



## **Effectively Screening Resumes**

*Provided by the workplace experts at Robert Half*

If you are like many hiring managers, you have multiple commitments and priorities that you juggle daily. When it comes time to make a new hire, it is important to address the project in the most efficient and effective way to maximize your time. Your job posting may attract dozens of applicants, both qualified and unqualified. Developing a method for screening these resumes — and adhering to it — will ensure consistency in your hiring efforts and allow you to identify the best prospects for interviews.

The most commonly used resume format is reverse chronological, in which the most recent work experience is listed first. This is the preferred style of most hiring managers because it lets you see how a career has progressed and illustrates growth in responsibility. When reviewing this kind of resume, look for any large gaps in the applicant's work history. There's usually a reasonable explanation — such as a layoff, relocation or time spent raising a family — but you'll want to inquire about this in an interview or screening call.

Candidates who want to de-emphasize an employment gap or who are transitioning to a new career often choose a functional resume format, which is organized based on skills and expertise. The benefit of this style is that it immediately spotlights relevant skills and experience. Its disadvantage is that you'll have to look for what may be *missing* from the information — such as actual positions held or specific job descriptions. Functional resumes are sometimes used by applicants who have encountered layoffs or whose background is light on experience.

### **Scan First for the Basics**

Your initial screening will be much easier if you have clearly communicated the core qualifications for the position in the job listing. If applicants know up front exactly which skills are essential, you are likely to hear from fewer individuals who are less than qualified. A clear set of

standards to use in reviewing resumes also allows you to more quickly identify candidates most suited to the position.

### **Narrow the Field**

After you eliminate applicants who fail to meet the core qualifications, examine the remaining resumes for those who particularly distinguish themselves. Has the candidate taken time to understand the job requirements and spotlight relevant background and achievements? An individual who did his homework and emphasized his most applicable strengths demonstrates initiative and could be a strong match for the position. Also try to assess how important the accomplishments outlined were to previous employers — in other words, did the candidate seem to understand the big picture and align her efforts with business goals? Look for a bottom-line impact.

Examine the resume for a history of stability and advancement, which often reflects a solid work ethic and commitment. Set a high standard — for example, the resume must hit a particular percentage of the criteria.

### **Read Everything Submitted**

The cover letter can be just as informative as the resume, so take the time to review it carefully as well. You'll often gain additional insights about a candidate's career goals and why the individual feels he is a good match for the position. The cover letter will tell you how well the applicant communicates in writing and whether she's done her homework in researching the position, your company or the industry. If you read between the lines, the cover letter will also reveal whether the candidate is genuinely interested in the position.

### **Beware of Red Flags**

Look for clues that may indicate a candidate is not a strong match:

*Vague wording.* If you're not sure what an individual did when he "coordinated special projects," request specifics. Also take note of phrases such as "participated in" and "exposure to." Ambiguous language may be used to disguise a lack of extensive experience or knowledge in a particular area. Has the candidate really mastered PowerPoint, or did she just use the software a couple of times at a previous job?

*Possible lack of commitment.* When reviewing the resume, don't overlook the section on outside interests, if one is given. If it has more detail than the work history, this might indicate that the candidate places a higher priority on personal hobbies than his career. If you sense these activities may interfere with the commitment to the job, delve into this area further during a screening call.

*Sloppiness.* Professionalism comes through in well-crafted documents. A candidate whose resume includes formatting inconsistencies, typos or misspellings may not be conscientious on the job.

### **Contact the Contenders**

Establish a separate file for finalists who pass the screening process. If you have only a few candidates at this point, you may want to interview them all. If you have a large abundance of candidates, a logical next step is a phone screen. Initiate a short conversation with each applicant to clarify career goals and gather additional information. This will help you identify the top candidates to interview.

The key to effectively evaluating resumes is to set clear standards, review each document thoroughly and strive to uncover any potential red flags. You can't determine a fit simply by reading a resume. But a consistently applied system will yield the best individuals to interview and help ensure a quality hire who can make an immediate contribution to your business.

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