

SECTION 6

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Interviewing and Selecting Your PA

In the previous section, we prepared for the face-to-face interview by screening the applicants.

This screening process included:

- calling each applicant;
- asking questions and giving information about the job that helped both the applicant and you be able to decide if this job was a good match;
- deciding if you wanted to proceed to the more formal face-to-face interview; and
- making notes to read later.

By screening your applicants with a telephone interview, you save time and money and come up with a list of people who are interested in your PA job.

Now, you're ready to meet the applicants!

The Face-to-Face Interview



The face-to-face interview gives you the opportunity to learn as much as you can about the person who is applying for the job. It also gives the applicant information about the job requirements so that both of you can make a good decision. This works best if you are prepared.

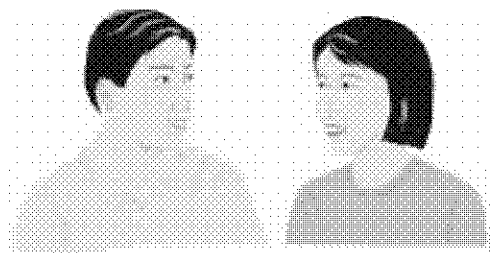
Guidelines for Interviewing Face-to-Face

- Be safe
 - Hold the interview in a location that is safe for you. Your local church, apartment building or community library may have rooms available for you to conduct interviews if you do not want to use your home.

- You can invite a friend to sit in. In addition to safety concerns, having a second person is a good idea because that person may notice things during the interview that you do not.
- Setting the tone of the interview
 - First impressions are important. Show that you are a capable individual able to direct your own services.
 - If you have a friend present, make sure it is clear that you are the interviewer.
 - Think about the location of the interview. A living room is a better choice than the bedroom, which could make you appear dependent.
 - Dress comfortably, but be sure you look like an employer, someone who knows what you want.
 - Sit facing the applicant so that you can observe eye contact and body language.
 - Eliminate distractions. Turn the TV and radio off. Make sure pets and children will not interrupt.
- What if you are nervous?
 - It is natural to feel nervous when interviewing.
 - The applicant is probably nervous too.
 - Being prepared for the interview may lower your anxiety level.
 - Having a friend or family member with you may help calm your nerves.
- Be prepared. Before the interview, make sure you have:
 - A blank job application form, if needed.
 - The job description.
 - Information about your needs or your disability.
 - Information about special equipment you use.
 - A way to record your impressions (write them yourself, have a tape recorder or ask a friend to act as recorder). Taking notes on each applicant during the interview will help you remember their answers. This is important if you are talking with several applicants.
 - A list of the interview questions you will ask.
- Planning the interview questions

- Decide ahead of time what questions you will ask, and write them down.
- Be sure your interview questions give you the information you need. (At the very least, you want someone who is trustworthy, reliable and responsible. Ask questions that will give you that information).
- Use the same list of questions for each applicant so you can compare their responses more easily.
- Make sure you know the questions that are legal to ask.

What to do when the applicant arrives



Find out as much as you can about each applicant. You will be making a decision to hire someone based on just a few contacts, a job application, reference and background checks. It is important to make the interview matter. Your health, safety and well-being

are dependent upon the choice you make.

- Check them out.
 - Do they look neat, clean and presentable?
 - Do they seem comfortable around you?
 - Do you feel comfortable around them?
- Make the applicant feel comfortable. You can ask, "Did you have any trouble finding the house?" or "Isn't this a beautiful, sunny day?" A discussion about the weather is always safe and helps people relax.
- Have the applicant fill out the job application if it is not already complete. You need a copy of the job application. Then give him or her the job description to look over. This will give you time to review the job application. Pay attention to:
 - Past experience
 - How does the job application look? Is it neat?
 - How specific is it?
 - Are all the blanks filled in? (Does it include work experience and education?)
 - What are the employment patterns? (Are there frequent job changes?)

Red flags on the application:

- Gaps in employment (any time period of over one or two months - ask for more details)
- Omissions (educational, former employers -- ask for details)
- Inconsistency (dates do not make sense -- ask for details). If you have questions about any of the information on the application, the interview is the place to ask them.

