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Remote Interviewing Toolkit

How to Interview, Connect With and Hire the Best Talent

Using This Toolkit

Conducting interviews remotely requires a unique workflow. However, it doesn't require a full remodeling of your existing interview process.

As with in-person interviews, the key is to focus on the candidate experience, which starts from the very first point of contact with your company. Every touch point — each website visit, email and, yes, interview — should leave a positive, lasting impression of your company as an employer of choice. Sound difficult? It all boils down to prioritizing and accommodating the candidate whenever possible.

How you interact with candidates has a significant impact on your employer brand; 76 percent of job seekers say not hearing back from an employer about a job application is more frustrating than not hearing back from a first date. On top of that, 69 percent of candidates would share a negative interview experience with their personal and professional networks.

Because interviews make up the majority of the candidate experience, it's vital that you get them right. To help, we've put together this guide, complete with best practices for conducting phone and video interviews, as well as worksheets to structure, guide and evaluate each conversation. Leverage these resources to create a successful and impactful remote interview experience.

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The Remote Candidate Experience

Creating a positive candidate experience is essential. Not only will it help you close the deal with great candidates, it has a significant impact on your ability to recruit prospective employees further down the road.

A poorly structured or negative interview process will deter job seekers from your future roles — 69 percent of candidates who had a negative experience won't apply to the organization again. This section breaks down the fundamentals of a successful candidate experience.

Remote Candidate Experience Best Practices

1. Solid Tech Stack and Tools

A seamless interview process makes for a strong candidate experience. In order to effectively get to know prospective employees and successfully introduce them to your company, you need a strong set of tools backing your efforts.

That includes an easy-to-use video conferencing platform, as well as a comprehensive onboarding and training software. Without these tools, your candidate experience will miss the mark.

2. Consistent Communication

Clear, consistent communication is essential. Prospective employees want to know what they can expect of the process and how to prepare accordingly. Additionally, some candidates may be fielding multiple opportunities. If it takes too long to hear back from you, they may turn their attention to other employers, causing you to lose out on top talent.

Frequent Updates Are Key

81%

of candidates want more frequent updates during the interview process.

More than three-quarters (81 percent) of candidates say more frequent updates from potential employers would significantly improve the process. Be upfront with candidates regarding what they can expect from the process, how you plan to communicate with them and any delays you foresee.

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☐ 3. Company Culture Spotlights

Employees aren't just filling a role; they're joining a team. Company culture is as important — if not more — as compensation. In fact, 56 percent of employees say so. Since remote employees may not be able to join you in the office regularly if at all, it's important that you show them what your culture is like and how you make remote team members feel connected.

☐ 4. Personal Touches

With very minimal human interaction during the remote hiring process, leveraging opportunities to connect with candidates on a personal level is extremely important. Without that, the interview process can feel very formal and cold — especially if you're using templates and autoresponders. Take diligent notes during every conversation so you're able to incorporate personal details into your correspondence and make the candidate feel appreciated and valued.

☐ 5. Candidate Feedback

Collecting feedback from candidates regarding the strengths and weaknesses of your candidate experience is vital to optimizing the process for future prospects. On top of that, asking for their input endears candidates to your brand as you earn the reputation of an empathetic employer.

Additionally — should you choose to forego a particular candidate — providing them with constructive feedback will boost your brand in their eyes. This can help you recruit qualified talent more quickly later down the line; candidates are four times more likely to apply to an open position in the future if they receive feedback during the initial application process.

Candidate Experience Audit

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One of the most important things you can do as a recruiter is experience your hiring process first hand. Test-drive your recruitment process as a candidate and evaluate each step along the way. Rate each element on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being the best; 1 being the worst) and take notes as you go through the process. The more critical and honest you can be, the better your candidate experience will be in the end.

