



# The Complete Guide to Conducting a Successful Interview

Do's and Don'ts



## Copyright Information

### Disclaimer

We created and compiled this guide to help HR professionals and hiring managers improve the quality of their interviews. This document's intention is to provide a source of information for interviewers so they may be able to organize and improve their interview process.

All information contained in this document was compiled from various professional sources, both print and online. Original content provided by Talexes.

## INTRODUCTION

Since the industrial revolution, interviews have been part of the hiring process. In fact, they have become so integral to hiring, that interviewing itself has developed into its own science. As such, information about the interviewing process has become so prolific, it can easily become overwhelming, leaving hiring managers feeling defeated before they even start the search for candidates.

Most managers simply do not interview enough to develop interviewing expertise. That's why we've developed this interview guide, to provide you with a system for conducting successful interviews. This guide presents an objective process by which each candidate can be fairly evaluated, and help your interviews remain consistent, objective, and unbiased. It's no secret that the cost of turnover, poor performance, and low productivity will always outweigh the costs of investing in an effective hiring process. And being that interviews are among the most important elements of the pre-hire process, a significant level of attention should be devoted to their quality.

When seeking your own answers to questions about the interview process, it can take days or even weeks to comb through the wealth of information available online. Add conflicting points of view and different methodologies, and the art of interviewing can seem difficult, if not impossible, to decode. That's why we've painstakingly researched and developed interviewing best practices to compile this guide with the best, most relevant information to assist you in your quest for effective interviewing.



This document will walk you through the steps of preparing for an interview, conducting it (including a list of sample questions to ask and not ask), and following up afterward. With moderate adjustments depending on the specifics of the open role, this guide should leave you feeling prepared to conduct an impactful interview that leads to the hiring of a successful candidate.

# The Structure of an Interview

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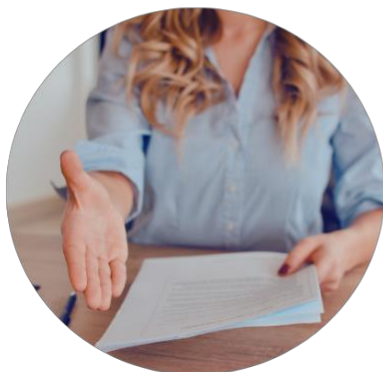


## Preparation

- Identify needs of the position
- Review application materials
- Review assessment results
- Converse with other managers
- Formulate interview questions
- Prepare yourself mentally

## Interviewing

- Make the candidate comfortable
- Explain the interview process
- Avoid cliché questions
- Follow up each question with another
- Focus on past behaviors
- Use your outline
- Keep phrasing clear and concise



## Deciding

- Follow up with the candidate
- Filter out mediocre applicants
- Have candidates complete appropriate screens
- Offer job as soon as a decision has been made

## PRE-INTERVIEW PREPARATION

### Before You Meet the Candidate

The aim of the interview, contrary to popular belief, is not to accumulate every bit of information you will use to hire the candidate. In fact, it's only one piece of the overall hiring process and should not be treated as the sole means of evaluating a candidate. As research has shown, **cognitive ability** and **personality** play the most important role in a candidate's ability to perform the tasks and requirements of a job. Make sure you have taken the necessary steps to acquire this information before scheduling an interview with a candidate by requiring the completion of a job fit assessment. Talexes has a variety of [job fit assessments](#) available that measure multiple characteristics.

Begin preparing for the interview the day before it takes place. Long before you meet a candidate, you should have looked over their application materials, assessed him or her using an objective, multi-measure hiring assessment, coordinated with other hiring managers to ensure consistency and avoid overlap, and formulated a list of questions for the specific candidate(s). When compiling questions for your applicant, make sure to include **fact-finding questions, behavioral questions, and impact questions**. We'll go over each type of question and how they should be incorporated throughout the interview process in the following sections. For now, let's review the pre-interview process more fully.

- ✓ **Talent Profile:** Creating a customized talent profile offers the opportunity to capture intangible attributes that form the foundation of performance. This enables you to create comparison points based on the context of the job. To experience this firsthand, [complete the survey at the end of this document](#) and send it back to [support@talexes.com](mailto:support@talexes.com) for a complimentary talent profile – no strings attached. The analysis will be a one-page overview demonstrating the ideal attribute for a particular role across the three most critical domains (cognitive – personality – interests) that correlate to retention and performance.
- ✓ **Job Analysis:** Before you start recruiting and interviewing consider the requirements of the job by implementing a job analysis. A job analysis is a process of studying a job to gather, analyze, synthesize, and report information about job requirements, including specific Knowledge, Skills, Abilities, and Other Characteristics (KSAOs) of the job. It's important that the job analysis, which includes the KSAOs, has been converted to a job description. Don't forget to include the tasks, task dimensions, importance

of tasks/dimensions, and job context. The O\*Net is a great resource for comparison information.

