Top Interview Tips: The Employer's Essential Handbook

A comprehensive guide to interview preparation, questions, tactics, and more



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Introduction

Getting the right people into your open roles is critical to your company's success - and the interview process helps you identify them. The problem is, there's no magic formula for finding your next top performers. Even companies like Google, which see millions of candidates and hire thousands of employees each year[1], are constantly adjusting their formula to identify top-tier talent. While there is no silver bullet, every change to your interview process is an opportunity for improvement.

The following is a guide for recruiting leaders, hiring managers and founders who are committed to creating a great interview process to get the right people in the door.

How do you structure your interview process? How can you provide a great candidate experience throughout? Which interview tactics work, and which don't? These are just some of the questions we asked our panel of experienced recruiting leaders, to shed some light on how to create the best interview process.

Read on to meet the panel and hear their best interview tips for employers.

[1] http://www.businessinsider.com/meet-googles-hiring-gatekeepers-2015-7

The Panel



Anna Lambert

Director of Talent Acquisition, Shopify

Anna is the Director of Talent Acquisition at Shopify. Since joining Shopify in 2011, she's helped build the company from 150 employees to over 1000. Anna is the co-founder of an apparel company called Caged Collective, an avid snowboarder, and a one-time* marathon runner.

*Anna has completed one marathon and has committed to "never doing that again."



Arthur Yamamoto

Director of Recruiting, Twitch

An accomplished search industry professional with experience leading recruiting organizations from New York to San Francisco, Arthur has spent the last 10+ years helping to build some of the best organizations on the planet. With both agency and in-house recruiting experience, he's continuing to learn and evolve, and loving every minute of it.

The Panel



Nicole Ossey

Head of Recruiting & HR, AnyPerk

Nicole Ossey is the Head of Recruiting & HR at AnyPerk, an employee happiness company with a perks and rewards platform that is used by over 1,000 companies across the U.S. She is responsible for leading the company's HR initiatives and growing the AnyPerk team across all its key functions, including Product & Engineering, Marketing, Sales, and Finance. Nicole started her recruiting career at VonChurch, a digital entertainment recruiting agency, first as a technical recruiter and then as the Global HR Director in charge of internal recruitment.



Lumen Sivitz

Head of Recruiting, Shyp

Lumen has worked in recruiting for more than 10 years. After beginning his career in agency recruiting, Lumen founded an online talent marketplace called Mighty Spring which he ran for four years before joining Shyp.

The Panel



Richard Cho

Director of Global Talent Acquisition,
Machine Zone

Richard (Rich) is currently the Director of Global Talent Acquisition at Machine Zone. Prior to Machine Zone, he helped Facebook and Dropbox during their hyper-growth phases. He has a passion for establishing effective recruiting strategies and employment brands for hyper-growth companies, as well as a successful track record of growing companies from the hundreds to the thousands in a short period of time.

Interview process

The interview process tends to be fairly standard from company to company. It will generally begin with a phone screen, sometimes followed by an assessment, and conclude with one or more onsite interviews. More innovative companies, however, have found ways to make small improvements to their interview process that produce big results.

Make your candidates and interviewers comfortable

Everyone is trying to put their best foot forward during the interview process and, as a result, may not relax and be themselves. Alleviate pressure by including an informal gathering, such as lunch or happy hour, to allow both candidates and interviewers to be themselves and really get to know one another.

That's why Twitch includes lunch during a typical onsite. Arthur says, "The candidate will sit and chat with someone from the team - but it isn't an interview, it's a conversation with a lunch buddy. Candidates sit with employees, and feel our culture from a more organic perspective." He continues, "At the offer stage, we invite the candidate back for a happy hour or dinner - not just as a closing tactic, but also so the candidate gets to see the company culture without the pressure of an interview. We see more of their real self once they know there's an offer because it's no longer an evaluation process. We interact on a more human level."

Be transparent about your process

Lack of communication is one of the biggest complaints job seekers have about the recruitment process. Lumen explains,



"Not knowing what's next and who will be in touch is the worst. Try to set expectations, clearly and appropriately, about next steps - and then deliver on your process."

