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THE ART OF INTERVIEWING AND SELECTING THE BEST TESTERS

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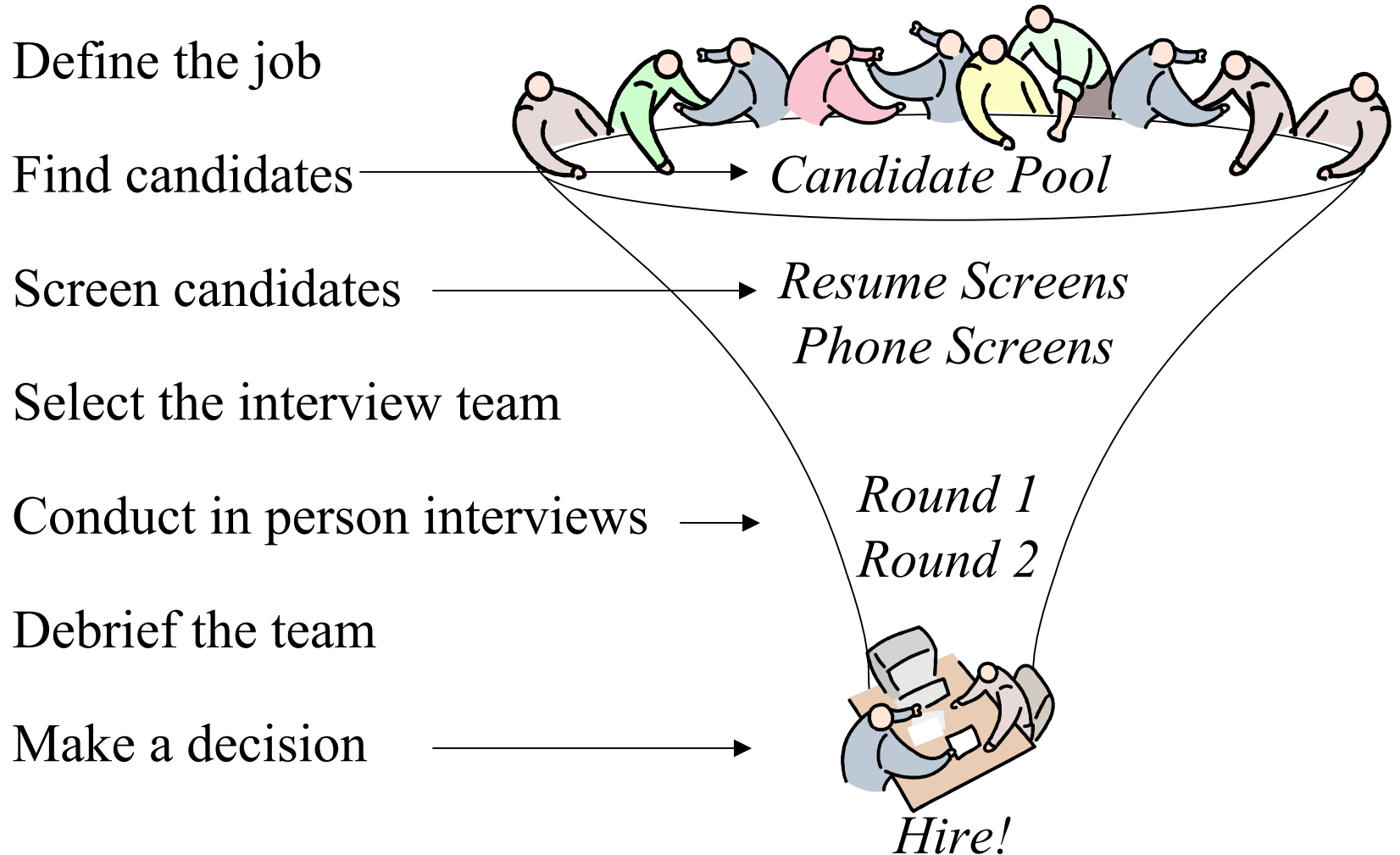
Founder and president of Quality Tree Software, Inc., Elisabeth Hendrickson is an independent consultant specializing in software quality and management. In the software field since 1988, Elisabeth has at one time or another been a tester, test automator, technical writer, programmer, and manager (sometimes simultaneously). An award-winning author, Elisabeth has published more than 20 articles and frequently is invited to speak at major software quality and software management conferences.