- ✓ **Job Posting:** If your company is seeking to incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion (often referred to as DEI) in your hiring practices, your job posting is the first external opportunity to deliver that message to potential candidates. Develop your job posting to convey these values by keeping the following in mind: Use inclusive language. Decide beforehand which competencies are most important to this position. Make sure you're auditing and mitigating your own biases by not listing ideal qualifications as requirements – limit requirements to the “must haves” and basic education needed on day one. Use education and experience equivalencies to provide alternative options for potential candidates to meet the qualifications. Consider competencies, transferable skills, and equivalent experience when developing requirements. Use gender-neutral language and run the final job posting through a gender decoder tool. Develop a candidate evaluation form that you'll use to assess each candidate equitably.
- ✓ **Application Materials:** Before the interview, look over the application materials so thoroughly that you do not need to waste your time during the interview asking for information that has already been provided. It's often beneficial to build a file for each candidate with their resume and application, the results of any assessment or background screenings you've conducted, and your list of prepared questions designed to gather information beyond what those documents are telling you.
- ✓ **Assessments:** Information regarding your candidate's cognitive ability, personality, and interests before entering the interview, you will be able to tailor your interview questions to learn more about the candidate. Your interview will provide you with the clarity necessary to make an informed hiring decision. Many types of assessments are available, (including those which measure personality, cognitive ability, motivation, soft skills, technical skills, and more,) so research which assessments are right for your organization and incorporate them into your hiring process as a pre-interview. Assessments that offer a customized talent profile provide unique context that will enable a more engaging interview.
- ✓ **Coordination:** Before entering the interview, you should be on the same page with other hiring managers. Understand what has been asked and what has yet to be asked and adjust your plan and questions for the interview accordingly. Coordinate with key decision-makers and leaders to



develop the candidate evaluation form you'll use to evaluate each applicant. Make sure you all have a clear understanding of exactly what you're looking for and how you'll assess a candidate's qualifications.

- ✓ **Questions:** Before the interview, you should take time to formulate questions relating to the specific position, as well as to the candidate. This step is vital in being able to garner specific and relevant information. This guide will provide you with multiple questions to consider asking but be sure to include both fact-finding questions (Do you have a reliable means of transportation?) and behavioral questions (What do you think makes a person successful?) at minimum.

## When the Candidate Comes Knocking

Just before you begin the interview, take time to prepare yourself. Though the preparation you have already undergone is vital, it must be coupled with readiness in the moments just before a candidate steps through your door. Statistically, most hiring decisions are made in the first five minutes of an interview. Don't fall victim to this mentality! In the moments before interviewing, it's important to take into consideration several important factors that will affect the way you interact with candidates to ensure the highest quality interview experience for both you and the applicant.

### 1) Review Assessment Results

The focus of an interview is not to garner every bit of information you will need to make an informed hiring decision but to clarify and explore the nuances of a candidate's personality that would make the position challenging for them. At this point, you should already have the results of the assessments you used to identify the personality, soft skills, and cognitive ability traits of the candidate. Before you step into the interview, familiarize yourself once again with the results of their assessments, and *ponder the implications of those results in relation to the role*. If your candidate's personality leans toward extroversion and they will be required to sit alone and work quietly for extended periods of time, it is important to address this with the candidate and ensure that both of you are clear about the potential challenges their personality factors may present.

### 2) Put Yourself in Their Shoes

We've all been on the other side of the desk. The clock crawls along in the quiet reception area as we rehearse our responses, waiting for the door to be opened, to shake hands, sit, and be interviewed. The anxiety a

candidate feels when stepping into an interview should be mirrored only by your own awareness of the importance of this process. As everyone has heard before, giving the candidate a good impression is as important as them impressing you. Be mindful of your body language as you welcome the candidate and begin the interview. Crossing your arms, leaning back with your fingers laced, seeming bored or uninterested, and speaking over or more frequently than your candidate can give them the impression that you believe yourself superior to them, and can be disconcerting. Use your body language and responses to make them feel comfortable, listened to, and valued.

### 3) Prepare Yourself Mentally

When sitting down in an interview with a candidate, you must ensure you are in the proper mental state to conduct an objective assessment of him or her. If you have incurred frustration throughout the course of the day, it is unfair to carry that frustration with you into the interview. This can cause you to inadvertently send signals to your candidate that you are annoyed, bored, or not engaged. Tapping your fingers on the desk, neglecting eye contact, leaning back in your chair, and touching the back of your neck or head are all subconscious non-verbal cues we send to candidates that imply a lack of engagement in the process.

Conversely, carrying an overly positive or excited mood into the interview can cause you to negate or overlook potential red flags that the candidate communicates, and can lead to hasty hiring decisions. This is also the time to check your biases. Remember that everyone is biased – it is a natural part of who we are as humans. But it is important to minimize the negative effect your biases may have on your ability to make sound and equitable decisions. Self-awareness is the first step in doing so. Here are some questions to ask yourself before reviewing applications and meeting a candidate for the first time:

- Are there elements of this resume such as format or style that positively or negatively influence my overall impression?
- What elements of this resume am I considering that are not relevant to the job?
- Am I evaluating the skills and experience actually listed on the resume or my assumptions of the candidate's skills and experience?



- In what ways have I already excluded or endorsed this candidate? Why?
- Is this conclusion evidence-based?
- Have I considered all perspectives?

Another way to mitigate biases within yourself is to intentionally look for ways to say yes to the candidate and the information you'll receive in the interview. Keep in mind the following:

- Don't overlook or undervalue the unfamiliar or unexpected
- Compare candidates only to your predetermined criteria
- More experience doesn't always mean most qualified
- Recognize the ways bias may influence how you define merit and excellence
- Consider culture adds, which are the various forms of diversity that add value to your team and department

## DURING THE INTERVIEW

### The Beginning, Middle and, End

During any interview, there should be an Opening, a Body, and a Closing. This helps to serve both the purpose of the organization, as each of your interviews will have a framework for completion, and to provide reference points during your interview process. Knowing where you are in the process will keep you from getting stuck and provide efficiency so candidates will not drain their energy trying to keep pace during a too-lengthy interview. Communicate the flow of the interview to your candidate at the beginning. The added clarity will help them focus on your questions instead of wondering what's coming next.

