

# PROCESS FOR USING AN INTERVIEW COMMITTEE

NOTE: Make certain you determine ahead of time the available interview times for the Interview Committee. Make certain the applicants know how to get to the parish; send directions, if necessary. Also, be very clear about where in the parish the interviews will occur.

For those applicants that you are not going to interview, it is sufficient to notify them by mail as to their status. (A SAMPLE LETTER SENT TO THOSE NOT INTERVIEWED IS INCLUDED IN THIS PACKET.)

## INTERVIEWING APPLICANTS

1. Choose the Interview Committee. It is recommended that one to two people who were involved in screening applicants be involved in the interviewing process. The rest of the Interview Committee should be people who were not involved in screening the applicants.
2. Determine what decision-making process will be used. For example, will the Interview Committee recommend to the Pastor/Parochial Minister only the top candidate? the top two or three candidates? Has the Pastor/Parochial Minister delegated the responsibility for the decision to the Committee? Will the Committee use a "majority" vote, or will there be a consensus process for making the recommendation/decision?

This is a critical decision that needs to be known by all persons involved, before any interviewing actually begins.

3. Develop written questions for the interview. For all jobs, there are both "technical/skill" and "performance" questions. For example, for a Director of Religious Education, the Committee needs to ask technical/skill questions about the "content" of the job--catechetics, formation, RCIA, etc. Additionally, there are performance questions that get at HOW the person works/performs in a particular work environment. For example, questions about issues like a team approach to ministry, collaboration, communication, dealing with stress and conflict, preferred style of supervision, etc., also need to be asked.
4. Have each Committee Member review the position description.
5. Have each Committee Member review the qualifications and qualities for the job.
6. Have each Committee Member carefully study the candidate's application and résumé.

## INTERVIEWING ETIQUETTE

Interviews should be conducted in a private room where the candidate will be able to speak freely. There should not be interruptions during the interview. For professional ministerial positions, each interview should last at least one and a half hours. For support positions, one hour may be sufficient. Although this may seem long, it is the only way you can make an informed decision. Remember, a decision you make after one hour will have consequences for years to come!

## Recommended Interviewing Techniques

1. Designate which Committee Member will facilitate the interview process.
2. Establish a friendly atmosphere by greeting the applicant at the door, introducing yourself, other Committee Members, and calling the applicant by name.
3. Begin the interview with a brief description of the job.
4. Start with the planned questions, covering all areas, and have the same person ask the same questions of all candidates.
5. Ask open-ended questions rather than questions that can be answered with a "yes" or "no." Let the applicant do most of the talking.
6. Give the applicant the opportunity to ask questions.
7. Avoid making immediate judgments or expressing personal feelings. Rely on information presented during the interview and through the application. Don't rely on just your "gut feeling."
8. Check inconsistencies by asking follow-up questions; don't be afraid to push the applicant for further clarification or explanation if you are not satisfied with the answer.
9. Take notes of important points and reactions. Inform the applicant at the beginning that you will all be taking notes, and that although it may be distracting, it is the only way you will all be able to remember each applicant.
10. Reconfirm the salary range and explain the benefit package. It is important to let the candidate know precisely what they can and cannot expect in the area of total compensation. For example, in addition to the parish benefit package (pension, medical, life insurance), make certain at least one member of the Interview Committee can answer any questions regarding:
  - a. Vacation
  - b. Sick leave
  - c. Holidays
  - d. Professional time (for evening work)
  - e. Continuing Education opportunities
  - f. Parking (if applicable)
  - g. Mileage reimbursement/car allowance
  - h. Days off/regular work hours
  - i. Personal leave (with or without pay)
  - j. Office space
  - k. Secretarial assistance (if appropriate)
  - l. Supervisor
11. Let the applicants know when they will be notified of your decision. Tell them that if they are one of the top candidates, you will be contacting them for names of people who can provide references on their behalf. An alternative to this approach is to ask all applicants to come with a list of four or five personal and professional references, including full names, phone numbers, and addresses.
12. Always thank the applicant for coming.

### Specific Questions You May NOT Ask

(either on an application or during an interview--the Civil Rights Act and other laws make it illegal to ask for certain information.)

