

How to tell an applicant they didn't get the job

In today's age, the recruitment process, while exciting, is equal parts challenging and time-consuming. Recruiters often have to sift through hundreds or even thousands of applications in search of the most qualified candidates. Since filling even one position can be such a tall task, some companies choose to save time by not sending rejection letters to candidates they don't intend to pursue.

After all, nobody likes being the bearer of bad news, so why not spare yourself the awkwardness and skip the whole rejection process?

However, not rejecting candidates can do a lot of damage to your company's reputation, which can limit your talent pool and make it increasingly difficult to attract top-tier talent.

72% of job seekers that had a poor candidate experience told others about it either online or in person, which does real damage to brands.

Conversely, being forthright about job rejection will actually improve your candidate experience and boost your company's reputation. Also, by maintaining a relationship with rejected candidates in the future, you can invite them to apply to future openings that better match their experience & skills.

While rejecting candidates is never easy, it's the right thing to do.

By sending a rejection email to a candidate, you're showing that you respect the time and effort they put into applying at your company. At the same time, you're helping out their job search by politely rejecting them, which allows them to pursue other opportunities instead of holding out for a callback from your company.

It's definitely worth learning how to tell an applicant they didn't get the job the right way, so stay tuned to learn how (rejection email and phone call templates are also included at the end of the article).

Why the silent treatment doesn't work

While saving yourself some work and skipping the candidate rejection process may seem appealing, you'll likely wind up doing more harm than good. Looking for a job is a full-time job, and job seekers often spend multiple hours each day applying to jobs, interviewing for positions, and checking their inboxes for replies from employers.

As such, whenever candidates interview or apply for job postings at your company, they'll be eagerly awaiting any type of response. Since it can take quite a while to complete the job interview process, applicants will hold out false hope for several days or even weeks if they receive no reply from your company.

So if they receive nothing but radio silence from your brand, that can lead to them feeling disrespected and even resentful. That's why the polite thing to do is reject all candidates that aren't getting the position as soon as you know who you're going to choose. While it may feel awkward or mean sending out rejection letters (or

rejecting candidates face-to-face), you're actually doing the considerate thing, and your applicants will appreciate you for it.

Besides being courteous to your applicants, formally rejecting candidates yields other benefits for your organization.

By rejecting the candidate yet keeping in touch, you can follow up and encourage them to apply to future positions that better fit their skill sets. As a result, whenever you post a new position, you'll already have a talent pool of previously qualified candidates to contact, streamlining the hiring process. That will improve crucial HR metrics such as time-to-fill, time-to-hire, and cost-per-hire.

Avoid damaging your reputation

As stated previously, applicants that have negative candidate experiences aren't shy about sharing them with the world. If you fail to let candidates know that they didn't get the job, it can lead to negative reviews on Glassdoor and social media sites like LinkedIn, which will damage your organization's reputation.

While that may seem harmless, negative posts about your company's hiring processes online can affect your future job openings, causing strong candidates to choose not to apply. In short, the brief uncomfortableness that goes along with sending a rejection letter is overshadowed by the potential damage not sending one can do to your employer brand.

Lastly, sending rejection letters can help you retain applicants as customers, assuming that your organization sells consumer products or services. If you leave your applicants hanging, they may choose to leave you not only a poor Glassdoor review but also boycott your products & services (not to mention telling their friends to do the same).

To avoid doing all types of damage to your business, make it a rule of thumb to send personalized rejection letters to candidates that didn't get the job.

Tips for turning down internal employees



Learning how to tell an applicant they didn't get the job becomes even more complicated when it's one of your internal team members applying for the position.

That's because you'll still have to interact with the candidate after you reject them, which can be quite awkward if you don't approach the situation with tact. After all, the last thing you want to do is damage their morale or relationship with your company.

First, you should never use a template rejection letter for internal employees. Instead, something more personal is in line. Also, be sure to break the news to them as soon as the selection process is complete to avoid keeping them in suspense for longer than necessary.

Here are some additional tips for rejecting in-house applicants:

- **Deliver the bad news in person.** An email or phone call is too impersonal for internal employees, especially if you're their direct manager. Always go with a face-to-face meeting to let the employee know that you're pursuing other applicants. If meeting in person isn't doable, then a video chat call may suffice. Rejecting them this way is more personal and shows that you care about them and the work they do.
- **Provide constructive feedback.** While a brief "We're pursuing other candidates" may work for online applicants, it's not enough for in-house staff. Instead, provide some constructive & honest feedback on why they weren't chosen for the position, including what they can do to improve in the future. Also, be sure to mention some future opportunities you feel they're a great fit for and encourage them to apply to those.

How to break the news to candidates

Finding the ideal new hire means reviewing lots of good candidates that you'll inevitably have to reject — which is why your hiring team needs to know how to break the news in the nicest way possible.

The good news is that rejecting candidates isn't nearly as difficult as most hiring managers picture it in their minds. As long as you show respect to each job candidate and their precious time, you'll be able to end the rejection on a positive note.

Here's how to tell an applicant they didn't get the job in **7 easy steps**.

Step #1: Send the rejection letter ASAP

Job applicants are often ripe with stress and anxiety while waiting to hear back from potential employers, which is why you need to keep them in the loop during the hiring process.

If you're starting the interview process with a handful of candidates, don't hesitate to inform all the other candidates that you won't be moving forward with them. You by no means have to wait until you provide a job offer to a specific candidate, as there's no use stringing candidates along any longer than necessary.