### The Do's and Don'ts

When interviewing, it's important to know what you shouldn't do as well as what you should. Interviewing is a complex, yet important process in hiring any potential candidate. Becoming aware of the things you shouldn't be doing will help improve the quality of your interviews. Consider this list of simple Do's and Don'ts to remember.

**DO:**

- *Use the same interview for every candidate.* The moment you measure each candidate using a different yardstick, you've forfeited the integrity of your measurements. Interview questions are only insightful if each candidate is asked the same ones. Follow-up questions will likely be different, as these are intended to glean additional information beyond a response to one of your original, preconceived questions. In addition, spend the same amount of time on each candidate. Even if you decide within the first five minutes not to hire someone, it is unfair to end the interview without first gathering the same information as you did for other applicants. This will help with objective decision-making during the post-interview process.
- *Be mindful of phrasing.* It's easy to lead a candidate to a certain answer when you are excited about his or her qualifications. It is equally simple to trap a candidate into an answer that may hurt his or her chances of being hired. For example:
  - A leading question might be: "Tell me about a problem you've had with coworkers." This question assumes that the candidate has had issues with coworkers in the past and leads them to answer you accordingly. Instead, asking "Have you ever experienced conflict in the workplace? If so, tell me about it." gives the candidate the option to negate or disagree with you.
  - A trap question might be: "Tell me what you did to handle a bossy coworker." This requires the candidate to 'tattle' on a former colleague by singling that person out. The question "Tell me about a situation in which you and a coworker didn't get along," is phrased in a way that alleviates the pressure to 'tell on' a specific coworker by shifting the focus to the relationship rather than the individual.
- *Let them do the talking.* It's easy when interviewing to fall into the trap of over-explaining. In our quest to divulge the most attractive, exciting aspects of the job and company, we often find ourselves venturing down various rabbit trails without gaining any useful information from the candidate. He or she should provide 90% of the input. It is the job of the interviewer to listen and interpret, not to dominate the conversation.
- *Focus on previous behavior.* Researchers agree that one of the most effective means of confirming whether a candidate would be able to succeed is to gain an understanding of past behaviors. Do this by asking behavioral

questions. While asking a candidate hypothetical questions about what they would do may seem like the best way to coax valuable information from him or her, asking such questions - those with a future orientation (i.e. "What would you do if...") - tends to elicit answers from the candidate they believe you want to hear. If your candidate's answer contains terms such as "would," or "should," or if they use vague terms such as "usually" or "sometimes," you may be asking for a non-behavioral response. Answers to behavioral questions contain 1) the background of the situation, 2) the action that the candidate took, and 3) the result of that action. Behavioral questions often begin with "Tell me about a time when..."

- *Take notes.* You should be evaluating all candidates based on the same criteria, which you have determined before the interview begins. Take notes to help you remember key pieces of information, concerns, or things you want to follow up on after the interview. This is not the time to evaluate, but the time to listen and observe. After the interview, you'll take time to make a more thorough evaluation using your previously determined evaluation criteria.
- *Include at least one DEI question.* Part of creating a more inclusive workplace is dependent on making sure new hires are in agreement with the mission and values your company is pursuing. Asking interview questions around DEI can take initiatives beyond lip service and into practice. You'll find more examples of DEI-focused interview questions in the Questions section, but one example is:

"Can you tell me about a time when you had to overcome societal constructs regarding your identity in order to reach a goal? What was the most valuable lesson you received from that experience?"

### DON'T:

- *Carry biases into the interview.* If you feel yourself beginning to disqualify a candidate early in the interview, it is important to evaluate the reasoning behind your opinions. Perhaps you are sensitive to grammatical errors and the candidate misspelled a few words on his or her resume. A typical response might be to pass over the applicant. This could cause a star candidate to be dismissed on the basis of irrelevant information, assuming keen spelling is not a requirement of the open role.
- *Leave the candidate guessing.* He or she is already nervous and knowing the agenda can help soothe his or her apprehensions. Don't make your

candidate guess what the interview will consist of and how long you expect it to take. When your applicant knows what to expect, his or her full focus can be devoted to answering your questions. In the same vein, be clear about your intentions. Sending mixed signals to the candidate can throw off their equilibrium by making them pander to emotions they cannot understand.

- *Make promises you can't keep.* When selling their companies to a candidate, many hiring managers fall into the habit of describing exciting new projects, enhanced benefit programs, opportunities for promotion due to potential expansion, and many other hopeful things that might happen for the candidate in the future. This is not a bad thing, but the problem begins when the candidate translates "might" into "will." Suddenly, you've created expectations that you may or may not be able to meet. Never describe possibilities. Instead, focus on definite opportunities and things in your control.
- *Neglect to assess soft skills.* During the interview, ask the candidate to explain what soft skills they consider important for the job. If they don't understand the job well enough to know what skills are needed, they might not be a good fit. To further assess soft skills, you could ask the candidate to rank their soft skills from strongest to weakest, providing them a list of options. Most people will either be honest or try to guess what you want to hear; both are revealing. And if they list the primary soft skills you're seeking among their weakest attributes, they may not be the right fit.
- *Ignore other interactions.* Job candidates give you their best during the interview. When selling themselves, they're on their game and engaged. But how do they act when not trying to impress you? What a candidate does in the lobby before meeting with you can tell you a lot about them. If your receptionist tells you he or she was excessively rude, impatient, and/or demanding, you know this behavior will persist since it was executed before they raised their guard for the interview. A jerk in the lobby is always a jerk on the job.
- *Overdo it.* Know when it is an appropriate time to bring the interview to a close. Don't try to over-evaluate the candidate during the interview. You will have sufficient time after the interview to make a thorough evaluation. Keeping the interview succinct will also alleviate the wear on the candidate, given that a long interview requires a high level of thinking from him or her.

