Managing people

Which candidates are the keepers?

How do you know a nurse is a good fit for the OR—even if the person doesn’t have OR experience? There’s a body of research that shows that the better the fit between an organization and an employee, the longer the person is likely to stay.

Managers often say they have a “gut feeling” about who will make it in the OR. That’s one piece of the puzzle, but you need to make sure you have a selection process that is job related, objective, and consistent, advises Charles Handler, PhD, an organizational/industrial psychologist specializing in employee selection.

You want to ensure every applicant is evaluated based on the same criteria. That’s also the best way to ensure the process can stand up to legal scrutiny, says Handler, founder of www.rocket-hire.com, a website that focuses on employee screening and assessment.

Of course, you will review a candidate’s nursing experience and clinical skills. You will check references to verify previous employment. But you also want to know how applicants would handle situations in the OR. Known as “behavioral interviewing,” this is based on the premise that the best predictor of future behavior is how a person responded to similar situations in the past.

Keys to behavioral interviewing:

• Relate the situation directly to the job. Don’t ask something like, “If you were an animal, what would you be?” (OR examples in the sidebar.)
• To help ensure objectivity, rate responses using a scale planned out in advance. The scale might outline behaviors that represent excellent, average, or poor responses, Handler suggests.

You might have a committee of managers and staff develop the scenarios and model responses, with input from the HR department.

One example of a scenario: “This job may require you to work overtime on short notice. How would you handle that?”

Examples of responses:

• Excellent: “There have been times I have done this. I have changed my schedule to meet my work commitment, even though it meant missing a personal event.”
• Average: “I’d do what I can, but my own life is important, too.”
• Poor: “This is basically just a job. I would have trouble making last-minute changes.”

Be sure to train managers and staff who will be interviewing so they fully understand the process, Handler adds.

Tips from OR managers

Deborah Alpers, RN, administrative director of perioperative services at Memorial Hermann Southwest in Houston, says she asks a lot of questions about difficult scenarios.

“If they tend to blame others and don’t suggest steps they can take to make the situation better, that turns me off,” she says. She also finds those who make lists and take notes during the interview tend to have good organizational skills, a quality she is looking for.

Beth Fitzgerald, RN, MSN, CNOR, perioperative nurse internship manager for Christiana Care Health System, Wilmington, Delaware, has applicants write an essay about why they want to be an OR nurse.
For one person, it was because a family member had a good experience with surgery, and the candidate kept talking about how wonderful the OR was. For another, it was the excitement they felt about wanting to work in surgery. I find the new graduates especially refreshing because they are energetic and excited about wanting to learn perioperative nursing,” she says.

At Columbia Hospital in West Palm Beach, Florida, Gary G. Reardon, RN, MSN, MS, CNOR, says he looks past the lack of OR experience for something else—potential and energy.

“My first question is: ‘Why do you want to be an OR nurse?’” Reardon says. “If they talk about wanting to get away from so much shift work, or they have a babysitter problem, or they really like to work days, I don’t waste my time.

“But if someone says, ‘I really want to work in the operating room, if someone would just give me a chance,’ I keep talking. If I see that desire, I hire them. These were the characteristics someone saw in me years ago and gave me a chance.”

Avoiding inappropriate questions

Another benefit of a structured, job-related interview is that it helps avoid improper questions. “Asking inappropriate questions in a job interview is probably the easiest way to get sued,” Handler says.

Inappropriate questions are those that place people in a protected class at a disadvantage. Examples of protected classes are race, ethnicity, religion, national origin, age, sex, and disability status.

For example, it’s not legal to ask applicants about their plans to bear children, their date of birth, their marital status, or whether they own a car unless these questions can be shown to be directly related to a person’s ability to do a job.

Interviewing scenarios

Two scenarios used by Christiana Health Care System, Wilmington, Delaware:

Scenario 1
You are assigned to a trauma case involving a 15-year-old with multiple life-threatening injuries from a motor vehicle accident. The patient is not expected to survive but is brought to the OR to do everything that can possibly be done. The trauma surgeon is visibly upset and has brought 4 other surgeons with him. This is going to be a busy case with 5 procedures taking place at one time (neurosurgery, orthopedics, general surgery, plastics, and cardiovascular).

• How will you handle this case emotionally?
• How will teamwork play a role in this procedure?

Scenario 2
You have been asked to form a team and revise a policy on retained foreign objects. Describe how you would facilitate this teamwork and encourage participation among the unengaged OR staff.

Interviewing questions

Some questions asked at Memorial Hermann Southwest in Houston:

1. Tell us about a time when you were proud of your decision-making skills. Pick a problem you have had to solve, give the details involved in it, and tell us what you did in creating the solution to that particular problem.
2. Give a detailed example of what you do in your current position to organize yourself to begin your day and throughout your day.
3. Tell us about a time when you have had to deal with a person in a position of authority, and you had a difference of opinion. How did you handle this situation?
4. Tell us about a time when you were able to achieve something by doing more than was expected.
5. Describe a situation in which you were expected to work with an individual you personally disliked. What happened?
6. Talk about a time when you made a personal sacrifice to reach a work objective.
7. Pick an example from your current job that would reflect on your ability to deal with pressure and/or stress.
8. What types of things make you angry in the work setting?
9. When has a customer or co-worker been able to make you act less mature and professional than you normally do?