- Explain your needs or disability, as far as you feel comfortable. Give information that would be important for someone to understand if she or he was helping you.
- Review the duties on the job description and checklist.
- Ask the interview questions. Your interview questions will help you learn more about the applicant. A few specific questions may help you decide if the applicant has the skills they need. Try asking questions the applicant can answer with real examples of their experience in the areas that are important to you. This will help you get more information than you can with simple “yes” or “no” questions.

For example:

Don't ask “Can you cook?” instead, ask:

- “What is the last meal you cooked?”
- “What is your favorite dish to cook?” or
- “Tell me how you make fried chicken.”

Be sure to write down the answers. Remember to ask someone to write for you if you want help. Have a method for recording responses. You might use something like the Interview Notes and Interview Impressions Worksheets on the next two pages. You may want to make notes after each question so you remember what the applicant said and compare answers. You may also want to write down other impressions during the interview or right after the interview.

Interview Notes Worksheet

Notes can be written by a friend if you decide that is what works best for you.

| Interview Questions | Answers/Notes |
|---------------------|---------------|
| | |
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| | |

Interview Impressions Worksheet

Applicant name:

Date:



| | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|--|---|---------------------|---|----|---|
| 1. a. Spoke directly to me instead of my helper. | | | | | |
| 1. b. <u>If not</u> , corrected this when pointed out. | | | | | |
| 2. Listened to me and tried to understand me. | | | | | |
| 3. Seemed comfortable with me. | | | | | |
| 4. Looked neat and clean. | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | Circle your answer. | | | |
| Has own phone? | | YES | | NO | |
| Reliable transportation? | | YES | | NO | |
| Talks too much? | | YES | | NO | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| I would hire this person. | | YES | | NO | |

Notes:

After you have completed your interview questions, ask applicants whether they have any questions. You can learn a lot about how well your applicants understand your needs by the questions they ask.

Be sure to discuss:

- Duties and responsibilities of the job
- Specific hours and days of work
- Rate of pay, method and time of payment
- Arranged time off
- How the PA will be trained
- How their performance will be evaluated
- How complaints/concerns will be handled
- How much notice is expected from the PA and employer for termination of services
- Whether the working relationship will be formal or informal
 - A formal working relationship might mean that you prefer a set schedule of when your PA comes to work and a set list of tasks.
 - Informal might mean that when your PA arrives you'll have decided the schedule for the day.

Things to look out for...

- An applicant who:
 - Is rude
 - Is late
 - Discloses confidential information about previous employer
 - Takes control of the interview
 - Expresses sympathy, being overly considerate or hypersensitive
 - Smells of alcohol
 - Has greasy hair and dirty fingernails
 - Stares or makes prolonged eye contact
 - Makes little eye contact (Keep in mind it might mean the person is shy or from a culture that finds too much eye contact disrespectful.)
 - Begins the interview by telling you all the things s/he cannot do or all the times s/he cannot work
 - Has no references (Even someone who just moved here should have friends or previous employers elsewhere.)
 - Says s/he just really needs a job and will take anything for now

- Looks to the non-disabled person in the room for instructions and approval

Avoid these interviewing mistakes



- Do not talk too much. The more the applicant is able to talk to you, the more you can learn about them.
- Do not fail to follow up with related questions. For example, if the applicant tells you they have had training, ask for more details. Where did they get this training and how long did the training last? What did they learn from the training that can be applied to this job?

Sample Interview Questions

Below are some sample questions. Pick and choose the ones you want to ask. Try to think of any questions not on this list that could fit your particular situation. You will want to ask questions that link back to the job description you developed.

- Tell me a little about yourself.
- Tell me about your experience working with people with disabilities.
- What do you like best and least about the work you have done in the past?
- Are you available for additional hours? How much notice would you need if I need extra help?
- Are you comfortable using assistive technology or other DME (durable medical equipment)?
- Are you able to think quickly on your feet? Give me some examples.
- How do you handle differences of opinion with an employer? Can you give me an example?
- How do you handle constructive criticism? Give me an example if possible.
- How do you deal with another person's anger or frustration?
- Do you feel comfortable assisting with bowel or bladder routines?