Employer Brand

- Content   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- Digital Presence   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- Career Page   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

_____

_____

Application Process

- Ease of completion   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- Length of time needed to complete application   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- User experience   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

_____

_____

Interview Process

- Frequency of communication with company   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- Quality of communication with company   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- Quality of interviews/interactions with company   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

_____

_____

Additional Notes

_____

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_____

Phone Interviews

Phone interviews are an integral part of the remote hiring process. From screening applicants to second- and even final-round interviews, phone conversations with candidates need to be well executed. Use the resources in this section to ensure your phone interviews go off without a hitch.

Phone Interview Best Practices

The key objective of a phone interview varies depending on where in the process it takes place. However, the guiding principles remain the same. Use the following list of best practices to structure and conduct each phone interview successfully.

☐ 1. Send a Confirmation Email

Prior to the interview, send the candidate a confirmation email to remind them of the date, time and access links. Include the phone numbers to call, if they don't hear from you. This is an added courtesy that will enhance the candidate experience.

☐ 2. Start on Time

If the interviewee is waiting around for your call, they're going to start to second guess themselves, wondering if they got the dates mixed up, if they were supposed to call you, and so on. This adds unnecessary stress to the process, which has an impact on the overall candidate experience. Be prompt and call your interviewee at the designated time. If you're running late, notify them over email so they can relax until you're ready to begin.
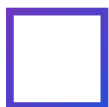
☐ 3. Set Up a Quiet Space

Give your interviewee the courtesy of an uninterrupted conversation and your full attention by designating a quiet space to conduct your interview. Eliminate background noise and anything that might break your focus. If available, reserve a conference room for the time of your interview. Otherwise, notify your colleagues — in the office or your own remote setting — that you'll need a quiet environment to conduct the conversation.

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☐ 4. Set an Agenda

To ensure the conversation flows smoothly and addresses your key points of evaluation, have a set agenda for each phone interview. Once determined, share a brief overview of the agenda with the interviewee, both ahead of time via email and at the start of the conversation. This will help them prepare appropriately for the interview and ensure they address your points of interest.

☐ 5. Pay Attention to Verbal Cues

In addition to evaluating the candidate's response to your questions, pay careful attention to their tone. More than one-third (38 percent) of communication is conveyed through tone of voice; your words only amount to seven percent. If they sound enthusiastic and eager to learn more about your company, great. If not, they probably aren't the candidate for you.

☐ 6. Speak to Your Core Values

Again, a remote candidate likely won't be able to experience your in-office culture very often, if at all. Because of that, you must make it a priority to highlight your company culture through storytelling. Since a phone interview is typically an earlier stage of the interview process, use it as an opportunity to explain your core values. This will help the candidate get a sense of both your working style and type of organizational culture — two important factors to consider when evaluating a potential employer.

Phone Screen Interviews: Questions to Ask

The purpose of a phone screen interview is to collect background information on and assess whether or not they qualify for the role. Use this list of questions when screening candidates over the phone.

Question 1: Is now still a good time to talk?

This shows that you are respectful of the candidate's time.

Question 2: Can you tell me about yourself?

You should learn a gist of the candidate's professional background, skills and most recent projects, personality and a few outside interests.

Question 3: Why did you take this call?

Pay close attention to their response; this is a tricky question to answer. The candidate is likely unhappy with their current role or company, but "going negative" or dragging their employer through the mud is a serious red flag. If the candidate is rude, arrogant or dismissive of their current job and boss, it's likely they'll experience the same frustrations at your company.

This phrasing is better than the standard, "Why are you interested in this job?" which puts candidates on the defense right off the bat. Additionally, they might not be actively looking for a job and were simply intrigued by this opportunity.

Question 4: What are you looking for in your next job?

This answer should provide more context as to why they're leaving their current company — a desire for more growth opportunities, interest in exploring new markets, change in career path or simply taking the next step in their career.

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Question 5: What interested you about this role and our company?

Test their knowledge of your company — if they're really interested in the position, they will have read up on your organization — and understand how they view their fit for the role.

Question 6: Tell me about your greatest accomplishment in your current role.

This answer will help you get a sense of the candidate's confidence in their abilities as well as preemptively assess their fit for the role.

Question 7: When have you made a mistake at work?

