

HIRING TIPS FOR THE INDEPENDENT PHARMACIST

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Introduction

A pharmacy is only as successful as the people it employs. Similarly, bad employees can cost a pharmacy an incredible amount of time, money and resources. It pays to invest significant time in the hiring process to pinpoint the best candidate for the vacant position at your pharmacy. This article will serve to provide strategies for the independent pharmacist to utilize in the hiring process.

Attracting Applicants

The most traditional choice for attracting prospective employees to apply for a vacant position at your pharmacy is the classified advertisement section of your local newspaper. If you decide to make use of this particular method, then place your advertisement in the Sunday or weekend edition of the largest circulation local papers. If you are opposed to advertising in this manner, there are many other appropriate methods. You should start by utilizing your personal and professional network of contacts. You should tell everyone you know about the vacant position, including your friends, family, neighbors, customers, vendors, colleagues and peers. Encourage your current employees to recommend your pharmacy to their contacts, and offer an incentive (such as a cash bonus or a gift certificate) for doing so. Consider contacting pharmacy school career offices. The career office representatives may advertise (sometimes for free) the vacancy in an email or other written publication that circulates among the students at the pharmacy school. If you are searching for a more mature applicant, then post your advertisement for the position at a senior citizen center. A retiree seeking extra income or a productive way to fill his or her time may be the qualified and seasoned professional you need. You should publicize the vacant position in a trade association newsletter or industry publication. This is an effective way to attract skilled individuals within your industry. If necessary, consider listing your vacancy with a headhunter or recruiter, which will usually require a fee. Finally, go online and list the vacancy with online job banks so that prospective employees across the country will be aware of the vacant position.

Once you have considered the avenues for attracting applicants, you need to draft and place the advertisement. You should spend some time drafting a well-written job description. A proper way to start is to list your goals for the new employee, considering whether you want a person who can fill in on short notice when you need a day off or whether you need a full time employee. Further, analyze whether you need someone who can pick up your overflow or be a self-starter and take

over as a leader in your pharmacy. If you can clearly articulate the job to all applicants, they will have the opportunity to determine if this vacant position has the potential for a mutually agreeable relationship.

It is highly recommended that your advertisement include a request for the following information from applicants:

1. résumé with educational history and professional experience;
2. list of references who are unrelated to the applicant;
3. licensure information (if relevant to the position) including license name, license number and license date; and
4. an executed (signed and dated) statement permitting you and/or a third party to conduct a background check on the applicant.

Finally, close the advertisement with an expiration date that the applicants' materials must be postmarked to receive consideration for the vacant position. This will assist you in ensuring that the responses are submitted in a timely fashion for your review. As you receive the applicants' materials, create and maintain a file associated with each of the applicants applying for the position. As you receive the materials, review them to determine whether any of the documentation you requested is missing. If so, note what is missing on the front of the applicant's file. Once the time period for receiving the applicants' materials has expired, request any omitted materials from the applicant (or, if you prefer, move on to those other applicants who fully complied with the request for specific materials).

Narrowing the List of Applicants: Research the Applicant

If the position that you are hiring for involves licensure by the Texas State Board of Pharmacy and/or other entities, immediately perform a license and registration verification with those entities, including on the Texas State Board of Pharmacy's ("TSBP") website at <http://www.tsbp.state.tx.us/dbsearch/default.asp>. The TSBP service allows you to search for a pharmacist, pharmacy technician, technician trainee or pharmacist intern. This will allow you to quickly determine the license history of the applicant, other basic information related to the applicant, as well as more detailed information, such as whether any adverse history or prior disciplinary orders were enforced against the licensee. This information will allow you to narrow the list of applicants in an objective manner or provide you with further information to make use of when interviewing the applicant. You should print copies of the results of this licensure research and/or your notes related to this research and place it in the applicant's file.

Due to the nature of the pharmacy business, which involves a potential for drug diversions and an emphasis on patient safety, you should conduct a background

check of the applicants you are seriously considering for the vacant position. Locate a reputable company for conducting the background checks. You can search on the Internet, ask your general liability insurance provider or talk to your local police authorities for recommendations on companies to conduct this check for you. In each instance, you will need the applicant's executed statement that you and/or a third party are permitted to conduct a background check as a condition of employment. You should print copies of the results of the background check and/or your notes related to this research and place it in the applicant's file.

After you have conducted the licensure review and background check in regard to the applicants under consideration, you are hopefully left with a smaller pool of potential candidates for the position. At that time, you should proceed to carefully study the résumés of the applicants remaining. As you review the résumés, sort them into two stacks - one for those that are possible prospects to you, and one for those that are unacceptable. When you review a résumé, look for length of time at a particular position. An applicant with several short-term employers (less than a year) could indicate a lack of commitment. Look for gaps in employment and ask for an explanation during the interview. A long period without any work history could be a result of a criminal background. Review the employment dates of the applicant for any overlapping. This could be a simple error, but also might indicate that the candidate is not being truthful about previous employers. Ask the applicant for an explanation, and contact those employers to verify dates of employment with them. Review your copy of the job description at hand when you review the résumés. The more skills that match your job description, the more likely you will be to have a great match.

