## An in-depth guide on the best practices in interviewing

If you want to attract top talent to your organization, mastering the interview process is a must. The proof?
The \#1 reason candidates turn down a position is due to a negative experience during the job interview. On the flip side of that, $80 \%$ of job candidates report that a positive interview experience convinced them to accept an offer.

It's clear that an effective interview will go a long way toward securing the best talent out there, but what makes the experience a positive one for the interviewee? That's where knowledge of the best practices in interviewing comes into play.

## By using proper interview techniques, you can:

- Reduce stress in your candidates so they can relax and speak honestly.
- Evaluate if the candidate is a fit for your company's culture.
- Successfully gauge their competency with the tasks they'll perform in the position.
- Avoid unconscious bias and other common mistakes.

In today's age, your prospects will have access to a plethora of information about your hiring process. Websites like Glassdoor provide reviews for companies and their interview processes, which makes conducting interviews even more difficult.

That's why you need to know how to conduct a superb interview that's free of bias so you can consistently secure top talent for your company. Read on to discover our picks for the top best practices in interviewing.

## Why interviewing skills matter in 2022

Solid interviewing skills have always been in-demand, but they matter now in 2022 more than ever. The pandemic and the Great Resignation of 2021 have completely changed the employment landscape - and hiring decisions are no exception.

Consider that there's been a $135 \%$ increase in remote job openings or that only $46 \%$ of HR professionals are prepared to adapt to a virtual recruiting and hiring process.

These changes have also affected the types of interview questions job seekers are likely to see. For example,
it's common for prospects to answer questions about their vaccine status, remote work, and how they communicate outside of the office. The employee selection process has become a bit complicated as a result. That's why good interviewers are in higher demand than ever before.

If you can provide an exemplary interview process for candidates, you'll stand a far greater chance of securing skilled employees that will stay at your company for the long term.

Video interviews have also become more prevalent since 2020. $60 \%$ of HR recruiters now use platforms like Zoom and Skype to conduct interviews.

While the hiring landscape has certainly changed in recent years, the good news is the best practices in interviewing have not. Without further ado, let's learn how to conduct a successful interview that provides a positive candidate experience and fully evaluates their potential for the role.

## How to prepare for interviews

Detailed preparation is always necessary for conducting job interviews. Otherwise, you may forget to ask specific questions or draw a blank in the middle of the process, which won't reflect well on your part. That's why you need to set aside some time to prepare for each job candidate you will interview.

## You should focus on the following when preparing for interviews:

- Constructing goals for the overall interview process
- Doing background research on each candidate
- Selecting suitable types of questions
- Organizing your questions in a way that flows and makes sense

Let's take a more detailed look at each of these preparation steps.

## Creating interview goals

Before you start researching candidates, you should set a few goals for the interview process as a whole. In other words, what do you hope to get out of the interviews? What does your ideal candidate look like, and what skills should they possess? Asking these questions will help you form a clearer picture of the perfect candidate.

Also, make sure you're very familiar with the position you're hiring for, which means diving deeper than reading the provided job description. To help with this, you can gain inspiration by examining the top performers at your company. If there are already existing employees in the same roles, that's even better.

For example, if you're hiring new salespeople at your company, take a look at your top-performing salespeople first.

Do they have anything in common? What types of jobs did they have before starting at your company? In what ways are they skilled and resourceful?

If you find that they all held similar sales positions before joining your company, that's something you can look
for in your candidates. The same is true for any desirable skills or certifications they may have.
If you want to dive even deeper, you can speak with your salespeople to see what they feel are their most vital traits, skills, and assets. That will provide you with some vetted criteria for what it takes to become a successful salesperson at your company - which is invaluable for the hiring process.

## Tips for creating actionable goals

To find the most success with your interview goals, you need to be as specific as possible with them. The more information you can provide about your goal, the easier it will be to make it a reality.

## Here's an example of a poorly defined goal:

"To find the best and most qualified job candidate for our sales position."
This goal is extremely vague and doesn't contain any information you can act on.

## Here's a much better version:

"To find a talented salesperson with at least 3 years of experience in a similar role, who communicates well, and knows our software."

Now that's a goal that you can use for your interviews. It contains detailed information on the experience and skills that the ideal candidate has, which you can check for when conducting interviews.

## Conduct detailed background research

You should always do a little background research on each candidate you interview. Why's that?
There are a few reasons, one of which is that it makes an excellent first impression on your interviewee.
Remember, you want to provide a positive candidate experience to attract the best talent. As such, showing that you cared enough to research their background conveys a sense of respect. It communicates that you value their time and are honestly considering them for the position, which is a plus.

Doing some background research will also help you save precious time during the interview. If you already know a bit about the candidates' background, you won't need to waste time with questions like, "Where did you work in the past?" Or, "Are you currently employed?"

It will also help you prepare a list of questions that directly relates to each candidate's experience. That will aid in conducting a more thorough interview, which will help you select the most qualified new hires.

## Preparing the right interview questions

The questions you ask are the most crucial aspect of your interview. Ask the right questions, and you'll wind up with the most qualified candidate for the position. Meander too long or ask nonsensical questions, and you risk getting stuck with unqualified prospects.

Sadly, too many interviewers ask the same questions we've heard a million times, like, "What are your strengths and weaknesses?" These questions are mostly nonsensical and usually elicit nothing more than lies from the candidate. After all, who would outright admit to weaknesses during a job interview?