Similarly, this answer should see how self aware a candidate is as well as their willingness to improve their skill set. As a follow-up question, ask them what they learned from the situation.

Question 8: What are your expectations in the way of salary?

Compensation is a huge factor to consider — both for you and for the candidate. You may find an extremely qualified candidate who meets all the requirements and then some, but expects a much larger salary because of it. Negotiations can wait until you extend an offer to a candidate, but you should know now whether your offer and the candidate's expectations are in the same ballpark or not.

Question 9: Anything else you'd like to tell me about yourself?

Give them a chance to bring up other thoughts or call attention to specific parts of their resume.

Question 10: Do you have any questions for me?

If they didn't already ask any throughout the interview, give the candidate an opportunity to get their questions answered. This is also a good way to gauge if they were actively listening throughout the conversation and their interest in the role.
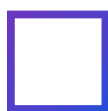
Video Interviews

Most individuals are familiar with video conferencing for work, but interviewing may still be a relatively foreign process to some. In order to make the best use of the conversation, we've outlined essential best practices for conducting video interviews. Use them, in addition to the accompanying resource, to set yourself up for success.

Video Interview Best Practices

A video interview should follow the same basic principles of a phone interview, but there are a few nuanced details to be aware of. Below are the top five best practices to follow when preparing for and conducting a video interview.

☐ 1. Send a Confirmation Email

A few days ahead of the interview, send the candidate a confirmation detail with relevant details for the video interview. Include the date, time and access links to join the call. Additionally, let them know what the dress code is, remind them who they'll be speaking with and provide them with phone numbers to call in case their video or audio isn't working properly. Again, this is a simple way to improve the remote candidate experience and distinguish yourself as an employer of choice.

☐ 2. Test Your Equipment

Prior to the interview, thoroughly test the software as well as your device's video and audio functionalities. You may need to set up a new account to use the platform, and the application may need authorization in order to access your computer's camera and microphone for the interview.

Most software providers have user tutorials available online. Use these to get familiar with the platform and ensure you know how to operate basic functions like a screen share. Test the platform with a colleague in a mock interview and have them provide feedback on the sound and video quality.

3. Highlight Your Company Culture

Company culture is a significant factor when it comes to evaluating potential employers. In fact, 77 percent of job seekers would consider a company's culture before applying to an open role. Because of that, you must take the time within each video interview to describe the central elements of your company culture. This includes your core values, key initiatives, culture committees as well as how remote employees are involved.

4. Designate a Distraction-Free Environment

Make sure there's nothing going on in the background of your video screen that could disturb the conversation. Aim to create a quiet, well-lit space to conduct all video interviews. If you have access to a conference room, reserve it during the designated interview time so your candidate has the courtesy and benefit of a distraction-free interview.

If things do come up, such as colleagues walking in the background, ignore them and give the candidate your full attention. If there is an interruption — either on your end or the candidate's — be flexible and accommodating. You can't control outside factors, so be gracious if you do have to pause the conversation. The interviewee will appreciate your understanding and this demonstration of empathy will bode well for your employer brand.

5. Be Aware of Body Language

Body language is an integral part of a video interview. Over half (55 percent) of communication is nonverbal, meaning how you carry yourself actually says more than the words you use. Pay attention to the candidate's body language, and be mindful of your own. Make eye contact, sit up straight and nod to show you're following along with what the candidate is saying.

6. Have a Backup Plan in Place

Technology has its shortcomings and sometimes it doesn't work as intended. As a preventative measure, have a failsafe in place to fall back on in case your video conferencing software causes issues. This can be another platform or simply a phone call — whatever you can do to avoid rescheduling the interview. This will help you stay on track with the process and prevent the candidate from having to deal with pre-interview stress any longer.

Pro Tip:

Streamline your communication and improve the candidate experience by using email templates.

This helps reduce the amount of time you need to dedicate to candidate communication and ensures applicants don't slip through the cracks.

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Company Culture Highlights

Because remote employees can't experience your culture firsthand in the office, you must paint the picture for them. Use the following checklist to ensure you discuss the essential components of your company culture with candidates. Consider making a deck containing of these highlights so you can walk the candidate through each element during the interview.