Candidates want to be kept in the loop about what to expect next. Respect their time by communicating your process upfront, and alerting them to any changes. This is particularly true if you have a long, or strenuous, interview process. Candidates can be extremely agile if you keep them informed about your interview process, but may not stick around if you spring surprises on them. Top-tier candidates are in high demand, and a simple phone call, email, or even a text message, can go a long way.

Deviate from your normal process if need be

While a structured interview process can help you tell candidates what to expect and provide each of them with a consistent experience, it may be beneficial to deviate from time to time.

For instance, when AnyPerk interviews engineers, it skips its standard phone interview screening and goes straight to an hour-long video interview. Nicole says,



"When we interview for an engineer, we try to move as fast as possible. If an engineer is actively searching for a new job, they're usually pretty active."

If both parties are interested in moving forward, AnyPerk schedules an onsite visit for the candidate to meet the team and CEO. If all goes well, the company will make an offer that day.

It may also be a good idea to lengthen the interview process in specific situations. Lumen says, "If we have a strong internal referral, we will begin with a brief coffee meeting." Referral candidates are often passive talent, and may need warming up before they agree to formally interview. Research has shown that referral candidates are faster and less expensive to hire, and stay at their job longer[2], making an extra meeting well worth the effort. It may also be necessary to add an extra meeting if the candidate needs to meet with additional people, or if they have additional questions - just make sure any changes are clearly communicated to the candidate.

[2] https://business.linkedin.com/talent-solutions/blog/2015/08/5-reasons-employee-referrals-are-the-best-way-to-hire

Keep time to hire in check

You never want to substitute quality for speed, but a long time to hire can cause substantial damage to your company. You can lose candidates who are in high demand, and your unfilled position can bar you from reaching your goals.

Nicole explains that some positions will naturally have a longer time to hire than others, particularly for



“high-level candidates whose availability is limited. For these candidates there are more people to speak with, and there is more thought that goes into making a final hiring decision on both sides. By two months, however, if all parties can’t figure out if there’s a fit, it probably means there isn’t and it won’t work out.”

At a certain point, you simply need to cut your losses and pursue other candidates.

Interview tactics

Throughout the interview process, companies employ various tactics to help them identify the top candidates. However, the jury is still out on which methods work best. Each company, and each position within that company, is unique - and needs different interview tactics to find the people to best fill it.

Assess values through behavioral interviewing

Rich says,



“There are two categories of hiring: skills-based and qualitative. Every company can test an engineer’s skills in a programming language well enough for a good signal, but it’s harder to assess for qualitative skills that are predictors of success. With values-based, or behavioral, interviewing, you can look for the specific values you want to see in candidates.”

He continues, “For instance, Facebook values people who take chances and solve problems quickly - you’ve probably seen the posters inspired by them that read, ‘Move fast and break things’, or ‘What would you do if you weren’t afraid?’ Dropbox, on the other hand, places high importance on the fact that their product works perfectly all of the time — evidenced by their slogan, ‘It just works.’ They value employees who are more methodical and detail-oriented to ensure that their product is delivered as close to perfect as possible.” While skill requirements may be similar across all companies for a given position, each team has unique values that are just as important to screen for as skills.

Don’t try to trick your candidates

A recent trend in interviewing tactics is trying to catch your candidates off-guard with wacky questions to see how they react. Lumen explains why this is a bad idea:



“We don’t think tricking candidates during the interview process gives us a strong indication of their ability to perform their job well. We are rarely caught by surprise in the work environment, so we don’t want to surprise people during our interviews.”

The interview process should be designed to assess how well the candidate could do the job, if hired. A situation that they wouldn’t have to deal with in their day-to-day should not be considered for evaluation.

Keep candidates in their element

Lumen continues, “We don’t believe in whiteboarding for code interviews — instead, whiteboarding questions tend to be more architectural in nature. If you’re writing code that should be production quality, you should have the tools you’d have on the job. Tools matter. You hammer with a hammer. We want to put candidates in a realistic scenario to evaluate them on the job they’ll take, rather than evaluating them on a fictitious skill set and hoping they do well on the job.”

