

ROBERT WALTERS WHITEPAPER

**MANAGING THE INTERVIEW PROCESS TO  
ENSURE A POSITIVE JOB-SEEKER EXPERIENCE**

**spotlight**  
SERIES



ROBERT WALTERS

# FOREWORD

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I am pleased to introduce our latest whitepaper, entitled 'Managing the interview process to ensure a positive job-seeker experience'.

This whitepaper has been created to help employers review their existing interview procedures, and help them understand the importance of a positive job-seeker experience. This topic is particularly important at present as we are still experiencing skill shortages across a number of sectors, heightening the importance of securing top talent.

The interview has always been at the heart of the recruitment process. Traditionally an interview gave an employer the opportunity to meet, assess and select the best talent for their company. However, times have changed and the process is no longer one-way - it's two-way, and often a candidate's first impression of an organisation. Regardless of whether a candidate is successful or not, it is important for an organisation's employer brand and reputation to ensure the interview process is handled effectively and represents a positive experience for all involved.

Many candidates we've spoken to about their interview experiences agree that their first meeting with an organisation greatly shapes their opinion of the company and their desire to be a part of it. That is why I am so pleased to present this whitepaper, which offers many insights and recommendations to help you understand what a good interview process can do for your organisation.



**James Nicholson**

Managing Director – Australia, Robert Walters

# METHODOLOGY

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This whitepaper is based on the findings of research undertaken by Robert Walters in January 2012. To conduct this research, Robert Walters surveyed over 600 job-seekers and over 500 hiring managers across a range of industries.

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## INTRODUCTION

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This whitepaper has been created to help employers better understand the interview process and examine the effectiveness of their own interviews. By looking at the interview as a two-way exercise that can affect the employer brand, the findings will help demonstrate the importance of a positive job-seeker experience.

Specifically, this whitepaper explores:

- The nature of the interview process, including candidate perceptions and expectations
- The importance of interview feedback and how to deliver it
- Consequences of negative interview experiences and how to negate them
- Perceptions of lengthy interview processes

# THE NATURE OF THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

The job interview is one of the most important parts of the recruitment process. It gives the employer the opportunity to match the personality to the resume, and the candidate their first opportunity to impress.

Candidates and employers often have conflicting views of what makes a good interview. With some understanding of candidate expectations, the process can be tailored to ensure a positive experience, even for unsuccessful candidates.

## Survey results

When asked what attributes they believed were most important to an employer in an interview, 56% of candidates surveyed selected 'experience', followed by 'cultural fit and personality' at 35%. Similarly, 40% of employers selected 'experience' as the most important characteristic, followed by 'cultural fit and personality' at 37%.

Candidates indicated that the most important attribute they expect from an interviewer is 'knowledge and understanding of their profession' (43%) followed by a 'polite and respectful approach' (24%).

Most candidates (66%) are comfortable with two interviewers being present. Similarly, 79% of employers also prefer having two people interview candidates. Only 11% of employers and 18% of candidates are comfortable with a panel of three or more conducting the interview.

When asked if they use an interview to assess a potential employer, 93% of candidates answered 'yes', with 72% regarding the job interview process as 'very important' in shaping their opinion of an organisation.

The discovery process begins before the interview; with 99% of candidates surveyed confirming they research the company beforehand. Almost 97% of people use the company website to research the organisation, with 57% also using the advice and opinions of their networks, 49% news articles and 23% social networking sites.

**Chart 1.0 - What is the most important attribute you look for in an interviewer?**



- 43% Knowledge and understanding of your profession
- 24% Polite respectful approach
- 18% Leadership and inspiration
- 15% Enthusiasm for the company

## Key learning #1

### You the employer are being interviewed

A critical but often overlooked step at the beginning of any relationship is the interview of a potential employer by a candidate.

Organisations should understand the dual nature of an interview. It plays a major part in shaping a candidate's opinion of the company and their fit into the corporate culture.

Employees are commonly regarded as brand ambassadors for their company, and the same attitude should extend to the interviewer. The key is to realise that the interview process is now a two-way process, and to secure top talent an organisation has to make a good impression. The interview is often a candidate's first impression of an employer, and will effect how they interact with the company in the future. To protect the brand image and integrity of an organisation it's important to manage the interview process as carefully as any marketing campaign.

## Key learning #2

### Knowledge and understanding is key in the interview process

Candidates indicated overwhelmingly that the most important attribute they expect from an interviewer is knowledge and understanding of their profession. Just as a potential candidate has prepared for an interview, they expect the organisation's representative to have done the same.