## The Question After the Question

There is nothing more vital to the integrity of your interview than “the question after the question,” also known simply as the follow-up. There are two main types of questions: open-ended and closed-ended. Both are useful and should be utilized during an interview if you remember to ask the question after the question.

Whichever type of question you ask, open-ended or closed-ended, follow up with the other type.

When asking a candidate a closed-ended question, it's imperative that you follow with an open-ended one to **validate their response**. For example, if you were to ask a candidate “Would you enjoy working here?” their instant response will be “Yes.” You must then follow with an open-ended question that requires evidence to support your statement. “What makes you feel that way?” A candidate with canned responses may be caught off guard, while a candidate who is truly engaged in the interview process will be able to articulate.

After asking open-ended questions, **clarify their response** with a closed-ended question summarizing the answer they have provided you. When asking a broad question such as “What do you feel this company can do for your career,” make sure you listen carefully to their response so that you can summarize what you've heard back to them. “So, from what I understand, you plan to be an editor one day, and this web designer position will give you experience so you can accomplish this.” If the candidate immediately responds “Yes” to the question, you know they did not take the time to ensure your summary is correct. If they take a moment, add to, modify what you've said, or disagree, chances are high that they gave you a thoughtful answer and listened carefully to your response.

Following are examples of closed-ended questions, and their open-ended alternatives. **Remember, always supplement a closed-ended response with an open-ended validator, and an open-ended response with a closed-ended summarizer.**

### Closed – Needs Open Follow-Up

- Have you ever had issues with coworkers?
- Would you consider yourself a trustworthy person?

- Have you ever felt frustrated with your job?
- Do you think punctuality should be enforced?
- Who do you talk to when you experience conflict?

### Open – Needs Closed Summary

- Can you give me an example of a time you clashed with a coworker?
- Can you tell me about a time when you had to earn someone's trust?
- When you feel frustrated at work, what do you do to resolve the issue?
- How do you think punctuality affects daily operations?
- Could you tell me about what you did to resolve conflict in your workplace?

Consistently backing closed-ended questions with open-ended clarifications will help you verify the validity of the answers the candidate is providing. If they cannot answer an open-ended question during the interview, chances are they did little preparation, and asking closed-ended questions will not be able to reveal this to you. Always ask a confirmation question after their response to ensure you are getting the most honest answers from your candidate.

### Questions to Ask

With quality interview questions, you should be able to gain a clearer understanding of the factors that drive your candidate to succeed. These questions will provide useful insight about the candidate while remaining fair and professional. The following is a list of interview questions proven to glean valuable information about your candidate.

1) **What obligations do you feel a company has to its employees?**

This question, though phrasing may vary, is vital to your interview. Candidates should be treated like customers, and as with your customers, you must sell your organization to them. There is no worse feeling for a hiring manager than picking his or her favorite prospect and finding they do not want to work for the organization. Asking this question can help you learn how to attract quality candidates to your company, as well as learn what will motivate your candidate to perform.

2) **What aspects of this job would you be passionate about?**

A candidate with a genuine investment in your company will be able to tell you why the job he or she is applying for is exciting, and what about it garners their interest. Not only that, but a candidate who is prepared for the interview will have researched the business and the culture and be able to tell you why your *company* excited them, not just the position itself.



Looking for candidates who exemplify a passion for the position will help you alleviate motivation problems in the future.

3) **Is it better to be perfect and late, or good and on time?**

This is a wonderful question for many reasons. First, the candidate can interpret the meaning of this question in many ways. Perhaps it references the worker. “Is it better to be a high-performing employee but be a little late sometimes?” Alternatively, it could reference the work itself. “Is it better to make your work absolutely perfect and turn it in a bit late?” Secondly, the desired answer to this question will vary depending on the position for which the candidate is applying. If you need someone who must meet strict deadlines, the latter answer is the best. If you need a creative individual to complete artistic projects with little or no pressure to meet deadlines, you will want them to answer to the former.

4) **Why do you think this position is significant to the company?**

Not only will this tell you whether the candidate knows the position well, but it will also demonstrate their knowledge of the company. A quality candidate will be able to tell you how the position interacts with other aspects of the business, and how the position contributes to the overall success of the company. A candidate with this knowledge will know what is expected of them and what the requirements are for success.

5) **Is there a question you’ve been expecting that I did not ask?**

This question gives the candidate a chance to bring something up that has not yet been addressed. This will both help you to understand the driving factors of that employee’s motivations and give them a chance to open up to you and share something that they feel is significant to them or the position. Allowing the candidate to reveal what is important to them eliminates the stress of them having to provide a right or wrong answer and provides you with a deeper understanding of the candidate.

