

A HIRING MANAGER'S GUIDE TO:

PHONE INTERVIEWS

FOR QUALIFICATION & SCREENING



Actionable advice for candidate and
recruiter

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PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

Phone interviews are a lot more than just a time and money saving measure.

While they are a good means for an employer to save the time and costs required to interview candidates in person, they are by their very nature impersonal.

REMOVE DISTRACTIONS FROM THE ROOM & DIARY

Focus your full attention on the interview so you can stay alert for important nuggets of information that the interviewee either says or hints at.

Checking your Twitter stream or responding to a colleague's email during your interview will not only distract you, but may make you come off as sounding distant or disinterested, which isn't fair to the interviewee.

KNOW WHAT YOU WANT TO SAY ABOUT YOURSELF

Often times you might find yourself stumbling the most when you're talking about yourself and that's perfectly natural - we don't love to talk about ourselves.

That's why it's a great idea for you to get down a few key points you want to say about yourself and your team. Tailor them to the role you're interviewing for and perhaps explain what this new acquisition should be bringing to the team.

RESEARCH YOUR CANDIDATE

The best questions are the ones that truly resonate with the candidate. For that reason, it's best to do some research into your candidate's background.

If this is a technical role, or you've found a candidate that seems to be incredibly strong on paper, then it would be a good idea to dive into them as a contributor. For technical roles, GitHub is the best place to find what your talent is talking about and what kinds of solutions they're working on. Spending 5 minutes browsing their profile will give you more insights into their working methodology than most questions would.

USE A LANDLINE

An interview is a stressful enough experience for a candidate already. Add to that the always unreliable mobile reception and you've got a recipe for candidate anxiety.

As the interviewer, this is something you need to take ownership of. Make sure you are ringing from a landline or desk phone.



PHONE INTERVIEWS

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In some cases, you won't even be talking to a hiring manager – a human resources staffer or an administrative assistant may simply ask you a preset list of questions and record your answers for later review by their superior.

THE QUESTIONS

The phone interview can be a massive time sink, with potential pitfalls everywhere. Having questions to hand that you've built specifically to meet the needs of that particular hire will help you save time and find talent quicker.

Here are some good qualifying questions that will dig into the character of your candidate.

KEY:

What the questions reveal about your candidate:



Communication



Culture Fit



Development



Expertise

WHY DO YOU WANT TO GET INTO...

What motivates a candidate to enter a particular industry or role is always a good place to start with a screening call. There shouldn't be any red flags here. Even if you aren't a particularly money focused individual the candidate might be. You just want to focus on how well they can articulate their motivations and desires.



WHY ARE YOU LEAVING XYZ?

Screening for potential toxic behaviour is just one the reasons this question needs to be in preliminary screening. Pay particular attention to language choices when listening to someone articulate previous roles. Are they pointing the finger or are they giving a measured account of an experience, be it positive or negative?



WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT US?

You don't need to go far these days to find a something about a company to talk about. Social media and recruitment marketing have brought an (almost) complete level of transparency for companies. For that reason, this question is about diving into a candidates willingness to do a bit extra. Look for enthusiasm and a little more than repetition of the companies values.



TELL ME ABOUT A TIME YOU SHOWED...



Pick a behavioural trait related to the role you're screening for and run with it. If it's important for a candidate to be able to get back up from knock-backs, you'll want them to be able to articulate a prior experience that has demonstrated that. Don't be put off by an answer that isn't in a business setting. Read between the lines.



WHAT CHALLENGES ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

Not only is this probing for expertise and awareness, it's also analysing a candidate's propensity for self-development. A good candidate should be excited about the role and can measure it based on the development opportunity on offer. Watch out for cookie cutter responses here. You want role specific challenges you can help the candidate tackle.



WHO ARE YOU OUTSIDE OF WORK?

It may be worth bringing this topic closer to the start of the call if you think the candidate is particularly nervous as the chance for them to talk about themselves outside of a professional frame should put them at ease. This is also an opportunity to look for what the candidate may add to your culture.



GIVING FEEDBACK

Giving interview feedback to unsuccessful candidates can be difficult. No one wants to hear they didn't get the job. But rather than face a slightly uncomfortable situation, some hiring managers gloss over taking care of this responsibility.

As an IT recruitment agency, we see this happening all too often. Some hiring managers simply hope their candidates will get the hint after weeks of silence or be placated by a simple 'thanks, but no thanks' email. Not only is this unprofessional, it's also highly damaging to the employers brand.

As celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain said: **"If you have a good experience in a restaurant, you tell 2 people. If you have a bad experience, you tell 10 people"**

The same goes for job interviews. If candidates get radio silence after an interview, they'll be pretty unhappy. And you can guarantee they'll tell their peers about it. So, how do you respond?

78%

Of candidates will tell their friends and family about a bad interview experience.

*the talent board

Would you recommend an employer if you received feedback on an application within...

24h

46

48h

29

7 days

-12

14 days

-44

Never

-85

n=609 candidates surveyed immediately after submitting an application. Margin of error is 4 NPS points at the 95% confidence level.

GIVING NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

Sometimes the feedback you'll need to give isn't around how well the candidate performed, but rather around where they can improve. There is an art behind giving negative or constructive feedback. Here are a few tips to help you deliver it.

USE INTERVIEW NOTES

Human memory is unreliable at the best of times. That's why if you're going to be serious about giving useful interview feedback to unsuccessful candidates, it's essential you keep your notes from the interview itself.

How useful those notes are depends a lot on your interview style. If you run unstructured conversational interviews that lack a clear sense of direction, your notes probably won't be very helpful. There's clear evidence that hiring managers make better hiring decisions when interviews are structured (i.e. all candidates face the same set of predetermined questions). Using a structured interview format means your notes will indicate where and how the unsuccessful candidate performed poorly.

HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY

There's no point giving interview feedback to unsuccessful candidates if you aren't going to be honest.

It's advisable to keep your feedback closely related to the job description and the required skills and experience. But rather than just tell them where they fell short, try to phrase your feedback as areas they can develop and work on.



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