The Art of Interviewing and Selecting the Best Testers

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Overview of the Process





Defining the Job

Make sure you know what you're looking for before you start screening candidates.

The Job Definition

“I need a tester” or even “I need an automation expert” isn’t specific enough.

Consider key success criteria:

- Skills
- Experience
- Characteristics

Technical
Testing
Communication
Tools

The diagram consists of three boxes on the right. The top box contains 'Technical', 'Testing', 'Communication', and 'Tools'. The middle box contains 'Successes' and 'Failures'. The bottom box contains 'Observant', 'Curious', 'Articulate', and 'Thoughtful'. Arrows from the list on the left point to these boxes: 'Skills' points to the top box, 'Experience' points to the middle box, and 'Characteristics' points to the bottom box.

Successes
Failures

Observant
Curious
Articulate
Thoughtful

Examples of Skills

Technical Skills:

- Programming/scripting in a particular language
- Relational Databases
- Networking
- System Administration
- Operating Systems
- Application knowledge
- Tool knowledge

Testing Skills:

- Design tests
- Document test cases
- Plan a test effort
- Test data design
- Use test selection strategies
- Report bugs
- Isolate bugs
- Reproduce intermittent bugs
- Automate tests

Now That You Know What You're Looking For...

*How will you know
when you've found it?*





Finding Candidates

Cast a Wide Net

Internal sources:

- Tech support/help desk
- Technical writers
- Programmers
- Systems analysts
- Configuration managers
- System administrators
- Field engineers

External sources:

- Online discussion groups
- Local user groups
- Local networking events
- Former coworkers
- Personal referrals from existing staff
- Recruiters

Working with Recruiters



*Let recruiters make
introductions, not
decisions.*

The Importance of Diversity



Would you create an orchestra of just piccolo players?



Initial Screening

Screening Resumes

- DO look for evidence on the resume that candidates have the skills, experience, and characteristics you need.
- DON'T play buzzword bingo. General experience is usually much more important than experience with a particular tool or technology.

*When in doubt, DON'T throw it out.
Move the candidate on to the next step.*

Phone Screen Tips



- Allow at least half an hour.
- Describe the role. Be specific about day-to-day responsibilities.
- Ask a few softball questions to warm the candidate up.
- Ask probing questions to give you enough information to decide whether or not to bring the candidate in for an in-person interview.

The higher the cost of an in-person interview, the more probing the phone screen should be.

Ask About...

The candidate's experience:

- “I see you tested XYZ software. Tell me about some of the typical test cases you executed.”
- “How did you document the test results?”
- “Can you give me an example of a bug you found in the last month?”

The candidate's skills:

- “Your resume indicates that you're a UNIX expert. Tell me something I probably don't already know about UNIX.”
- “Your resume says you know SQL. How have you used SQL in the past?”

If you don't feel comfortable assessing a candidate's responses, bring another interviewer into the phone screen.

Two Possible Conclusions

"Thank you. I appreciate your time. However, this is not a good fit at this time."

OR

"Thank you for a great conversation! I'd like to talk to you further in person. Can you come in for an in-person interview?"



In Person Interviews

Establish the Interview Team

Make sure the team includes representatives from various groups. For example:

- Fellow testers
- Programmers
- Project managers
- Technical writers

Bring the whole team together to discuss who will cover what areas to make sure the team as a whole gets a good overall picture of the candidate.