1. What is your race or color?
2. What is your lineage, ancestry, nationality, or parentage?
3. How old are you? What is your date of birth?
4. What is your marital status?
5. What is your maiden name?
6. Where is your birthplace?
7. Would you please provide a photograph?
8. What is your height, weight, eye color, hair color?
9. To which clubs, societies, and lodges do you belong?
10. Have you been arrested?
11. Who are your relatives: names, addresses, and ages?
12. Would you tell me about your military discharge?
13. Where does your spouse work?
14. How many children do you have?
15. How old are your children? Have you taken care of day care provisions?

### REFERENCE CHECKS

Pre-employment reference checks are very important. While letters of recommendation can be helpful in the initial screening, reference checks are most efficiently done by telephone or by personal visit, if practical. Letters or forms rarely provide the type of information needed to obtain a complete view of the candidate. People hesitate to put in writing information--especially negative traits and experiences--which they might volunteer over the phone.

Prepare for the call by making a list of the questions to be asked. Obtain permission from the candidate if calling a present employer. A reference check should not jeopardize the applicant's job.

Call the people identified as references. Identify yourself and explain the reason for the call. Assure confidentiality. Describe the position being filled to assist the person being contacted in answering the questions.

Questions should be developed according to the "technical" and "performance" components of the job in question. For example, if you are interviewing for a Director of Religious Education, ask questions about previous experience in areas of leadership, staff motivation, curriculum development, conflict management, etc.

Rely again on the questions prepared for the interview, and determine if the present/former supervisor experienced the applicant in a manner similar to how the applicant described him/herself.

## MAKING THE DECISION

The selection process involves making an informed decision about which candidate both meets the qualifications and also has the highest possibility of success in that particular position. It is important to take the time and care in making that selection; extra effort initially can avoid the problems created by having a less than satisfactory employee.

### Ethical Considerations

As in recruitment, care must be taken in the selection process to assure just treatment of candidates. In general, the following practices are unethical:

1. Contacting an applicant's present employer without her/his permission.
2. Selecting the preferred candidate, using different criteria from those advertised.
3. Allowing subtle biases to determine the preferred candidates, e.g., from certain colleges; from certain age groups; referred by friends; with traditional male career patterns.
4. Asking candidates to provide information about race, age, and other personal characteristics which are not job related.
5. Discriminating on the basis of race, skin color, gender, national origin, or age.

It is recommended that members of the Interview Committee NOT discuss candidates UNTIL the last candidate is interviewed. Discussing perceptions and observations after each interview clearly colors the objectivity with which each Committee Member sees the candidates.

In making a recommendation/decision about whom you will offer the job to, the Committee should:

1. Evaluate the candidates objectively by reviewing their job histories, interview responses, and reference information carefully.
2. Review the criteria established at the time of advertising, including qualifications and qualities needed.
3. Protect themselves from their own biases; we all have biases, and it is important for the Committee to candidly anticipate and discuss any concerns or advantages for hiring each candidate.
4. Be concerned about hiring overqualified candidates. Although it may work out well, someone who is overqualified may become restless and dissatisfied with some of the less challenging components of the job. Conversely, don't imagine that someone underqualified will necessarily be able to "grow" into the job. If the best available candidate does not meet the minimum qualifications, one option is to reopen the job with fewer responsibilities and a proportionately lower salary range. It is not fair or just to hire someone who does not meet the minimum qualifications. It is very likely that other people would have applied had they known that the minimum qualifications could be lowered.

FINAL COMMUNICATION WITH APPLICANTS

Before you notify the applicant(s) who were NOT chosen, make certain the applicant you want will, in fact, accept your offer of employment.

Designate a person to call the prospective new employee. Offer the job, and get an acceptance from the applicant, including starting date and salary, before contact is made with the other applicants.

Assuming the applicant accepts, you can either personally telephone the other applicants or write to them. Please do so in a timely manner. It is inappropriate for applicants to hear "on the grapevine" that they didn't get a job.

The following sample letter could be used to communicate with those applicant(s) who were not selected:

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

On behalf of the members of the Interview Committee of \_\_\_\_\_ Parish, we want to thank you for participating in our interview for the position of \_\_\_\_\_. We all appreciated the time and energy you gave in preparing for and participating in our process.

After a prayerful discernment process, we did choose another person for the position. We wish you success and blessings in your future job search efforts.

Thank you again for the opportunity to interview you.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_

Once the applicant has verbally accepted the position, it is valuable to send a "letter of employment/hire letter" to confirm the offer and acceptance of employment.

(A COPY OF THIS TYPE OF LETTER IS INCLUDED IN THIS PACKET.)