- I need a driver with a clean driving record. Will there be any problems when my insurance company runs your driving record?
- Can you drive a vehicle with a stick shift?
- Do you have experience driving a full-sized van with a high top?
- Do you have experience with city or long-distance driving?
- Are you available for out of town travel? Would your schedule allow you to stay somewhere overnight? How much advance notice would you need?
- Describe your best qualities.
- Describe your worst qualities.
- Do you prefer/require lots of supervision, or just a task list?
- Have you ever been fired from a job? If so, why?
- Do you have any questions/concerns about the job?
- Is there anything on my list of duties you cannot provide?
- If selected for this position, when could you start work?

Questions You Cannot Ask in an Interview

It is important to ask all the questions you need to in the face-to-face interview. It is just as important to know the questions that are illegal to ask. Check out this list for questions NOT to ask.

- How old are you?
- What is your native language?
- Are you married?
- Do you have any children?
- Have you ever been arrested?
- Do you belong to any religious affiliations?
- Do you belong to any clubs or organizations?
- What is your credit rating?
- Do you own or rent your home?
- Do you own a car?
- What country were you born in?
- Do you have any addictions?
- What is your star sign?
- Do you have a disability or medical condition?
- What is your political affiliation?
- What are your family members' names?
- What is your race?
- Where are your family members employed?

Realistic Job Preview and the “Look-See”

A realistic job preview helps the applicant avoid having to say later, “If I had known what I was getting into I would never have taken this job.” A job preview includes information about the actual work the PA will do. Include positive and fun, as well as, difficult or unpleasant tasks to help the applicant understand the actual job tasks you need done. By giving the applicant the information they need to understand the job, your PA will be less likely to quit when a better opportunity becomes available.

If you interviewed the applicants in a public place, at some point you may want to tell them the area in which you live so they can decide if the location is going to work for them. If you’re interviewing for someone else, now may be the time to conduct a “look-see.” Introducing the applicant and the person with a disability may help decide if the job and the applicant are a good match.

Narrowing Down the Candidates

Once you have completed all your interviews you will be ready to choose your top candidates. Review the answers the applicants gave you to the interview questions along with any personal notes you may have made to yourself. If you had a friend or family member with you during the interviews, compare notes with him/her.



Keep Names & Phone #s of Top Choices

You may want to keep a list of names and numbers of your other top choices and ask them if they would be willing to work as a back-up PA. This list could also be useful if the PAs you hire do not work out for some reason. You could refer to your list for a replacement PA.

The next step is to check references.

Employment Contingent on Reference Check

Checking employment and personal references is a very important part of the interview process. You can check employment references before or after the initial interview. NEVER hire someone before checking their references. You can offer the job to your top applicant but tell them the offer is only available after satisfactory reference and background checks.

References can give you a much clearer picture of the applicant's work history and background. Remember, past employers may legally answer only certain questions about past employees.

You should always check references of someone you are planning to hire, even if you think you know the person well. You can either call or write for a reference. You may find it easier and faster to phone, although many employers require a written request with a signed release of information by the applicant. Even with a signed request, many employers will only tell you the dates that a person worked for them.

If an applicant has asked you not to contact his/her current employer, please respect this, as the employer may not know about the interview. Remember to ask the applicant for another employment reference for you to contact.

Questions to ask previous employers

Some possible reference questions for previous employers would be:

- Would you hire this person again?
- Was this person reliable, did he or she show up on time?
- Are these accurate dates of employment?

Checking personal references

Personal references, on the other hand, are often willing to talk to you on the phone, and will often provide detailed information. Be sure to get personal references from appropriate people. Talking with someone's spouse, parent or best friend is not always the most objective reference. You may want to talk to a co-worker, a teacher, a supervisor or other person who knows them.

Personal reference questions:

- How long have you known this person?
- What is your relationship with this person?
- Would you recommend this person to provide personal assistance services?