Anna agrees, saying, “We hold technical interviews that may include a project, peer exercise, and deep dive to see how candidates would go about solving a problem they’d be solving at Shopify. This allows us to see how they make decisions, how thorough they are in making them, how they handle feedback, and how they work with the team.” By assessing candidates with scenarios they’d face in their role, you get a better idea of how they’d perform once hired.

Experiment with different tactics to see what works

Arthur recommends “experimenting with different solutions and coding tests to decide what works best to determine technical abilities.” He continues,



“We are still using whiteboarding today – and we’ve hired some good people – but I don’t believe it’s the most effective way to evaluate coding skills. Research has shown that pair programming could be better, specifically for evaluating female engineers. It’s something we are piloting and experimenting with currently.”

Rich adds, “We find that technical assessment tools like HackerRank work well, but that they’re a lengthy time commitment for the candidate. Nobody has fully figured this out, and this is a good area for people to improve upon.”

It’s important to find the right balance between assessment thoroughness and candidate experience. What works well for one company won’t necessarily work in another. The same goes for tactics that have failed elsewhere - it can’t hurt to give them a try to see if they work in your environment, with the candidates you want to hire.

Collect interview feedback from candidates

One of the best ways to inform your interview tactics is to ask candidates for feedback. Lumen shares,



“We realize our process can be a little overwhelming. We like to get feedback so we know how candidates feel about long conversations, and back-to-back technical interviews.”

Armed with this feedback, Shyp can make changes to their interview process to better accommodate their candidates. One such change has been to their lunch interviews - they found that neither side could focus and that the candidate couldn’t finish lunch. Once they tried unstructured group lunches, they found that the candidate opens up and enjoys the experience more.

Candidate experience

Nine out of 10 professionals say a good interview experience can change their mind about a company they had doubts about[3]. When a positive candidate experience can be the difference between your top choice candidate accepting your offer, or that of your competitor's, you better believe employers are paying attention to it.

[3] https://business.linkedin.com/talent-solutions/resources/recruiting-tips/talent-trends-global

Our panel confirmed the importance of candidate experience in their own words:



Rich:

"We always strive to get better at candidate experience. We send a survey to all candidates who make it onsite, asking them how we did, if their visit was smooth, and how they enjoyed the amenities. Our recruiting coordinators' primary focus is improving the candidate experience, and their performance reviews are based on the survey results."



Anna:

"We have a candidate experience team that focuses on making our candidates comfortable and keeping them engaged. They are in constant contact with each candidate throughout the entire recruitment process, and keep everything running smoothly. They set up flights and hotels for out-of-town candidates, and create a "homeroom" where candidates can leave their bags and grab food and drinks throughout the day. Every candidate, whether they are hired or not, is sent a feedback form so we can continually improve our candidate experience."



Arthur:

"Candidate experience is an important part of our process. The overall philosophy is that we want a high-touch process. The turnaround time is 2-3 days to respond to applicants. Scheduling is as flexible as possible for the candidate. Throughout the process, recruiters and hiring managers are accessible to the candidate. The recruiter follows up after the phone screen to make sure the candidate is comfortable and ready for the onsite interview. Reception treats the candidates well, and we make sure we have great front desk people so it's a pleasant experience from the moment someone walks in the door. They are the initial face when people arrive, and they make sure candidates are greeted, offered drinks, given whatever they need, and comfortable if they need to wait.

We are always fine tuning our candidate experience. There are cases where candidates fall through the cracks - usually when they've been passed on - but we want everyone to feel like they've had a great candidate experience. We're trying to optimize our candidate experience at every turn."



Nicole:

"One of the first things we think about is candidate experience. It's so important, and oftentimes overlooked. We really reinforce it to employees internally. Even if the candidate isn't the right fit, we want them to walk away loving us and thinking highly of AnyPerk. We don't want them to go on Glassdoor or LinkedIn or talk about us poorly with other people in passing. We want everyone to have a positive experience. We want to make sure candidate communication is considered positive and that we always get back to them in a timely manner."