## Incorporate Impact Questions

Asking behavioral questions provides information about how a candidate has responded to situations in the past, which is important to assess. However, it’s equally important, yet slightly more difficult, to ascertain how an individual will perform at your company at the present time. This requires getting them to demonstrate how they will solve the real-world problems they’ll face in your job should they be hired. Questions to that end are called impact questions. They focus on real problems at this job in your company. Impact questions are not your typical

interview questions and as such, may stump an unprepared applicant. However, they are highly useful for revealing top-tier applicants. Incorporate impact questions during your interview when filling roles that require high levels of excellence from the employee. Consider in advance what answers would be deemed strong and which would be weak, so you know a great answer when you hear one. There are four types of impact questions you could ask depending on the needs of the open role:

*1) Questions relating to identifying and solving real problems* - known as content questions, these questions are valid because they reflect the content of the actual job. They allow candidates to show off their problem-solving skills. Examples include:

- **How will you identify problems and opportunities on the job?** — The best new hires tend to quickly identify and address problems in their new job. Ask the candidate to describe the process they'll use during their first weeks on the job to identify the most important current issues and problems, as well as any positive opportunities that may be present.
- **Can you identify the likely problems in this process?** — Provide a single-page outline of an existing process or system related to the open position, that you know to have flaws. Ask the candidate to look over the outline and identify the top three areas where they predict a serious problem is likely to occur.
- **Solve a real problem that you will face** — Provide the candidate a sheet of paper with bullet points outlining an existing problem they would face upon starting the job. Ask them to outline the broad steps they'd take to address the problem.

*2) Questions that show a candidate is forward-thinking* – If your business operates in a rapidly evolving environment or industry, you need employees who are forward-thinking, anticipate changes, and plan for the future. Identify likely candidates by incorporating one of the following:

- **Forecast the evolution of this job** — Describe the importance of forward-thinking to the job, then ask the candidate to project or forecast 3-5 different ways the job they are applying for would likely change over the next three years because of changes in business, technology, and a rapidly innovating environment.
- **Forecast the evolution of this industry** — Ask the candidate how often they consider the future of your industry. Then, ask them to forecast

trends in the industry and describe how top companies will need to adapt over the next several years to meet the needs of these changes.

### 3) *Questions related to a candidate's ability to innovate, adapt, and learn*

– Top performers tend to be those who are adaptable, innovative and who continuously learn. Questions helpful in revealing this type include:

- **Show me how you would be a continuous learning expert** — Ask the candidate to identify an important subject matter area relating to the job where they will need to remain on the cutting edge of knowledge. Then, to describe how they will initially learn and stay up to date in this area. Or ask them how they maintained their expert status in their most recent role.
- **Show me your adaptability when dramatic change is required** — If major changes are possible within your work environment, employee adaptability is important. Ask the candidate how they would adapt to an example of major change if they were to take the role, and specifically what steps they would take to adapt. You can alternatively ask them for a recent example within the last year where they had to adapt to change rapidly. Have them walk you through the steps of how they successfully did so.
- **Show me how you will innovate** — Ask the candidate to select a single important area of the job and walk you through the steps of how they might innovate in that area during their first year. Alternatively, ask them for a recent example of how they innovated in an area of their previous job, how the innovation was created and implemented, and what their role was at each step along the way.

### 4) *Questions to help you better understand a candidate* - Interview questions that relate to an individual's competencies or preferences can be improved by requiring the candidate to rank their answers from most important to least important.

- **List and rank your job acceptance factors** — Present the candidate with a scenario where they are choosing between two job offers and ask them to list and rank by order of importance the top five factors they would use to evaluate and accept the better fit. Examples of factors include pay, job duties, fit with the manager, levels of responsibility, etc. You can use this opportunity to find out what job

factors are most important to candidates, and potentially adjust your offer accordingly.

- **List and rank your job motivators** — Ask the candidate to list and rank the top five factors that motivate them most on the job. Keep this information on hand if you hire this candidate. The information could be very useful to the employee's manager later.
- **Tell me about the most effective approaches for managing you** — Have the candidate explain their preferred methods of being managed, and what factors motivate them to perform versus what factors are less important to them. Examples include feedback, rewards, the closeness of supervision, a communications approach, and leadership style preference.
- **List and rank the capabilities that you bring to this job** — A different take on the traditional question "What is your greatest strength/weakness?" This question allows the candidate to list in descending order the strongest capabilities they believe would make them a top performer in the job. Important categories to listen for include knowledge, experience, education, and skills.

**DEI-focused Questions** – As previously mentioned, advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion within your organization requires a multi-angled approach to be of significant value. Asking candidates about their experiences and views of DEI will give insight into whether it's something they value and understand, and how their addition to your company will advance or hinder the progress you are trying to make. You should ask at least one DEI-related question in each interview.

However certain questions will provide more insight than others. Define guidelines in advance that will help you determine if an answer is valuable. Aspects of a quality answer include it being actionable, articulate, clearly describing motivation or the candidate's "why", acknowledging the challenges and difficulties of DEI efforts, explaining a connection between equity/inclusion and the candidate's personal/professional opportunities, or demonstrates an understanding of the terms 'equity' and 'inclusion.' Sample questions to incorporate include: How have you committed yourself to understanding



and aiding in the pursuit of equity and inclusion in your professional or personal life?

- What steps have you taken to mitigate your biases in the workplace?
- Explain what framework you are using to confront inequities in your workplace.
- Please share a time when you were part of an event, meeting, or setting where there was diverse representation in thought and culture. How did you contribute? What did you take away and apply?