☐ **Core Values**

State your core values and explain what each means to your organization.

☐ **Culture Initiatives**

How do you maintain your company culture? Mention any recurring events, what your feedback strategy looks like, the role employees play along with anything else your team does to support your culture — both in and beyond the office.

☐ **Culture Committees**

What kind of groups help organize and carry out your culture initiatives? Explain the general goal of each committee and how remote employees are encouraged to get involved.

☐ **Remote-Work Culture**

How do remote teams stay connected? Let the candidate know backstops in place specifically for remote employees, such as daily standups with direct managers, team-building activities or happy hours. Additionally, explain how remote employees are integrated into in-office happenings, whether that's regularly through communication channels or monthly in all-hands meetings.
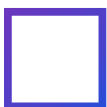
☐ **OPTIONAL: Additional Details**

Mention any remaining major elements of your company culture. Remember, culture matters to job seekers, so make sure you paint an accurate picture and sell the candidate on your company.

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Interview Worksheets and Resources

By now you should be familiar with the best practices for conducting phone and video interviews, as well as creating a memorable candidate experience. To help streamline your efforts, we've compiled several resources and worksheets to use throughout the process.

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Questions to Ask in an Interview

Depending on the number of rounds in your interview process, the goal of each conversation will be slightly different, which is why it's so important to set an agenda ahead of time. In general, you should get to know the candidate better with each subsequent interview.

We've broken down the following list of questions into categories based on subject matter and intention. Within each interview, aim to ask questions from each category, but know that the total number of each will vary.

For example, in a phone screen or first-round interview, you'll want to focus on asking more professional background questions to better understand the candidate's qualifications and whether or not they fulfill the job requirements.

Conversely, a final-round interview will likely center around behavioral or situational questions that get at the heart of the candidate's soft skills and working style.

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Interview Questions

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Mix and match the following questions to foster a well-structured and informative conversation.

Question 1: At the start of every interview, always as the candidate, "Is now still a good time to talk?" This shows you appreciate and respect their time. Remember, they're evaluating you too.

Professional Background Questions

1. At your current job, what does your day-to-day look like?
2. What is your favorite part of your job?
3. What is your least favorite part of your job?
4. Tell me about the most recent project you worked on — what was your involvement and scope of work?
5. How many hours a week do you normally work? What's expected of you at your current job?

Professional Aspirations Questions

1. What does your dream job look like?
2. Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
3. What aspect of this role are you most interested in and why?
4. Are there any skills you hope to pick up or grow as your advance in your career?
5. How does this role align with your career goals?

Working Style Questions

1. What motivates you at work?
2. How frequently do you work as a part of a team? Do you wish it was more or less often?
3. How would you describe your work style?
4. How do you handle stress?
5. How do you prioritize multiple projects?

Problem Solving Questions

1. Describe a time when you had to overcome a challenge at work. How did you handle it?
2. What do you do if you can't find a solution to a problem?
3. Describe a time when you had to make a difficult decision. How did you make your choice?
4. Have you ever had to reevaluate a strategy or project while working on it? How did it go?
5. How do you handle making mistakes? How do you handle not meeting goals?

Teamwork Questions

1. Have you ever disagreed with a colleague? How did you handle it?
2. If your manager makes a request that you disagree with, how would you handle it?
3. Which way do you prefer to work on a team project: divide and conquer or work together at the same time?
4. What does your ideal team work environment look like?
5. What motivates you about working as part of a team? Demotivates?

Interview Planning

Use any combination — some, all or none — of the different types of questions from the previous resource to complete the following worksheet ahead of your next interview with a remote candidate. Incorporate any of your own questions as well.

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Interview Planning

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Print and fill out this worksheet or recreate and customize it for your purposes in Google Forms.

Date of Interview: _____	Interviewer(s): _____
Interviewee: _____	Format: _____
Job Title: _____	Duration: _____

Professional Background Questions:

1.

2.

3.