Compare reference responses to applicant information

Once you have checked both employment and personal references for all of the applicants, you should compare this information with the information you received from the applicant.

- Look for any differences in the information they gave you. If a reference states a reason why the applicant can or cannot do the job, consider this information.
- Remember to trust your own initial instincts as well.
- Refer back to the notes you made to yourself during the interviews so you will not forget the impression each person made on you.

We've included a Personal or Employment Reference Form on the next page that you can use for a personal and an employment reference. It can be used for either a telephone or a mail reference check. Since there may be questions you want to add, looking at this form can help you create your own form.

Personal or Employment Reference Form

Name of Reference: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Check one: Personal Reference Employment Reference

I, _____ (Name of Applicant), give permission for the above named person to provide reference information regarding my possible employment.

Signature of Applicant

Date

Dear _____,

_____ (Name of Applicant) has applied for a position with me as a personal assistant. This will involve assisting me with tasks of daily living and housekeeping chores.

1. Can you tell me when the applicant worked for you?

2. What was his/her job title? What were his /her job duties?

3. What can you tell me about his/her job performance?

4. Was s/he on time to work? Were there any problems with not showing up or taking too much time off?

5. Do you consider him/her to be an honest person?

6. How well did s/he take supervision and criticism?

7. Would you recommend him/her for a personal assistant job? Why or why not?

8. Would you rehire this person?

Name of person providing information
(Please print name)

Date

Criminal Background Check



Kansas requires that your payroll agent complete a criminal background check of your new PA. You, as the employer, need to be sure that your applicants know that a background check will be conducted. If they have a history of neglect, abuse or exploitation, they cannot be hired which may eliminate some of your applicants. Better now than later.

There is a possible exception to this requirement. It is possible that you may be able to choose to hire someone as a PA who has a criminal record in an area other than abuse and neglect. You must talk this over with your payroll agent.

Making the Offer

Once you have made your decision, call and offer the job to the person you want to work for you. This is a very exciting and anxious time, so be prepared ahead of time for all that is coming up.

Your Choice

After you have considered everything and made your top choice(s), you are prepared to call and offer him/her the position if his/her references check out and the criminal background check comes back clean.

You might want to offer the job to your top applicant and give him or her a “night to sleep on it.”

- Encouraging the applicant to take one more day to think about accepting the PA job gives him or her another chance to make a decision that is right for them. If the person changes his mind from one day to the next, then maybe it isn't the right job for them. The applicant who is really interested will still be interested on the next day.

You may hire the person contingent on a satisfactory criminal background check. Your payroll agent will conduct the background check. Make sure your PA understands that if anything negative comes back on the check, you have the option to terminate their employment immediately. Be sure your new employee understands that if their background check shows abuse and/or neglect their employment will be terminated.

The time you spend before hiring your PA will likely pay off after the hire. The very best match comes when the personal assistant likes the job and the people he or she works with. Feeling valued, enjoying the people in the environment and having respect for each other and the job contributes to loyalty and commitment between you and your PA.

Complete Necessary Paperwork

After you have offered a job to a new person and they accept, all of the necessary paperwork must be completed before they can begin work. Set up a time when you can meet. You will need to obtain the forms to complete from your payroll agent.

When your new employee arrives to pick up a “New Hire Packet,” have them complete their paperwork. You will be responsible for completing some of the paperwork yourself. This packet of information will need to be mailed or taken to the payroll agent. Your payroll agent will also request a copy of the new hire’s Social Security card and driver’s license or other form(s) of identification. You may want to keep some “New Hire Packets” from your payroll agent at your home.

Section 6 Checklist

| Section 6 – Interviewing and Selecting Your PA Checklist | |
|--|---|
| Check here | |
| | I read the guidelines for interviewing. |
| | I looked at the sample interview questions. |
| | I understand there are questions I can't ask. |
| | I read how to conduct a face-to-face interview. |
| | I understand the importance of checking both employment and personal references. |
| | I understand that my payroll agent will conduct a criminal background check of my new PA. |
| | I know that I will have to turn in paperwork to my payroll agent. |
| | I have enough information to select and hire the most qualified applicant. |