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If the person conducting the interview is a human resources professional without the requisite knowledge of the actual occupation, rather than the expert in the field or potential manager there are a couple of steps that should be built into the interview process:

- Ensure a full, complete briefing between the interviewer and the department hiring is undertaken
- Include a member of the hiring team or manager in the interview process. Allowing a second person into the process will prevent any knowledge gaps, reduce the need for further interviews and provide a well rounded candidate experience



93%

93% of candidates said they use an interview to assess a potential employer

# INTERVIEW FEEDBACK

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For organisations looking to maintain a strong employer brand, interview feedback for both successful and unsuccessful candidates should be an instrumental part of the recruitment process.

Organisations need to consider how feedback is given, when it is provided and in what detail.

## Survey results

When asked, 98% of candidates said they would appreciate feedback post interview, even if they were unsuccessful in securing a job.

However, 80% of candidates said they have not received feedback post interview, with 30% of employers surveyed admitting that they don't always give feedback to every candidate they interview.

Although traditionally it is accepted as best practice to give feedback by way of a phone call (with 40% of candidates preferring a phone call), 48% of candidates said they wouldn't mind an email or a phone call, as long as they received some feedback. The majority of employers surveyed (71%) indicated they tend to provide feedback mostly over the phone, with 29% providing feedback via email.

## Key learning #3

### Always give feedback to candidates after an interview

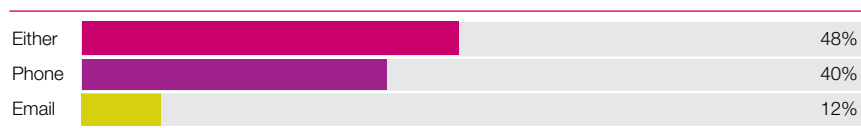
There has always been an imbalance between the amount of effort and commitment a candidate puts into a process and the feedback (or lack of it) they receive at the end.

As organisations become more rigorous in their selection processes, candidates applying for available positions are often expected to do more research, meet more people, perform tasks and ultimately jump through more hoops. If they're not successful, they will be keen to get something out of the process, apart from the feelings of disappointment and frustration.

The reality is a candidate will think more highly of an organisation if they give feedback, even negative, than none at all. Overwhelmingly, candidates demonstrated that the way they received the feedback wasn't as important as the fact they received it at all. Job-seekers are looking for helpful, constructive feedback that will be helpful in their future job search.

Feedback should be sufficient and appropriate, to ensure that it is helpful to candidates. While it is appreciated that giving feedback can be difficult, stating it clearly, quickly and sensitively will make difficult messages easier to deliver, and receive.

### Chart 2.0 - Would you prefer feedback via a phone call or email?





**98%**

98% of candidates said they would appreciate feedback post interview

# NEGATIVE INTERVIEW EXPERIENCES

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No organisation aims to have an interview process or technique that can later be described unfavourably, but unfortunately it does happen. The research explored the candidate interview experience to establish what effect a badly run interview can have on an organisation's reputation and attractiveness to potential employees.

## Survey results

Overwhelmingly, 79% of candidates said they would turn down a job offer due to a bad interview experience.

In addition, 91% of those respondents said they would tell people they had a bad interview experience, with 65% telling between 1-5 people, 15% 6-10 people, and 20% 10 people or more.

Almost 42% of candidates surveyed said they had been asked questions they felt were 'inappropriate or irrelevant to the job description'. Further, 49% of candidates said they had 'experienced rudeness or disrespect from an interviewer'.

In addition, 26% of candidates said they received a job offer in an interview that didn't eventuate, with 10% of employers admitting they had made a job offer in an interview, later having to rescind it.

When asked if there were guidelines and training in place for employees conducting interviews, 25% of employers said they did not.

## Key learning #4

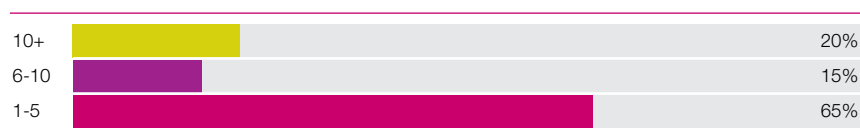
### Implement interview guidelines and training to prevent a negative experience

The key to preventing a negative interview experience is to have guidelines in place for those employees conducting interviews. Interview guidelines should be designed for consistency, to facilitate appropriate questions, and be in a manner that reflects company values. Some recommended key guidelines include:

- Ask clear concise questions in a conversational tone
- Ask a range of open-ended questions to draw the candidate out and allow them to talk
- Interview, but also sell the company and its benefits
- Avoid snap judgements
- Never make an offer during the interview, overpromise, or commit to something undeliverable

If a candidate turns down an offer, asking for honest feedback on the interview they experienced can shed some light on what could be improved in the process.

