

# Nine tips on how to conduct a job interview



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Learning how to conduct a job interview that helps you hire the right people is a critical skill for small business owners. Too many interviews feel rushed, unstructured or more like a gut check than a solid process. Developing a plan to conduct effective interviews helps ensure that you hire the right people for your business, and it doesn't require a large HR department to get it right.

Strong interviewing techniques and a little prep work can help you make strategic hiring decisions and build a team that grows your business. Here are nine practical tips for interviewing to help you hire the best talent and create a winning candidate experience.

## 1. Know who you are trying to hire

Before you schedule interviews, clearly define what success looks like in the role. Answer questions like:

- What skills are essential?
- What business problem does this role solve?
- What behaviors, values or expertise are crucial?
- What does excellent performance look like in the first 90 days?

## 2. Plan your interview agenda

Great interviews don't happen by accident. They're structured evaluations, so treat them like any other high-stakes meeting. Prepare ahead of time:

- Review the candidate's resume to understand their background, so you're prepared for a deeper conversation and not just reviewing what's written.
- Write down your questions to stay focused and consistent across interviews.
- Debrief immediately after the interview. Set aside a few minutes to capture your impressions in writing or discuss with other stakeholders.

## 3. Follow a simple interview framework

Don't leave the interview structure to chance. Follow a basic structure to keep the interview on track and create a positive candidate experience. A good interview consists of a few key steps:

- Break the ice with some easy questions that give candidates a chance to warm up and build a rapport.
- Start with role-based questions to help you understand their skills, experience and interests.
- Dive into behavioral questions to give you a sense of how they solve problems and perform under pressure.
- Allocate time for candidates to ask questions and for you to explain the next steps.

## 4. Craft questions that give you real insights

Interviews can often feel like they are workplace sitcoms. How much understanding do you really get from a canned answer to "tell me about your biggest weakness?" Instead, ground your questions in real examples that help you understand how a candidate thinks and communicates. Pay attention to the stories they tell, what they highlight and what they leave out.

For example, ask specific questions that help a candidate showcase where they're strong, such as:

- How have you handled challenging personalities, such as an angry customer? Can you tell me about a time when this happened?
- Can you tell me about the most difficult problem you've solved in the workplace, and how you did it?
- What's an example of something you had to learn quickly, and how did you approach the challenge?

## 5. Move beyond resumes to skills-based hiring

Resumes are a valuable tool in the hiring process. But often, the best hires may have non-traditional backgrounds or transferable skills that enable them to thrive. Many companies now use skills-based hiring rather than traditional approaches that focus on education or years of experience, and this often leads to a better fit.

With skills-based hiring, you can look for comparable experience that directly translates to your business needs. Someone with a strong writing background may be an excellent candidate for an administrative assistant who handles significant email communications, for example.

Other factors to consider include curiosity, a willingness to learn, adaptability to new situations and a cultural fit with your specific environment. Don't be afraid to ask about any gaps or shifts in their resume. Open questions give candidates the chance to tell you about successes they have had that could indicate a good fit, even when it's not outlined on their resume.

## 6. Offer a comfortable, respectful environment

First impressions go both ways. A candidate's experience helps them better understand your culture and determine if they're a fit.

During the interview, give the candidate your full attention. If it's an in-person interview, offer water and a private space for the conversation. If you're meeting virtually, take the call in a quiet location and check your technology and connection beforehand. When you treat candidates with respect, you make a good impression and help them relax enough to give more insightful answers.

## 7. Take notes while staying focused

Let's be honest: It can be challenging to remember who said what after three back-to-back interviews. Taking notes helps you make more precise comparisons and document your reasoning. Keep an interview guide in front of you during the interview to help you take unbiased and relevant notes.

Simple techniques that can help include using a simple rating system and writing down direct quotes that stand out. Note things you want to remember, but don't spend the whole conversation on your keyboard. Allocate a few minutes for detailed notes after the interview wraps.

## 8. Use a scorecard to help rank candidates

Don't simply go with your gut. After each interview, use a standard scorecard to rate candidates on the criteria that matter for the role. These might include specific skills, communication, problem-solving and the ability to grow in the role over time. By adopting a uniform approach, you'll help ensure that decisions remain objective and consistent. If multiple people are conducting interviews, comparing scores can help reveal the strongest candidates.

## 9. Close the loop

Never ghost a candidate. Have a clear plan for communicating with candidates, even if they're not a fit. Decide on a timeline, such as getting back in touch within a week of the meeting, and stick to it. Consider drafting a simple rejection letter that thanks candidates who weren't a fit, and have an offer letter ready to go when you find the right candidate.

A good interview doesn't have to be perfect. It's about connection, clarity and identifying people who will thrive in your workplace environment. With these tips on how to conduct a job interview and the right plan, you can identify talent and hire workers who will grow with your small business.

*The author of this content is a paid contributor for Verizon.*