Narrowing the List of Applicants: Interview the Applicant

Once you have narrowed the applicants by conducting general research, then you should schedule interviews with those applicants that are still appealing. Whether you are hiring a receptionist, pharmacy technician or pharmacist, having a successful interview will enhance your chances of finding the appropriate person for a vacant position. The interview can be a short phone interview or a live interview at your place of business. Either way, the interview is a critical component of the hiring process, as it is the time to determine whether the applicant should be interviewed further, hired or eliminated from consideration.

Shortly before the interview, review the applicant's file with the materials he or she submitted so that you are familiar with the applicant's educational history and professional experience. Consider bringing another key manager or employee to the interview to get a different perspective of the impression the applicant makes during the interview. When the interview begins, you should welcome the applicant and begin punctually. Break the ice by easing into the interview with a

discussion of current topics, such as the commute to your office, the weather or other neutral subjects. You should take notes during your interview of the applicant, but do not allow your note-taking to distract from your verbal communication with the applicant. You should show interest in the applicant by making eye contact, listening actively and asking relevant questions. When the applicant stops talking in response to a question and you want the applicant to continue, pause and silently count to five before speaking. The silence clearly conveys the message that more information is wanted and compels the applicant to go on. The following generalized sample interview questions (when used as appropriate) will assist you in thoroughly questioning an applicant. However, please be creative and draft your own specific questions related to your pharmacy and needs.

Sample Questions for Interviewing Applicants

Tell me about yourself.

Tell me about your educational background.

Provide me with a short summation of your professional experience.

Why did you choose this career?

How has your education prepared you for your career?

Why did you seek a position with this particular pharmacy?

What is your perception of a typical day in this position?

What do you think is the most challenging aspect of this position?

What makes you unique from the others applying for this position?

Tell me about your most significant professional accomplishment.

Why did you leave your last position?

Have you ever been fired or forced to resign from a position?

Tell me about your last supervisor. Did you like him/her?

If I was your supervisor, what is the best way to coach/mentor you to success?

Describe the relationship that should exist between you and your supervisor.

Have you ever had significant professional or personal problems with a co-worker? How did you resolve them?

How would your working for my pharmacy attract patients and customers?

Why do you want to work here?

Can you explain this gap in your employment history?

Why have you had so many jobs in such a short period of time?

Describe a time when you were not very satisfied with your performance. What did you do about it?

Give me an example of a problem you faced at your last position, and tell me how you resolved it.

What do you consider to be your greatest professional strength?

What do you consider to be your greatest professional weakness?

What are your short-term career objectives, and what steps have you taken toward achieving them?

What are your long-term career objectives, and what steps have you taken toward achieving them?

How do you deal with competition? Are you a competitive person?

What would you consider an ideal work environment?

Do you prefer working alone or as part of a team?

Tell me about a time you had to gain the cooperation of a group over which you had little or no authority. What did you do?

What do you do when people disagree with your ideas? Describe a situation.

Do you consider yourself to be a leader?

What are the attributes of a good leader?

Tell me about a time when you had to use your presentation skills to influence someone's opinion.

Can you tell me about an important written document you were required to complete?

What motivates you to go the extra mile on a project or job?

What does it mean to be successful? According to your definition, how successful have you been so far?

Recall a time when you were assigned what you considered to be a complex project. Specifically, what steps did you take to prepare for and finish the project? Were you happy with the outcome? What one step would you have done differently if given the chance?

Describe a situation in which you found that your results were not up to your supervisor's expectations. What action did you take?

Please tell me about your experience in resolving customer complaints.

What is your philosophy or practice in dealing with a difficult patient or customer?

How would you handle a complaint of a medication error made in the pharmacy?

What are your outside interests and hobbies?

Do you have any questions for me?

Is there anything you would like me to know that we have not discussed?

Questions to Avoid Asking Applicants

Federal law prohibits businesses from discrimination when interviewing or hiring. Disregard of mandated guidelines could prove financially devastating because of the numerous recent jury findings awarding not only lost wages to those discriminated against, but punitive damages as well. Federal laws declare that employers cannot discriminate among job applicants on the basis of age, sex, race, religion, physical handicap, nationality, or (in some jurisdictions) sexual orientation. Avoidance of discrimination begins in advertising that seeks new employees. Advertisements and materials sent out directly to potential employees must not contain references to any of the topics listed in the previous point.

With that said, anti-discrimination statutes may not apply to your business. Listed below are some of the anti-discrimination statutes, the protections they offer, and the number of employees the business must have before the statute applies. A complete listing of federal anti-discrimination statutes may be found at www.eeoc.gov.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended – Title VII prohibits employment discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, and national origin. The business must have 15 employees before its employees are protected under this statute.