**Chart 3.0 - How many people would you tell about a bad interview experience?**





## Key learning #5

### Negative word-of-mouth can be damaging

Organisations need to understand the power of negative word-of-mouth, which is very difficult to control and measure. The facilitation of word-of-mouth through the Internet has drastically changed the way information is created and transmitted. A negative review of a company's recruitment process cannot only spread between people and their networks, but also online through social media, blogs, forums, etc.

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Organisations that fail to align their recruiting practices with their branding strategy risk losing top talent and potential revenue. Each candidate will walk away with some impression of the organisation, and the statistics show they will talk about their experience with others. Therefore, each candidate encounter represents an opportunity to build a positive employer brand.

To mitigate this risk, organisations should apply their branding strategy throughout the entire recruitment process — from managing applications, to candidate interviews and completing the on-boarding process.



# LENGTH OF THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

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The speed of response throughout the recruitment process has a significant impact on whether a job-seeker will accept or decline an offer. In a candidate short market professionals have a greater number of options available to them and therefore don't have to wait for organisations that have elongated recruitment processes.

## Survey results

The survey found that 67% of candidates would be deterred from accepting a job offer if they felt the interview process was overly lengthy.

Almost 70% of candidates surveyed believe that a job offer should be made after two interviews, 17% believed one was enough and 11% of candidates were comfortable partaking in three interviews. Only 2% of candidates interviewed would be prepared to undergo more than three interviews.

However, 48% of employers surveyed said that the process can take between 2-4 weeks, 37% responding 1-2 months, 10% at 1-2 weeks, and 6% taking more than two months.

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## Key learning # 6

### Don't delay the recruitment process unnecessarily

There is no one size fits all approach to how long an interview process should take; it often depends on the role, employer and the pool of potential candidates. However, the most in demand professionals seeking new employment can have more than one job offer under consideration. The best way to lose top talent is to be slow.

The length of the interview process should be determined by a range of factors:

- **Level of position** - Generally, the more senior the position is, the longer the recruitment process can take
- **Job description** - Roles that require a very specific candidate with a specialised skill set tend to take longer
- **Economy and recruitment market** - These factors impact each industry differently and may either increase the demand for certain professionals, creating skill shortages or generate an over supply of candidates. In demand candidates will need to be quickly procured whereas organisations can afford to be more fastidious with candidates that are in over supply
- **Season** - There tends to be lulls over the festive season and New Year, and spikes in certain sectors around key dates, such as end of financial year

An organisation will be able to judge if their process is too long. Commonly, they will lose potential candidates who have taken other opportunities. If this is occurring, it may be time to audit the process.

The general consensus from the survey is that two interviews, and roughly one month, is an acceptable time frame.



**70%**

70% of candidates surveyed believe that a job offer should be made after two interviews

**Chart 4.0 - How many interviews do you think it should take before a job offer is made?**



17%	1
70%	2
11%	3
2%	More than 3

### **Key learning # 7**

#### **Keep candidates informed of their progress**

The survey found that feedback was extremely important to candidates. Keeping candidates informed of their status and how long each stage will take, only serves to simplify the process. Candidates who are unsuccessful, but felt like they were well informed will be more likely to view the experience in a more positive light, regardless of the outcome.

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The general consensus from the survey is that two interviews, and roughly one month, is an acceptable time frame.

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## **CONCLUSION**

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The interview process is traditionally a forum where candidates try to impress. However in a market where significant skill shortages are emerging, making it increasingly difficult to engage top talent, candidates can be more discerning when choosing their career paths.

Our research has shown that the interview process is held in a different regard to job-seekers than simply a vehicle to securing employment. It plays a part in shaping their opinion of the company as a whole, and how they communicate about the employer brand to others. Unfavourable sentiment is hard to measure, with negative word-of-mouth almost impossible to control, particularly when opinions can be dissipated so quickly through online channels.

Through assessing current interview practices and implementing simple guidelines, the interview process can be managed to ensure a smooth and positive experience, even for those unsuccessful in joining an organisation.



**67%**

67% of candidates would be deterred from accepting a job offer if they felt the interview process was overly lengthy

# ABOUT THE ROBERT WALTERS SPOTLIGHT SERIES

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This whitepaper is the fourth in the Robert Walters Spotlight Series. The Spotlight Series features a range of thought-leading whitepapers designed to help employers identify and address topical issues that could be affecting their recruitment processes.



# CONTACT US

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To discuss this whitepaper or your recruitment needs in more detail, please contact your Robert Walters recruitment consultant or **James Nicholson, Robert Walters Managing Director – Australia**, on **+61 (0) 2 8289 3130** or **[james.nicholson@robertwalters.com.au](mailto:james.nicholson@robertwalters.com.au)**.

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