**Questions Assessing Soft Skills** – While soft skills, sometimes referred to as people skills, can be challenging to quantify, it's important to ask a candidate to provide a self-assessment of their own soft skills. Their answers can provide valuable insight into who they are as a person and how they interact with others in the workplace. Before the interview, determine which soft skills you most wish to see displayed in a candidate based on role requirements. As previously mentioned, you could provide candidates with a list of soft skills and ask them to rank the skills in order of their proficiency. Highly valuable soft skills include:

- *Communication*: Can you effectively convey ideas?
- *Dependability*: Will you do what you say you will when you say you'll do it?
- *Managing work stress*: Can you think clearly and maintain professionalism under stress?
- *Leadership*: Are you able to think strategically and manage a team?
- *Teamwork*: Do you cooperate, listen actively, and respect others' differences?
- *Creativity*: Are you able to develop innovative solutions and identify opportunities?
- *Problem-solving*: Can you remedy problems quickly and effectively?
- *Adaptability*: How adept are you at learning new skills and behaviors in changing circumstances?
- *Conflict management*: Can you identify and handle conflicts fairly and efficiently?
- *Open-mindedness*: Are you open to new ideas, solutions, and critical feedback?

Use these example questions to further allow a candidate to share their aptitude with soft skills:

- *Tell me about a time when you identified a problem and minimized the negative impact.*
- *Describe an example of how you would approach a task or project that initially feels overwhelming or even impossible.*
- *Tell me how you typically respond when you make a mistake at work.*

## Do Away with Cliché (and Try These Alternatives Instead)

Some of us find ourselves in interviews so often it is easy to become complacent. When formulating interview questions, avoid clichés, as your candidate has likely already memorized prefabricated responses. That is not to say these questions don't have value. They became cliché for a reason, after all. But these questions are so commonly used that candidates can see them coming from a mile away, and will give you a bottled answer, one that they have likely given to many potential employers previously. For example:

**“What's your story? /Tell me about yourself.”** – This question seeks to learn more about the candidate in general terms. It allows the freedom for the candidate to choose what he or she feels is important enough to tell the interviewer and gives the interviewer a brief window into their world. The problem comes when one asks this question, and the candidate rattles off a memorized monologue.

Instead, try these alternatives:

- “In your opinion, which of your best qualities will I be unable to find in any other candidates?”
- “Tell me a short story about something interesting that you've done in the past.”
- “How would you summarize your life story?”

**“Why should we hire you?”** – Although incredibly valuable as a question, candidates who come across it likely have a rehearsed response they are prepared to give when asked. At its surface, asking why a candidate should be hired will elicit qualities and habits that the candidate thinks are appropriate for the position. But as evidence shows, the response usually entails something along the lines of “I'm a hard worker.” To get greater value out of this question, try phrasing it as one of these alternatives:

- “What makes you the most qualified applicant?”
- “How do you set yourself apart from other candidates?”
- “What unique skills or talents do you have that you feel would lend well to the position?”



**“What is your greatest weakness?”** – We’ve all been asked this question at some point. And we’ve all felt the familiar nervousness as we struggle to answer the question. Do I admit that I’m a procrastinator? Or do I try to phrase a strength as a weakness? Both answers are equally uncomfortable to give and cause the candidate unnecessary anxiety. Stressing your candidate out during the interview will cause them to back away from the question, often stalling to come up with a decent response. Avoid this question entirely, and ask these alternatives instead:

- “What is the most useful piece of advice you have ever received?”
- “How have you helped yourself overcome obstacles in the workplace?”
- “What is the trait you’d most like to improve over the course of the next year?”

**“Why are you leaving your current job?”** – A quality candidate will not want to put off a bad impression about their previous employer. As such, this question is difficult for many candidates to answer. As important as the information is, a candidate who experienced a lot of workplace conflict, or was not making enough money to be able to support him or herself will not want to admit this to a potential employer. Instead, they will likely give you a response along the lines of “I’m looking for a better opportunity.” This is not insightful, as every candidate who walks through your door is seeking a better opportunity. Try these alternatives to glean more useful information from your candidate:

- “What do you believe a company owes its employees?”
- “Is there anything about your previous position that you would change if you could?”
- “What were the greatest challenges in your last position?”

**“Where do you see yourself in \_\_ years?”** – Planning your life is about as certain as planning the weather. Anything and everything could happen to you over the course of those few years. It’s possible the candidate you’re interviewing was not expecting to have to re-enter the hiring pool. Some of the people who are coming to you are doing so because the plans they had for their lives did not pan out. Granted, there are many applicants who come to you because the position fits neatly into their plan. But to assume that the candidate has a detailed, long-term plan for their life is presumptuous (especially if hiring someone new to the workforce). Instead of asking for a detailed rundown of their life plan, try asking these questions:

- “What goals have you set for yourself?”
- “Is there anything you hope to accomplish by working here?”
- “When you think about your future, what do you feel is important that you accomplish?”

## AFTER THE INTERVIEW

### Get it on Paper

The time just after your interview is crucial. This is the first opportunity you get to perform a thorough evaluation of the candidate. Although we'd all like to think our memories will suffice, most of us know that to truly absorb the information you've just learned, you should write that information down soon after hearing it. This is one reason it's crucial to have developed a standardized candidate evaluation form that you will use in each interview. Not only will standardized evaluation criteria allow you to interview using questions that directly correlate to specific criteria and competencies, but you will also have an equal and consistent benchmark by which to fairly measure each candidate. Identify top competencies and high-priority requirements, as not all criteria will be weighted the same. Consider creating three classifications by which to rank candidates: *minimally qualified*, *qualified*, or *highly qualified*. Remember that these ratings should be used for consistency and documentation purposes only.

