

Sample flow of interview at a ranch

Greeting:

A friendly welcome. (1 min.)

Small talk:

Putting the applicant at ease, showing personal interest, offering coffee. (2 min.)

Job description:

Clarifying what the job entails and how it fits into the organization. (5 min.)

Housekeeping details:

Covering basic terms of employment — wages, hours, housing, or other special conditions. (2 min.)

Applicant questions:

Fielding the candidate's questions. What does he or she want to know about the organization and the position? The questions themselves may reveal important information. (5 - 10 min.)

Questions for the applicant:

Getting to know the applicant's qualifications for the job, with guidance of a prepared question list. (5 - 20 min.)

Continuation or cut-off:

Further selling of the job if the applicant is of interest, or a dignified close if not. Informing about expected decision time or next steps in the process. (5 - 10 min.)



Interview Context and Conduct

Some managers feel uncomfortable when it comes time to conduct an interview. By taking the experience out of “uncharted territory,” structuring usually raises their comfort level and ability to obtain, as well as provide, useful information. The interviewer is in a position to take control of the conversation to benefit both the applicant and the ranch. Even so, the applicant is also interviewing the interviewer. Part of management's task may be to present the business well and sell the job so that the first-choice applicant will accept an offer.

Consider these guidelines for successful communication during the interview:

- Pre-test your interview questions and techniques with a trusted employee or a family member, especially if this is your first interview.
- Choose a quiet, comfortable place in which to conduct the interview.

- Put the applicant at ease. The lower the tension, the more meaningful most of the communication will be. A handshake and friendly smile are a good start.
- Stick to your plan. Follow your list of interview questions and have a time limit for the session. Make sure to ask the prepared core questions of all candidates.
- Listen. Encourage the applicant to do most of the talking, and resist the urge to elaborate on your point of view.
- Complete all of the interviews before evaluating. Avoid indicating how you feel about any responses or other candidates.
- Provide the applicant opportunities to ask questions.
- Disclose basic information that the applicant is sure to weigh if offered the job such as work schedule and location, fringe benefits, responsibility for tools, and when you will be making your decision.
- Rather than committing to a specific wage during the interview, retain flexibility by telling a range of possible pay for the position.
- Take the applicant on a tour of the operation, either before or after the sit-down discussion.

No interview agenda would fit all circumstances, but below is an example of the flow and time frame for interviews at one ranch. Total time for the session is 35 to 50 minutes.

Although job-specific inquiries are the core of a structured interview, some generic questions may fit well into the flow of the conversation and bring out valuable information about the applicant. A list of 20 questions is offered on page 98.

Checking References

Asking former employers or supervisors about applicants can be of some use, though it is usually limited unless capitalizing on trust within an existing relationship. References have gotten more and more bland, as potential informants become sensitive to the increasing frequency of libel and slander suits brought by former employees. Even when a reference holds nothing back, the information provided may not be relevant to an applicant's prospects as an employee in a different job under different conditions.

Information provided by a reference may not be entirely accurate for various reasons besides fear of lawsuit. Friends of an applicant are likely to speak well of him, foes ill. People reached at a former place of employment simply may not have known the applicant or even have access to records that would confirm items like job title and duration. And previous employers have been known to give inferior employees a good reference just to get them to leave.