Some companies go so far as to provide email updates for all candidates on the different stages of the hiring process, which greatly alleviates their stress (and boosts the reputation of their employer brand).

Step #2: Be empathetic

Successfully delivering bad news takes a great deal of empathy; otherwise, the rejection will come off as cold and heartless.

Whenever you're delivering the bad news to candidates in person, try to relate by thinking about a time when you had your hopes up for a job that you didn't get. Empathizing in this way will help you adopt a more

compassionate tone, which will show that you really care.

Also, don't waste time with small talk, as it's best to get straight to the point. Your job applicant is likely riddled with stress while they anticipate your decision, and you don't want to keep them waiting with needless chit-chat.

As a rule of thumb, you should reject candidates that you've interviewed in person, either over the phone or through video chat. Since you've met them face-to-face, a rapport has been established, which means sending a formal rejection letter via email is too impersonal. To end the chat optimistically, compliment their skills and wish them luck with their job hunt.

Step #3: Keep things brief

Rejecting a job candidate isn't something that you want to take your time with, which is why small talk is a no-no.

You can think of it like removing a band-aid — it's best to get it over with as quickly as possible to minimize the pain. That's especially true if you're sending a template rejection letter to candidates that you didn't pursue or interview beyond briefly looking over their job applications.

A quick and simple rejection will suffice at this stage, as there's no need to dive into details about the job interview or why they don't exactly meet the job requirements.

If they send you a follow-up email asking for your feedback, then you can provide further information on why you chose to pursue other candidates. Not only that, but you can mention other open positions that better suit their level of experience and provide ways they can become a more appealing candidate in the future.

The more open you are with the candidates that apply, the stronger the reputation you'll build for your company name.

Step #4: Thank applicants for their time

Nailing the rejection process is all about showing respect, namely, for the time & effort it took your candidates to apply.

Most modern job applications aren't exactly brief, and it can take up to 45 minutes to an hour to complete just one. Then there's the time it takes candidates to update their resumes, write cover letters, research the job title, and learn more about your company culture.

That's why it's so crucial to thank your applicants for putting in all that work. Also, remind them that you'll keep their resume & information on file to consider for future positions. This step arguably has the biggest impact on your reputation, so it's crucial not to forget to thank applicants for showing interest in your organization.

Step #5: Personalize each response

While using templates can definitely work for lower-level rejections, such as candidates that didn't make it past the resume screening phase, you should still add a bit of personalization to each response.

How do you do that?

It can be as simple as including the candidate's name in the rejection letter or as intricate as highlighting their specific skills or experience. Either way, it's essential to let candidates know that they're not just numbers to you and that you took the time to learn their names & read their resumes.

Your templates can provide the bulk of the information, but adding personal touches here and there can go a long way for your candidates.

Step #6: Give constructive feedback

This step primarily applies to candidates that made it farther along in the process, especially the ones that you interviewed in person.

At this stage, it's clear that you've shown real interest in the candidate, which is why providing feedback on why they didn't land the position is a nice gesture. You can pinpoint specific skills they were lacking, which can help them improve their chances when applying to similar positions in the future.

You can also provide pointers & feedback on their interview performance, both good and bad. For instance, if the candidate did something that really impressed you, don't be shy about bringing it up. Conversely, if something they did or said caused you to no longer consider them, you should bring that up, too.

As long as you word your feedback carefully, it won't come off as rude or negative. Your feedback is a valuable tool for applicants in their job search, so don't be afraid to provide them with it.

Step #7: Encourage strong applicants to reapply

There will be times when you have to choose between two fantastic applicants without a clear winner in mind. In these instances, you should encourage the candidate you don't go with to reapply in the future, especially for similar positions.

Keep their resume and contact information on file, and email them if a future position opens up that matches their skills & experience. It never hurts to add qualified candidates to your talent pool, and your human resources department will thank you.

Email rejection template

Here's a template you can use for rejecting candidates via email:

Dear (candidate name),

Thank you for taking the time to apply for the position of (job title) with our company. Reviewing your resume and learning more about your professional skills was a pleasure.

While your profile is impressive, we've decided to pursue other candidates for the position.

However, we'd like to thank you for taking the time & effort to apply and for showing interest in our company.

The competition for this role was fierce, and while we won't be moving forward with you on this position, we'd like to encourage you to apply to similar positions in the future. We tend to post on LinkedIn, so keep an eye on our profile.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Thanks,

(Your name)

Phone rejection template

If you're breaking the news over the phone, you can use this script as a foundation:

Hello (candidate name), this is (your name) with (company name); how are things today?

I wanted to personally thank you for taking the time to interview with us for the position of (job title). It was a pleasure to get to know you, and we were particularly impressed with (a specific skill or experience).

Unfortunately, we've decided to go with another candidate because (reason for rejection). There was lots of competition for this role, and I'd like to encourage you to apply for similar positions in the future. We post open jobs on LinkedIn, so feel free to follow our page to receive updates. I'm also available to answer any questions or provide feedback, so just let me know.

Concluding takeaways: How to reject job candidates

Learning how to tell an applicant they didn't get the job is a necessity for any hiring team unless you want to risk tarnishing your reputation.

Rejecting candidates is by no means easy, but it's something you have to do to show respect to everyone that applied to your company. Politely rejecting candidates can positively affect your organization, such as building your talent pool for future hires.