Immediately after the interview, take time to evaluate the candidate and note pertinent information using your evaluation form. While it's appropriate and recommended to take notes during the interview, do not attempt to complete this form during the interview. It is respectful to wait until the candidate has gone, as it may make them uncomfortable to watch you fill it out in front of them during a live interview.

### Contact References

If you are at all interested in a candidate after interviewing them, waste no time in reaching out to their provided references. References are an excellent resource that often goes underutilized due to a lack of effort. References can provide valuable insight into the less quantifiable attributes of a candidate, including their soft skills. Ask their references questions like, Did they show signs of leadership? Were they entrusted with additional responsibilities? How did they get along with the rest of the staff? Depending on the reference, you may or may not receive valuable insight,

but it's worth pursuing. Cross-reference any answers you receive with information you acquired during the interview to gain a better idea of how a candidate would perform on the team. This is also a great opportunity to ask about anything that concerned you during the interview, which will be fresh immediately following the conversation.

### **“I’ll call you within the week.”**

How many times have you heard this from a potential employer? Remember that number. Now, think of how many times an employer actually called you back. For most of us, the number drops significantly. The stress associated with interviewing for a new job can be paralleled only to the stress one incurs from waiting for a potential employer to respond after the interview. If you say you're going to call, *you must call*. Period. And you should, regardless of your decision. Let's break down the reasoning why:

- 1. Not doing so is simply bad manners.** In the quest for the next best thing, it can be easy to overlook the needs of the candidates on whom you have chosen to pass. But when we tell a candidate “I’ll be giving you a call within the week,” we have made a verbal commitment to that candidate. When we break it, we indicate that we either never had the intention to call, or that the candidate was not important enough for us to exert the effort. You're not going to hire everyone that walks through the door. But you should make an effort to treat every candidate with the same respect with which you would treat a customer.
- 2. Leaving them hanging creates a bad impression.** When you interview a candidate, you are a representative of both your company's values and culture. You are often the only member of the company with which the applicant has contact. By making promises you don't keep, the candidate is left with a poor impression of your company that they will then communicate to their friends and relatives, as well as possibly on job boards or social media.
- 3. They're waiting for an answer before looking for another job.** No one likes to communicate bad news. But when that bad news is tied to a candidate's income, it has to come from somewhere. Of course, it isn't enjoyable to hear you didn't make the cut. But every candidate will appreciate your effort to inform them so they can divert their efforts to finding a better job fit.
- 4. They might be a perfect fit for a future position.** Every candidate has his or her own talents, and although they may not fit the position they're currently applying for, they may be a strong candidate for a future opening. If you leave them with a bad taste in their mouth for your organization, you are guaranteeing that they will not respond to your company's future postings.

## THE SELECTION DECISION

### Making Your Decision

It all comes down to this. You've conducted all your interviews, and it's time to make a decision as to whom you will hire. At this point, it would be valuable to convene with any other hiring managers who have had a hand in the process. If you're the only manager who is required to make these decisions, be sure to allot time to sit and review all the materials you have accumulated throughout the course of the interviews. This is where having a file on each candidate can be particularly helpful. Things to keep in mind when making a hiring decision are as follows:

**1) Assume and audit your bias.** As we've discussed, biases are natural, and we all have them. In making your hiring decision, assume your own bias and ask yourself key questions to help mitigate the impact of your biases on your decision. Questions include:

- In what ways have I already excluded or endorsed this candidate? Why?
- Could my assumptions, or biases be affecting my evaluation of this candidate?
- Are there attributes about this person such as style or appearance that positively or negatively influence my overall impression?

If your pool of top candidates lacks diverse representation, consider if bias could have played a factor in your initial rating. Take another look at the candidates who didn't make it into your top group. Some questions to consider:

- Were all candidates rated equitably?
- Are there any trends that may indicate bias e.g., similar education or work background or mostly internal candidates?
- Are there some candidates in the mid-tier that rated highly in the "high-priority" criteria and competencies that could be reconsidered?
- Would slightly broadening the range of qualifications increase the diversity of the top-tier candidates?

Remember that the candidate most qualified for the role does not automatically mean the one who is most formally educated or experienced. It also does not necessarily mean the candidate who scored the highest on your

evaluation form if you incorporated rankings. The most qualified candidate is the one who can demonstrate they meet or exceed the criteria for the role, and who may also bring a unique cultural perspective or expertise to the position and the department. Remember that a great hire will meet the needs of the open role AND improve your business overall.

- 2) **Beware the “decent” candidate.** Many of us complete a mental checklist when interviewing, and when a candidate can check all of the boxes, the tendency is to consider them a quality applicant. This is dangerous, as candidates who are able to check off your boxes may not be exceptional, but meet the minimal requirements. The absence of negatives is not a positive. You want a candidate who not only meets the requirements but exceeds them.
- 3) **Don’t waste time seeking additional mediocre prospects.** If there are other qualified candidates beyond the first applicant, ensure that you interview them within 3-5 days. But if your first candidate is ideal, and you don’t have other qualified applicants, make the offer. Wasting time interviewing and considering candidates that you are not – nor were you ever – enthused about, puts you at a disadvantage. Remember that many applicants are actively seeking employment at other companies and drawing out the process can put you at risk of losing him or her to another job opening.
- 4) **Administer final screening.** Depending on the values of your company and the needs of the position, you may have the candidate complete a criminal background check at the minimum. This has less to do with the candidate, and more to do with the risks your business runs should you hire someone with a criminal record and that person commits a crime on the job. Similarly, if your company has a drug policy, have them go through a drug screen. If the position entails control of a company vehicle, conduct a driving history check. A variety of pre-employment checks can be administered, so make sure to utilize the ones that will serve your purposes. These checks are usually associated with fees, so make sure you have narrowed down your search to the most promising candidate before committing.

