tracking system from HealthcareSource.
5. Automate the Interview Process

Software such as applicant tracking systems automatically manage much of the information and processes that were handled manually in the past. This includes matching applicants to jobs and responding to candidates. At the same time, these systems help ensure that information is properly routed, such as passing promising applications on to hiring managers, creating task alerts and follow through reminders.

With applicant tracking software, you can quickly send information to a hiring manager and get feedback. To make the interview process more efficient, train hiring managers on the interview process you’ve developed and provide them with standardized feedback forms to make it easier for everyone involved.

You can also use this software to create a library of worthwhile data. “Load all job descriptions into performance management software and build job postings from those,” advises Lydia Ostermeier. Also, add data to candidate records to make sure your hiring managers are well informed throughout the interview process.

There are many steps when it comes to interviewing and hiring for long-term care. Removing the hassle of a manual process is critical to making things more efficient. By tapping into new HR technology, healthcare organizations can improve the interviewing process and better establish themselves as an employer of choice.

Jodi Weiss advises recruiters to “help managers and other staff develop interview questions to ensure compliance with the law.” According to Miranda Maynard, “Many regulations and laws affect recruitment, an organization’s direction, what candidates you seek, and your hiring process. Stay abreast of industry changes and the healthcare recruitment market by researching and networking.” Make sure these new regulations influence your interview guide and keep all relevant staff up-to-date on any changes.

6. Multiply the Impact of Team Interviews

Team interviews can help evaluate a candidate’s qualifications and fit for a role, but their effectiveness depends on how well you prepare and support the interviewers.

“It’s important to train new hiring managers and relevant staff on the ‘do’s and don’ts’ of interviewing by providing them with an interview guide ahead of time so they can review and adjust it to fit their needs,” advised Cathy Benson, Director of Employment and Recruitment at Spartanburg Regional.

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HealthcareSource Software
- **Position Manager**: Applicant tracking and onboarding designed specifically for healthcare.
- **Performance Manager**: Automates the workflow and content for appraisals, competencies, training and performance reporting.
- **Physician Recruitment Manager**: Streamlines the physician recruitment and retention process.
- **Staff Assessment**: Proven behavioral-based, pre-employment assessments.
- **Leadership Assessment**: Proven behavioral-based assessments for healthcare leaders.
- **Reference Assessment**: Automates the pre-employment reference checking process.
- **Sourcing Manager**: ROI metrics for online recruitment media sources.

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Indiana University (IU) Health, named among the ‘Best Hospitals in America’ by US News & World Report for five consecutive years, employs a novel approach to evaluating candidates based on their organization’s mission and culture.

For its academic health center comprised of three large health centers, IU Health receives up to 20,000 applications per month for the 2,000 nurse positions it seeks to fill each year. After using behavioral assessment software to screen for fit and ensure candidates have the service excellence characteristics IU Health is seeking, they invite the top candidates to a class called An Introduction to a Culture of Always. This class acquaints the candidates to the organization’s vision, mission and values.

After the class, participants interview with hiring managers, then shadow a peer in the work area for which they’re applying. This process provides candidates with a real taste for the organization and the position, while giving potential co-workers an opportunity to assess them.

According to Lydia Ostermeier, the ultimate measure of the new program’s success will be change in turnover and HCAHPS scores. Meantime, candidates have already provided positive feedback by telling IU Health it’s a terrific introduction to the organization, and recruiters have said they appreciate another set of eyes evaluating candidates in-person. Best of all, because they utilize an extensive and automated screening process beforehand, the program hasn’t slowed down the hiring process.

Conclusion: Keep Striving to Improve

Let's review the 7 steps to improving your interview process.

1. Focus on providing the right job descriptions
2. Create and implement a consistent approach
3. Avoid and learn from past mistakes
4. Review your performance against other organizations
5. Automate the interview process
6. Build meaningful peer interviewing strategies
7. Let your organization’s mission influence the process

Successful long-term care professionals employ interview strategies that are built around their unique culture, such as job descriptions that reflect each positions’ requirements. This helps attract new hires that will be successful in their organization. Another key to success is ensuring consistency while interviewing candidates – during each step of the process. Not only does consistency help make the process more efficient, but it also imparts a positive impression on candidates.

The 7 concepts outlined in this white paper are important steps towards improvement, but there are always new steps to take. Harness all the tools at your disposal to ensure the best results and remember to stay in the know.

To keep pace with the interviewing, hiring, and talent management changes in the healthcare HR field, subscribe to the HealthcareSource blog, HealthcareTalent Management, and join the conversation on Facebook and Twitter.
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With over 1,700 healthcare facilities as clients, HealthcareSource is the leading provider of talent management software for the healthcare industry. Through its cloud-based solutions, HealthcareSource helps healthcare organizations source, hire, assess, develop and retain the best workforce possible in order to reduce costs and to improve patient satisfaction and safety. The company’s talent management solutions include applicant tracking, onboarding, performance management, behavioral assessments, reference checking, physician recruiting, and candidate sourcing. A private corporation, HealthcareSource focuses exclusively on the healthcare industry and consistently earns high marks for client satisfaction and retention. HealthcareSource was named 2011 category leader for Talent Management by KLAS Research. www.healthcaresource.com

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