

# Question time



THE PROSPECT OF FACING AN INTERVIEWER CAN FILL EVEN THE MOST EXPERIENCED CANDIDATE WITH DREAD, BUT SITTING ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE TABLE MAY BE JUST AS DAUNTING. **JAMES CRICHTON** OFFERS SOME TIPS TO HELP EASE THE NERVES OF INTERVIEWERS.

**M**ost organisations with an in-house treasury team also have a formalised recruitment process and can seek advice from a dedicated HR business partner. Assessing whether a candidate is right for the job can encapsulate surprisingly broad and technical methods, which can faze the inexperienced interviewer.

Most treasury interviews are presided over by one or two individuals: the recruiting manager and a member of HR or the person currently doing the job. One of the interviewers can then observe the applicant while the other focuses on the questions.

**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS** Fail to prepare and you prepare to fail. Doing your homework on a candidate before you meet them is crucial to a successful interview and will also leave the interviewee with a positive impression. A standardised structure of questioning also lets you compare the answers from different candidates more effectively than an informal chat.

The actual interview can take on many formats and different styles. There are certain situations and job roles when it is appropriate for an interviewer to angle the questions in such a way as to test the candidate. For example, it can be valuable to adopt an deliberately aggressive stance to see how the candidate might defuse a potentially explosive situation. That said, a more straightforward approach usually works best to gauge the suitability of a treasurer.

So what are the different interview styles? A traditional or biographical interview focuses on the candidate's experience, industry knowledge and where they see their careers progressing.

However, in recent years there has been a marked shift towards

competency-based interviewing – in other words, analysing an applicant's past behaviour as an indicator of future performance.

**INAPPROPRIATE QUESTIONS** HR professionals involved in the recruitment of treasury professionals often pinpoint the types of question that cannot be asked.

The Sex Discrimination and Race Relations Acts and the more recent Employment Equality (Age) Discrimination Regulations 2006 forbid employers from discriminating against any person on the basis of sex, marital status, sexual orientation, race, nationality, disability or age.

There are also some questions that an ill-prepared interviewer might ask quite innocently. It is almost always unwise to enquire after an interviewee's home and family life or to venture into "other interests" and future family plans (the most cited inappropriate question) as these are unlikely to demonstrate a candidate's capability to do a job.

**PANEL INTERVIEWS AND PRESENTATIONS** For more senior jobs or positions that require a high degree of internal liaison, a panel interview is a particularly efficient way for candidates to demonstrate their credentials. This type of interview often involves having to make presentations, which are an excellent way of testing both communication and analytical competencies. However, it is important to give candidates enough time and information to prepare fully for their presentation, as a lack of supporting guidance could undermine their interview performance. Although it may be considered an interesting exercise to "see what they come up with", would you expect someone in your team to deliver a polished performance under such circumstances? Another useful prescreening tool is the telephone interview, but they allow neither the interviewer nor the interviewee to go into any level of detail and also do not explore non-verbal cues such as body language.

**THE BEST CANDIDATE** How you assess a candidate says a lot about your company. Candidates have been known to decline a job offer or second meeting, not because of the job role or the company's profile, but because of the interview or assessment process.

Bear in mind that you are not trying to establish how good the person is at interviewing: you are looking to see if they are the best person for your job. Period. In some areas, the two can be inextricably linked but the ability to perform well at an interview does not necessarily mean you have found the strongest candidate for the job and vice versa.

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