Types of Questions

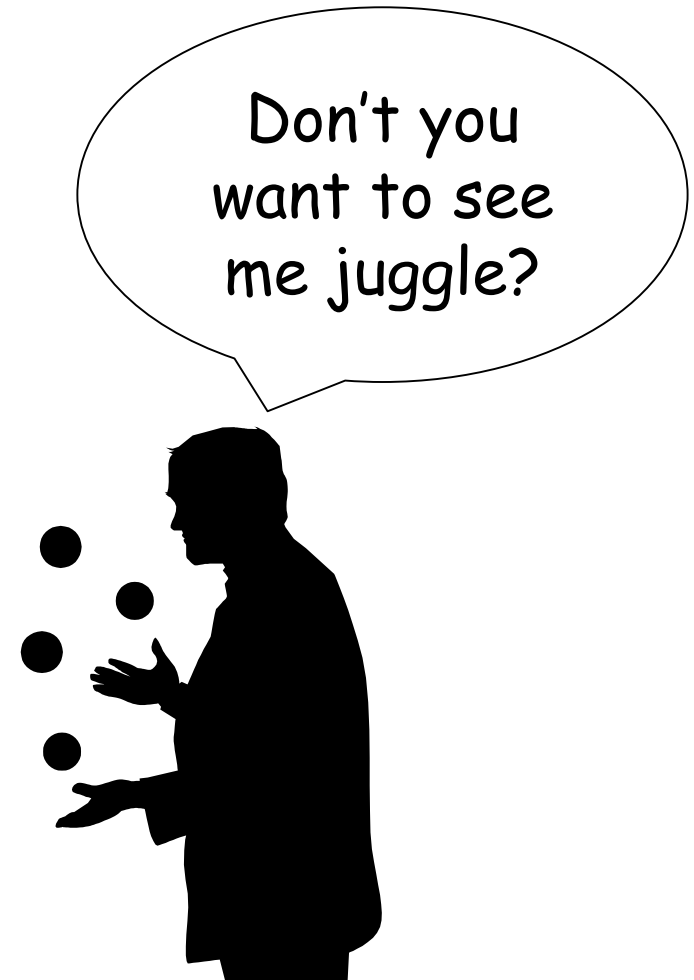
- **Hypothetical:** “What would you do if you could not possibly finish executing all the tests in the time allotted?”
- **Definitional:** “What is static analysis?”
- **Puzzle-based:** “Why are man hole covers round?”
- **Behavioral:** “Tell me about a time that you couldn’t finish executing all the tests you’d planned. What did you do?”
- **Technical:** “How can you find out what DLLs are loaded on a Windows machine?”
- **Audition:** “Here’s a simple program. Test it.”

Behavioral, technical, and audition-based interviews have the highest probability of predicting success on the job because they force the candidate to focus on DOING more than TALKING.

Audition

Have the candidate:

- Test a simple, representative program or dialog box
- Write a set of tests
- Write a bug
- Create a simple automated test
- Demonstrate how to perform a technical task such as edit the registry or set an environment variable



Do Second Round Interviews When...

- You want to split the 1st and 2nd rounds to make the 1st round shorter
- You need more information before you can make a decision
- You're having a difficult time choosing between two or three very promising candidates
- It's economically feasible

The second round interview is much like the first round, but perhaps more extended.



Making a Decision

Speed is of the essence

The Team Debrief

- Hear from each team member, preferably in a single debrief meeting where each team member can hear the others impressions.
- Don't let one team member speak for another: speak to absent team members on the phone if necessary.
- Compare notes during the debrief. Some candidates will tell interviewers different things. You need to know if this has happened.
- Consider both cultural fit and competence to perform the work.

Making a Decision

- Trust your gut – but follow up on hunches to get more concrete information.
- Don't rush into hiring the best of a bad lot just to fill the position fast.
- Let candidates know your decision quickly, within a day or two.
- Check references before extending an offer.



Variations on a Theme



Questions?

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