Lumen:

"It's important to make candidates comfortable. If that's not your number one concern, you're messing up. For instance, when scheduling interviews, we always ask the candidate their schedule first, and work around it. We also like to avoid early morning interviews because we want people to be full of energy on both sides.



Candidate experience isn't something you can fix with one change – there's a system that's in play. You have to be holistic in your thinking about what you're asking of the candidate, and how that makes them feel. Candidates should have a great experience all the way through – if one experience is off, it can blow the whole thing up. It's like building a great website with a terrible font. Even if the opportunity isn't the right fit, you want people to speak positively about your company because they had a great experience."

Preparing Interviewers

Nobody is a full-time interviewer, so helping employees prepare for interviews is crucial for a successful process. Not only do you need to identify the right candidates, you need to impress them enough that they'll accept your potential offer. So, how do you prepare your team?

Select interviewers based on competencies

Selecting and scheduling interviewers can be a daunting task for even the most experienced recruiting coordinator. Schedules change quickly, and different people will be better at screening for different competencies.

Twitch solves this problem by bucketing interviewers who can cover each competency, so the recruiter can easily select a qualified, and available, employee. For instance, there will be a bucket of people who can cover culture, and another for technical problems. Arthur says,

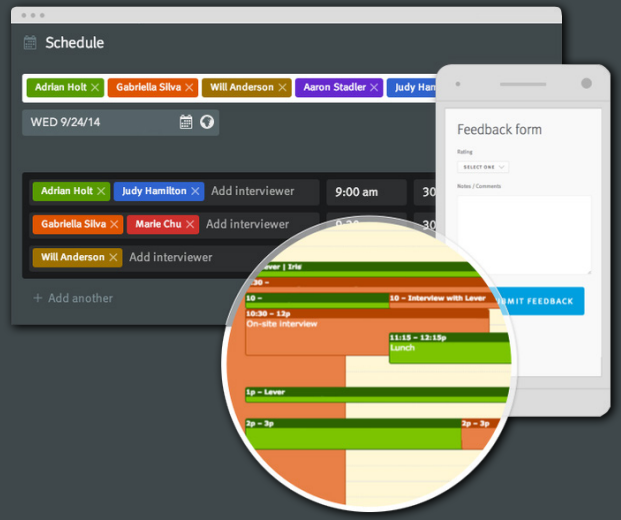


"This works particularly well for evergreen roles where there are a few open positions, and saves the coordinators a lot of time because they don't have to go back and find people."



Quickly and easily schedule interviews in Lever

Lever's calendar integration makes it easy to select interviewers based on their availability, and book conference rooms. Everything is built in, so there's no more bouncing between your ATS and calendar.



Provide interview training

Interviewing isn't intuitive to everyone, and offering training can make your employees and candidates more comfortable throughout the recruitment process. Rich says, "It's so important to show people how to interview for value-based questions. We assume great employees know how to do that, but they don't. We gather each team to come up with rubrics, or specific values we want to see in our candidates. Our interview training teaches the methodology of behavioral-based interviewing and how to grade candidates on each team's desired rubrics."

Shopify also has a robust interview training program. According to Anna, "All of Shopify's leads and hiring managers, as well as employees who are interested in interviewing, complete interview training. This includes interviewing at large, department-specific training, and bias training. Following the training, the interviewer will shadow an interview once or twice, then someone will shadow them."

