Help Scout

A Guide to Effective Interviewing

Every interview represents a significant investment of time
and energy from both the interviewers and the candidate.

An effective interview is:

- Well prepared for (by both interviewer
  and candidate).

- Polite and respectful.

- Consistent across candidates.

- Based on the candidate's real stories.

An effective interview is not:

- An attempt to trap or trick candidates.

- Meant to lead candidates toward
  certain answers.

- Discriminatory of race, gender, or other
  protected characteristics.

Before the interview

- **Select the most appropriate interview questions:** Use our customer service interview builder to collate a
  set of questions that will help draw out the information you need to make a good decision. Use the same set
  of questions for each candidate (known as a structured interview) to reduce bias. In an hour long interview,
  10 to 12 questions is a good target to aim for.

- **Prepare an interview scorecard:** Use an agreed-upon scoring system for every candidate to help ensure a
  fair process. In combination with your question set, a scorecard helps your hiring team consistently
  compare candidates across all areas.

- **Review the job description:** Have the advertised job description on hand, both as a reminder of your
  requirements and of how the role was described to applicants.

- **Prepare information about the team and company:** Try to anticipate questions your candidates might have,
  and prepare helpful answers. Typical areas include the structure, policies, demographics, and history of
  your team and company.

- **Re-read the candidate's information:** Review their resume and any application letter, as well as notes from
  screening stages. They can shape the order and pace of your questions and let you use the interview time
  to explore more deeply in the most relevant areas.

- **Note down any areas of particular interest:** For example, the candidate may have skills or experiences you
  want to understand more deeply.

During the interview

- **Be on time:** Be ready at the stated time to show respect to the candidates and to show that your company is competent.

- **Make introductions:** Introduce all the interviewers, and share with your candidate a general overview of the team and company they may be joining.

- **Explain the interview structure:** Let the candidate and other interviewers know how the interview will proceed to help settle nerves and set expectations. If you intend to take notes, let the candidate know that, too.

- **Listen well:** Avoid thinking ahead to your next question, and stay in the moment. Look at the candidate (or your webcam, if it is an online interview), and concentrate on their words. Often you will find an opportunity for a follow-up question that will be more revealing than your original question.

- **Take notes:** Writing down key answers and impressions during the interview is easier and more reliable than trying to recall them afterwards. It also helps you make a fairer comparison between candidates who may have interviewed days apart.

- **Watch the time:** Be respectful of your candidate's time. Adjust your pace and keep control so you can cover the most important questions.

- **Encourage candidates to tell stories:** Having people talk through their real experiences and actions will give you a truer sense of a person than having them guess what they might do in a given situation. Keep bringing them back to their own lived stories.

- **Look for their values:** Stories are also an excellent opportunity to understand what matters to a candidate and how they think about their role in the world. This will help you identify people who will add to your team culture.

- **Don't be afraid of silence:** Leave space for people to expand on their stories. Interviewing is stressful, and some people take time to formulate an answer. They may also reveal more helpful information if they feel there is time to keep thinking about their response.

- **Sell the role and the company:** Your candidate is also interviewing you. They will want to know if this role and company will be worth their time and effort, and you want them to be excited about the opportunity.

- **Ask for their questions:** Encourage them to ask about any aspect of the role, team, or company they are interested in, and preserve enough time during the interview so you can provide helpful answers.

- **Explain the next steps:** At the end of an interview, let candidates know what will happen next. When should they expect to hear back from you? What should they do if they have additional questions or information to share?

After the interview

- **Ask effective reference questions:** When possible, try to go beyond a generic recommendation. One method is to ask a reference to rate a candidate from 1-10 in terms of living up to their potential. Most people will respond warmly ("A nine!"). Following up with "And how could they get to a 10?" will often draw out a more helpful discussion of areas that may need improvement. Also consider asking for their tips on how to best manage this candidate. It's another way to reveal some more specific insights.

- **Give a timely follow up:** You may have tons of candidates to move through the hiring process, and it can be exhausting to manage them all. But remember that each candidate is waiting for news and might be holding off on other decisions. Build a system that ensures they are not left waiting longer than necessary.