## Instead, each question that you ask should originate from two places:

- Your knowledge of the position and its tasks
- Your knowledge of the candidate you're interviewing

That will help you stay in the realm of reality when asking questions, and it's a great way to see if the candidate is a good fit for the role.

Sticking with the salespeople example, you could form questions by asking your team which problems they struggle with the most. From there, ask your candidate how they would walk through and resolve the issue. If they provide an actionable solution, you know you have a qualified candidate on your hands.

## Write an interview script or outline

You want the entire interview to flow off your tongue, which is why creating a script or an outline is so helpful. That doesn't mean that you have to script out every word you're going to say, but it certainly helps to have a structure to use.

The script will serve as the framework for your interview. It should contain all the questions you intend to ask, as well as essential notes or instructions.

For example, you may have a few contextual questions on your list. These questions have unique stipulations like, "If a candidate answers YES to a question, ask a follow-up question." If you don't use an outline for your interviews, you could easily forget essential steps such as this.

You can also jot down instructions for yourself, such as a reminder to maintain eye contact and open body language. In short, an outline will help you stay professional and organized during the interview, which will reflect well on your company.

## How to conduct interviews

Now that you know how to prepare for an interview, it's time to start conducting them. Knowing how to conduct effective interviews is a must if you're a hiring manager or part of human resource management.

Of course, there are right ways and wrong ways to go about conducting interviews.
Sometimes learning what NOT to do can be equally as helpful as what to do. Bearing that in mind, here are some interview tips as well as some common mistakes that you should do your best to avoid.

## Contacting your interviewees

You need to pay special attention when reaching out to your candidates, as a poor experience in the early stages can persuade some to pursue other opportunities.

Double-check the contact information that you have for each prospect to make sure that it's correct. The last thing you want is to miss out on hiring a talented candidate because you got their phone number or email wrong.

Send an email to your candidates well in advance of their interview. Also, it's normal to conduct a phone interview first to identify your top candidates. From there, you can move on to face-to-face interviews until you settle on a hire.

## Here are a few other tips:

- Send a confirmation email the day before the interview to confirm the time and date
- Include some general interview questions so they can get a feel for what you'll ask
- Keep track of all scheduled interviews in a shared spreadsheet, so you don't lose track of them

As long as you follow these suggestions, you should be able to successfully schedule all your interviews without any issues.

## Prepare a small interview team

You risk overwhelming your employees when you include lots of others in the interview. As a rule of thumb, only include one or two other people during the interview. In general, a hiring manager or an executive manager is enough to include in the process.

While you definitely want to include your team in the hiring process, you don't want your entire executive board present for each interview.

More interviewers also muddy the waters when it comes to asking questions.
If you have 5+ people in the room, they may ask unrelated questions or speak over one another. That's why keeping your interview team nice and concise is best. Also, establish a rule that only one interviewer can speak at a time to avoid chaotic situations.

## Do your best to reduce the interviewee's stress

If your prospects are stressed, you won't get the best interview out of them. That can lead to skipping over candidates that seemed weak but were actually a perfect fit for your team.

A job interview is stressful by nature, so it's essential to take some steps to combat that.
Providing some sample interview questions in advance is an effective way to put candidates' minds at ease. It gives them the chance to prepare what they want to say and helps paint a picture of what you're looking for in a candidate.

Another way to reduce stress is to work with your candidates to find the most convenient time and location to conduct the interview. If they're on a tight squeeze that week, you can recommend doing a phone or video interview instead.

Lastly, including your company's dress code in your scheduling email can help reduce candidate stress. It's common for candidates to stress over what they should wear, especially if they aren't aware of the dress code.

The more that you can do to be transparent with your interviewees, the less stress you will cause. Not only that but providing a stress-free interview process is a great way to ensure a positive candidate experience at your company.

## Things to avoid during job interviews

Since you know the top best practices in interviewing, you should also know what to avoid during an interview.
Here's a list of the top no-no's to stay away from when conducting job interviews:

- Stereotyping. When interviewing, you should not form an opinion on how an employee will perform based on their age, race, national origin, gender, or sexual orientation. Not only is doing so in poor taste, but it's also against the law.
- Snap judgments. While it may seem tempting to go with your gut's first impression of a candidate, doing so is a form of bias. Instead, fully consider the candidate's skills, experience, and qualifications - despite any negative first impressions.
- The 'halo' effect. The halo effect occurs when an interviewer notices something positive at the beginning and lets it cloud the rest of the interview. An example would be finding out that a candidate went to your university and then hiring them based solely on that fact.
- The contrast effect. If you interview a strong candidate after a weak one, they may appear stronger than they actually are due to the contrast. To avoid this bias, make a note of each time you interview a desirable candidate directly after an undesirable one.

Those are the top forms of bias that creep through during job interviews. The best way to avoid these biases is to develop an awareness that they exist. That will help you stop yourself as soon as you begin to form a bias.

## Concluding thoughts: The best practices in interviewing

Those are our picks for the best practices in interviewing, regardless of your industry. While interviewing candidates is more difficult than ever, these fundamentals will help you get through your interviews with success.

Always prepare for each interview by researching your candidates, writing a detailed list of questions, and forming actionable goals.

From there, conduct the interview with a small team, follow your outline, and reduce candidate stress in as many ways as you can. Lastly, develop an awareness of the different forms of unconscious bias so you can avoid them at all costs.

Do that, and you should have no issues discovering the most talented candidates for your open positions.