## INTERVIEW RESOURCES

As we've seen, it is important to keep your interviews consistent. Having an "Interview File" for reference can help you accomplish this. On the next few pages, you'll find documents intended to aid your interview process. We've included an interview outline and a sample completed interview outline. Let's break down each of these forms and why they should be utilized.

Interview Outline – Using this outline, you can build a framework for your interviews. You can decide what questions to ask, in what order, and at what point throughout the process. This is particularly valuable, as the framework can be modified as needed depending on the candidate and position.

Sample Interview Outline – This outline can be printed for your records and modified to fit whatever job you're interviewing for. It provides a partially completed framework that you can use throughout every interview. Because it is partially completed, you will be able to maintain consistency throughout your interviews. And because there are spaces, you can add questions that you feel are important to the position itself.

We suggest adapting these pages to your needs, saving them, and keeping them in one location. You should use them for every interview you conduct.



## Interview Outline

Every interview you conduct should have an Opening, a Body, and a Closing. This helps both to keep yourself organized, as each of your interviews will have a framework for completion, and to provide reference points during your interview process. Knowing where you are along the line will keep you from getting stuck in one section of the interview. The candidate will also preserve their energy not trying to keep pace during a lengthy interview. Always remember to communicate the flow of the interview to your candidate. The added clarity will help them focus on your questions instead of wondering what is coming next.

### Opening

- Build rapport with the applicant and create a comfortable setting
- Explain the interview format and set a time frame
- Talk about the company or department and the benefits of working there

### Body

#### *Fact-Finding*

- Review the candidate's job history and collect information on a candidate's potential to perform the job

#### *Behavioral*

- Ask open-ended, behavioral-based questions
- Listen, watch body language
- Take notes

### Closing

- Describe the job or position
- Answer any questions candidate has
- Discuss next steps

## Sample Interview Outline

We have prepared an example interview outline.

### Before the Interview:

Do these things as you take the time to prepare for your interview.

- Administer assessment
- Review application materials
- Coordinate with any other managers
- Formulate interview questions

### During the Interview:

**Opening** – This is where you will build rapport and explain the interview format and time frame.

#### Rapport Building Questions

- Did you have any trouble finding us?

**Body** – This is where you will ask the questions that will help you determine the candidate's job fit.

#### Fact Finding Questions – questions intended to discover background information

- Why are you seeking new employment?
- Do you have a reliable means of transportation?
- Without revealing any personal information, is there anything that would prevent you from doing this job?

#### Behavioral Questions – questions intended to provide insight as to the candidate's personality

- What obligations do you feel a company has to its employees?
- What aspects of this job would you be passionate about?
- What is the most useful piece of advice you've ever received?

**Closing** – This is where you will describe the position, answer your candidate's questions, and explain the follow-up process

#### Closing Questions

- Is there a question you've been expecting that I did not ask?
- Do you have any questions for me?
- Make an offer as soon as a decision has been made
- Follow up with other candidates
- Have selected candidate(s) perform appropriate screen

## Customized Talent Profile Questionnaire

Assessments that offer a customized talent profile offer the opportunity to capture intangible attributes that form the foundation of performance so you can create a tangible talent profile. Experience this firsthand. Complete this survey by choosing 1 option per job requirement listed and send it back to [support@talexes.com](mailto:support@talexes.com) for a complimentary talent profile.

|    | This Job Requires...   | Hardly Ever | Some Times | Almost Always |
|----|--|-------------|------------|---------------|
| 1  | accepting others at face value.                                |             |            |               |
| 2  | following rules and policies to the letter.                    |             |            |               |
| 3  | the use of numbers and calculations to make decisions.         |             |            |               |
| 4  | taking control of projects and being responsible for outcomes. |             |            |               |
| 5  | social interaction with others.                                |             |            |               |
| 6  | following and working within organizational constraints.       |             |            |               |
| 7  | the interpretation of written material to make decisions.      |             |            |               |
| 8  | keeping things moving at a fast pace.                          |             |            |               |
| 9  | recognizing patterns and trends in data and information.       |             |            |               |
| 10 | accepting supervision without question.                        |             |            |               |
| 11 | working in a competitive environment.                          |             |            |               |
| 12 | working with a high sense of urgency.                          |             |            |               |
| 13 | seeing problems as opportunities rather than obstacles.        |             |            |               |
| 14 | participating as a member of a team.                           |             |            |               |
| 15 | being able to manage many things at the same time.             |             |            |               |
| 16 | strong determination and commitment.                           |             |            |               |
| 17 | having a positive attitude regarding people and outcomes.      |             |            |               |
| 18 | going for the goal at all costs.                               |             |            |               |
| 19 | being outgoing in an unfamiliar group of people.               |             |            |               |
| 20 | being in charge of others.                                     |             |            |               |
| 21 | making decisions for others.                                   |             |            |               |

## Next Steps

To receive a complimentary talent profile, save the above questionnaire and send it to [support@talexes.com](mailto:support@talexes.com).

Implement assessments into your hiring and development process. To learn more about Talexes, visit <https://talexes.com>. To speak to a member of our team, please email us at [support@talexes.com](mailto:support@talexes.com)