

Add a little 'mystery' to the interview process

Uncover candidate interview pitfalls and achieve a positive reputation for your organization

From the moment a job applicant calls or walks into one of your facilities, an impression of the community, either positive or negative, is formed. This impression continues based on several factors, including the courtesy and cordiality of the receptionist; the length of the wait before the interview; the welcome offered by the interviewer; the questions asked; the perceived interest, skill, and professionalism of the interviewer; and the information and messages that are conveyed about the facility, company, staff, and job.

How can you be sure that job applicants leave with the best possible impression? What if negative feelings were created during the interview process that caused the best managers or caregivers to go elsewhere? How can you monitor procedures to reduce the likelihood of desirable candidates choosing to work for a competitor? If your company maintains multiple facilities, how can you be sure that all of your facilities adhere to its guidelines for interviewing candidates?

These questions can be difficult to answer. Staffing issues sometimes plague the very best long-term care organizations, and the hiring process may involve multiple interviews or processes. When problems arise, pinpointing the direct cause can be like looking for a needle in a haystack. This is where a mystery shopping firm can help.

Mystery Shopping Helps to Maximize the Interview Process

What is a mystery shopping firm? It is a company that hires "undercover" people to contact their client by posing as a regular customer or, in this case, a job applicant.

Before the assignment begins, the mystery shopper is provided with a detailed scenario that enables him or her to be perceived as a bona fide applicant and respond to the client's need for information. If the mystery shopper is applying for a position such as a registered nurse or a manager, a "real" RN or manager would be engaged to complete the assignment.

After "shopping," the applicant completes a questionnaire and narrative account for each phase of the assignment on how the client's employees fulfilled their job requirements and the impressions formed during the calls and visits. While many

long-term care organizations have used mystery shopping as a way to evaluate customer service, sales effectiveness, and even responsiveness to residents' needs at a particular facility, few realize that

mystery shopping is also a great tool to discover and monitor the effectiveness of the candidate interviewing process.

A mystery shopping project can determine if your staff is presenting a realistic preview of the job. It can also represent your facilities, company, and employees in a positive, professional, and inviting way. If it is not, there can be far-reaching consequences for your company—beyond the scope of the individual interview. Each candidate interview is an opportunity for staff to create a positive public image for your organization. Candidates who have negative experiences will discuss them with others. As a result, the best prospects may seek employment elsewhere. Skilled nursing facilities, in particular, sometimes have difficulty recruiting the best caregivers. Therefore, if your reputation becomes even slightly tarnished, it can create staffing problems for years to come.

Mystery shopping helps to ensure that policies, procedures, and guidelines are being followed and used to your best advantage. Actual candidates are unlikely to provide this feedback, especially if they choose to work for a competitor. It can be difficult for your personnel to assess their own performance and, without some form of monitoring, you may be unaware that certain practices are creating unnecessary problems.

Interviewing requires effort, concentration, and practice. Staff must stay on schedule, maintain the proper image, build rapport, and consistently convey the culture of your organization. Interviewing skills also involve gathering the same general background data from each candidate and remembering what each candidate said, while evaluating their knowledge, skills, and abilities. Mystery shopping can pinpoint what aspects of the interview process fall short or are not working.