Chapter 21 of the Texas Labor Code – Chapter 21 prohibits employment discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, and age. The business must have 15 employees before its employees are protected under this statute.

Americans with Disabilities Act (“ADA”) – The ADA prohibits employment discrimination on the basis of disability, with disability being defined within the statute and by subsequent case law. The business must have 15 employees before its employees are protected under this statute.

Age Discrimination in Employment Act (“ADEA”) – The ADEA prohibits discrimination against employees age 40 and older. The business must have 20 employees before its employees are protected under this statute.

Family Medical Leave Act (“FMLA”) – The FMLA authorizes up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave for employees who work for employers that fall under the act. The business must have 50 employees before its employees are protected under this statute.

With that information regarding applicability of the statutes, every business, including those exempt from the requirements, should work toward compliance with the anti-discrimination statutes. Hiring forms and practices are the best defense to an allegation of noncompliance. The person conducting interviews should be trained on the proper and legal way to conduct an interview. Applications should be properly drafted to avoid lawsuits. Your business should have a current and legal employee handbook clearly defining policies and procedures to comply with the federal statutes. The job description and advertisement for vacant positions should be drafted in a legal manner. These practices can prevent current and/or former employees from filing lawsuits, as well as demonstrate to state and federal agencies, a jury or judge that your

company is a law-abiding, non-discriminatory employer that consistently and fairly enforces its policies and procedures. During job interviews, avoid asking the following potentially discriminating questions:

How old are you?

When did you graduate from high school?

What is your marital status?

What is the age of your children?

Do you have any physical limitations?

Have you ever been arrested?

In many instances, a unique job description and advertisement warrants specific requirements in applicants. Hiring an individual on the basis of previous work experience that matches the job description usually enables a business to conform to federal regulations on hiring. To assure future security against discrimination lawsuits, maintain detailed records defining why rejected applicants were passed over, along with specific reasons successful applicants were chosen.

Dos and Don'ts in Questioning Applicants

When attempting compliance with federal statutes prohibiting discrimination, the following are some generally acceptable and unacceptable questions:

Acceptable: What days can you work? What hours can you work?

Unacceptable: How many children do you have? Do you have a babysitter available?

Acceptable: Are you legally eligible to work in the United States?

Unacceptable: Are you a U.S. citizen? What country are you from?

Acceptable: This job requires someone who speaks more than one language. What languages do you speak or write fluently?

Unacceptable: What's your native language?

Acceptable: Have you ever been convicted of a crime?

Unacceptable: Have you ever been arrested?

Acceptable: Do you have a high school diploma? Do you have a university or college degree?

Unacceptable: When did you graduate?

Selecting the Employee from the Applicants

It is best to evaluate an applicant as soon after the interview as possible while your observations and impressions are still fresh. You should review your notes from the interview. The key to successful interview evaluation is to know the job, its requirements and what you are looking for in advance of interviewing. Your evaluation should reflect the applicant's skills, abilities and performance factors as measured against those required for the position.

Consider contacting the references provided by the applicants that you have finalized. This process will provide you with additional opinions about the applicant and allow you to finalize your decision.

Once you have selected the applicant for the vacant position, then make a detailed offer in writing, clearly defining the job description, hours, salary, benefits, vacation and sick time and other pertinent details. Provide a deadline that the applicant must respond to you in regard to their acceptance of the offer. Mail the offer via certified mail, return receipt requested so that you can ensure delivery and receipt of the offer.

Conclusion

While adherence to these hiring tips should prove beneficial for the independent pharmacist who is searching for prospective employees, it is important to remember that the obvious goal of the hiring process is to select the top candidate for the position, and that does not always mean the most polished applicant. In other words, simply because an applicant has a perfectly worded résumé or is smooth during the interview does not always indicate that he or she is necessarily a superior employee. For example, some applicants are quite skilled at the job-hunting process because they are always searching for a new position. Your objective is to hire and retain exceptional employees, not merely competent ones. A truly motivated and enthusiastic employee can be twice as valuable as a person of average skills. Once you have hired the applicant you believe to be most suited for the position, treat them fairly and kindly. Employees who take pleasure in their work and appreciate their supervisor are more likely to be trustworthy, dependable and loyal for the long-term. For employees, the greatest single factor in job satisfaction is being appreciated for what they do. It ranks ahead of working

conditions and salary. An employee that is publicly or privately appreciated for doing a good job will work harder for less compensation.

Finally, maintain the file related to the applicant that you hired as part of their personnel file. Your notes related to the diligence you exercised in researching and assessing the employee during the hiring process will assist you, should any negative outcome result from your relationship with the employee.

We hope you will take these tips into consideration when interviewing prospective employees. Questions? Please contact Ms. Fields at amandacfields@gmail.com