Professional Aspirations Questions

1.

2.

3.

Working Style Questions

1.

2.

3.

Problem Solving Questions

1.

2.

3.

Teamwork Questions

1.

2.

3.

Additional Questions

1.

2.

3.

Interview Scorecard

An interview scorecard is a standardized evaluation used to assess candidates. It helps ensure the conversation between interviewers and interviewees adhere to a previously determined set of criteria and ensures that multiple interviewers evaluate each candidate based on the same factors. It also helps to eliminate unconscious bias and gives each candidate a fair interview process.

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Interview Scorecard

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Complete the following interview scorecard after your interviews or use it as a template for your own evaluation based on unique criteria. Each interviewer should fill out this scorecard for each candidate they interview. Assessment criteria can be altered based on the stage in the interview process.

Candidate Name: _____	Date: _____
Role: _____	Interview Round: _____
Interviewer(s): _____	Duration: _____

Professional Background Questions

1. Do they understand what our company does?   **Yes   No**
2. Do they know who our main competitors are/how we differ?   **Yes   No**
3. What do they know about our industry?

_____

_____

4. Why did they apply for this role?

_____

_____

5. What is your overall impression?

_____

_____

Education, Experience and Technical Knowledge

1. Do they have a degree or certification in *[insert degree]*? Yes   No
2. How many years of experience do they have in *[insert industry or job title]*?   _____
3. What experience do they have working with *[insert platform, language, software]*?

_____

_____

Hard Skill Assessment

1. Do they have an adequate understanding of *[software/platform]*?   **Yes   No**
2. Can they demonstrate skills using *[insert program or software]*?   **Yes   No**
3. How well do they analyze *[insert problem]*?

_____

_____

Interview Scorecard

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Soft Skill Assessment

1. Do they possess time management skills? **Yes   No**

1 = Poor; 5 = Great

2. How would you rate their communication skills? **1   2   3   4   5**
3. How would you rate their interpersonal skills? **1   2   3   4   5**
4. How would you rate their leadership skills? **1   2   3   4   5**
5. How well do they work in a team setting? **1   2   3   4   5**
6. How well do they work independently? **1   2   3   4   5**

In what ways have they demonstrated they are an organizational citizen?

_____

_____

How have they taken initiative in previous roles?

_____

_____

How will this candidate fit into our culture?

_____

_____

How will this candidate add to our culture?

_____

_____

What are their personal aspirations?

_____

_____

What are their professional aspirations?

_____

_____

Additional Thoughts

_____

_____

_____

_____

CHECKLIST

Explaining Your Remote Work Policy

You're hiring a remote employee and likely already have a policy in place for how you'll manage their employment. One of the last steps in your interview process should be to explain the terms of your policy to your small pool of final-round candidates. However, you should make some of these terms clear early on, either as a notice on the application or during the screening interview. That way, you don't get far along in the process with a candidate who isn't interested in some or all of the arrangement.

Remote Work Policy Overview

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Use the following checklist to ensure you address every key point of your work-from-home policy with a potential new hire.

☐ **Purpose**

What was the intention behind implementing a remote work policy and what do you hope to offer employees by having one?

☐ **Scope**

Which roles in the company does the remote work policy apply to?

☐ **Working Hours**

During which hours and time zone is this employee expected to be working? Will their teammates have a different set of working hours?

☐ **Expectations**

What are the company's communication, responsiveness and availability expectations? Make note that the employee's direct manager will likely have their own set of expectations, but these are what the company has outlined.

☐ **Technology Requirements and Support**

What kinds of devices and internet access is the employee expected to have? Does the company provide or support these additional costs? What are the terms of that support?

☐ **Security Requirements**

What kind of network access is the employee required to have? This is very important to mention as it can have legal ramifications for your business and clients. Furthermore, it may severely limit where the employee can work; they can't access a private network from a coffee shop or community work space.

☐ **Onsite Requirements**

How often, if at all, is the employee expected to come to the office? Does the company support or cover the employee's travel expenses? What is the purpose of their onsite presence at each visit?

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