

Interview questions to ask when hiring for remote positions

Figuring out interview questions to ask a candidate applying for a remote position at your company involves covering two essential areas. First, you need to gather information to determine whether or not the person has the skills and experience to perform the expected duties and meet organizational needs – regardless of location. Second, you must ask interview questions specifically targeted at judging the applicant's potential success in a remote environment.

As you develop a list of interview questions to ask when hiring for remote positions, here are some things to think about:

Gain an understanding of the candidate's ability to do the job

No sense worrying about someone's telecommuting capabilities until you learn more about his education, work history, and qualifications. If hiring a software developer, for instance, you'd first want to be sure of the applicant's mastery of programming languages important to your projects and get a sense of what tasks he performed for other employers.

Ask candidates for remote positions a range of the standard interview questions you'd pose for on-site roles. These common questions will assist with breaking the ice, judging communication skills and professionalism, gaining a feel of competency level, and obtaining insight into personality. A few interview questions to consider include:

- Tell me about yourself.
- What do you consider your strengths and weaknesses?
- What makes you a good match for this role?
- Where do you see yourself in five years?

Gain an understanding of the candidate's ability to perform the job remotely

Do not assume every person is cut out to work remotely. Instead, treat the ability to function well in a remote environment as a specific skill, just like knowing a second language or being an effective communicator. Interview questions that can aid in figuring out how suited the individual is to remote work include:

Have you ever worked remotely before?

Possessing a track record of successfully telecommuting for previous employers supports the notion that this candidate understands what this arrangement entails and can handle it. Even if the applicant hasn't worked remotely full-time, being able to talk about some experience working from home (such as one day a week or during inclement weather) can help you gauge potential.

What do you foresee as the greatest challenges to telecommuting?

A job seeker who can't name any potential problems may not have a clear idea of what remote work involves. People who have telecommuted before (or at least thoughtfully pondered the issue) will be able to discuss obstacles such as managing time, staying in the office loop, avoiding distractions, or solving tech issues. Noteworthy candidates for remote positions will tell you how they cope (or would cope) with these problems.

Can you describe your home office set-up?

The reason for asking this question isn't to judge fanciness. Rather, listen for evidence that the person realizes a corner of the kitchen table isn't the best idea. Remote work requires a dedicated area where company material won't get mixed up with a child's homework. Likewise, the chosen space should be quiet enough to promote concentration and ample enough to allow spreading out.

What communication tools are you comfortable using?

What technology does your company depend on to keep in touch with remote staff? If, for instance, the person who gets this remote position will be expected to converse with colleagues through Google Hangout or check in daily with a manager via Skype, it pays to inquire about familiarity with these things. In the absence of direct experience, how willing does the candidate seem to learn new communication methods?

What strategies do you use to ensure work gets done correctly and on time?

Organizational skills are important for all workers, but they prove especially critical for telecommuters since a manager isn't there looking over a shoulder and providing reminders. A person with a methodical system involving a calendar, daily to-do lists, and similar tactics demonstrates a commitment to deadlines and not letting details fall through the cracks.

Also, look for evidence that the candidate feels comfortable speaking up as needed. A remote employee willing to ask questions and double-check information is highly preferable to someone who fears "bothering" managers and colleagues by picking up the phone or texting.

Why do you want this particular job?

Undoubtedly, the remote nature of the position proves attractive to many applicants. A candidate expressing how she thrives working on her own or loves the ability to skip a regular commute is natural. However, listen to what reasons (if any) the person gives *beyond* the telecommuting aspect. Genuine excitement over the work to be performed or the opportunity to be a part of your company's culture lets you know the job seeker sees this role as more than just a chance to work from home.

Use a remote interview to gain insight into telecommuting potential

Remote work expands the applicant pool for a position by eliminating geographical barriers to employment. However, distance sometimes makes in-person interviews difficult or costly.

Since the job will be remote, consider conducting the interview that way, too. Such a set-up provides a first-hand look at how well someone fares using the communication methods he'll be expected to employ if hired. Poor phone skills, problems using video conferencing equipment, a noisy or messy background, improper dress, and lack of preparation can be red flags that perhaps a remote relationship isn't the best idea for this applicant.