Schedule a kickoff meeting

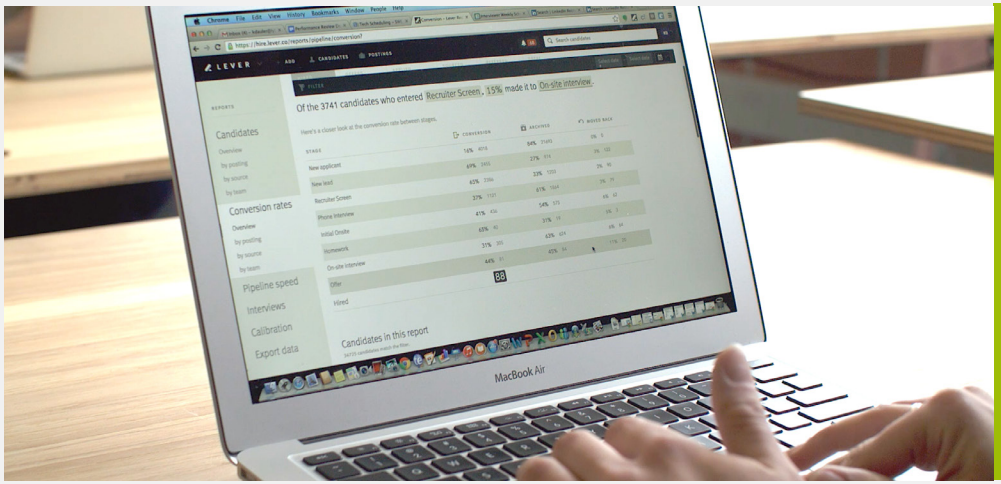
A team kickoff meeting at the beginning of the interview process is a great way to align on expectations and decide how you will be evaluating candidates. Lumen warns, "If expectations change mid-process, candidates at the beginning and end will have different criteria and receive different experiences."

Nicole recommends that you ask your team the following questions to get everyone on the same page: What is the goal of the position? What are the responsibilities of the person? What are the most critical competencies we need to see to move forward with a candidate, and what are the deal breakers? From there, determine interview roles and assign questions to interviewers to assess the candidate's competencies.

Making sure your team is aligned as quickly as possible, and that everyone knows what you're looking for, will create a smoother process for all involved.

Measure interviewer effectiveness

Take your preparation full circle by evaluating each interviewer, and using the data to inform your selection and training. Rich says,



"We are laying the foundation to collect information around interviewer effectiveness. For instance, we look to see if one interviewer is more biased toward saying no or yes. This requires an ATS that allows you to collect that data – and Lever lets us do it. We will be doing more of that in the future."

Arthur adds, "We use data to show what is and isn't working for interviewing. Data is louder than anything else. We use interview calibration data and the scores each employee gives to assess whether they're a strong or weak interviewer."

Armed with this data, recruiters can select their most effective interviewers more often, and provide development opportunities to those who are not as effective.

Top interview questions

We asked the panel, “What questions do you like to ask? Which would you rather avoid?”

Here's what they said:



Nicole: **The first question I always ask is, "Why AnyPerk?"**

"This sets the tone for the entire interview process. We want people who are passionate about us, not just randomly sending out their resumes. We have a really awesome team. People work hard and are excited about their work. You can teach people skills, but you can't teach them passion about product or our culture. Some people aren't passionate about HR tech. I want to know what, specifically, got someone to hit the apply button - not just hear blanketed statements like, "I want to work at a small, but growing, startup." We want a candidate who knows where they've applied to, and why. Was it our values? Because we're a leader in the industry? Because they knew someone on our team? These are all great reasons to apply. Other than that, I try to make the conversation flow while getting the information needed."



Arthur: **Generally, we like to ask, "Why Twitch?" and "What do you know about Twitch?"**

"These are important questions. It's not a requirement that you be a gamer to be hired - it's important that you understand the value we add to the community we serve. We're a company that values how we service our users. Candidates should understand on a basic level what we're about, so this question will be asked, regardless of the position. We avoid asking illegal questions. We educate interviewers on employment law: what can't be asked, how you can ask certain things. We send a document to everyone with a link to California employment details with questions that should, and should not, be asked. Interviewers aren't knowingly asking the wrong questions."



Lumen: **I like to ask, “What’s most exciting to you about this role and this company.?”**

“It tells me a lot about how the person thinks, and what I need to push on to sell them on the role. If we decide we like this person, we need to make sure we have done a good job at highlighting the right things to get them on board. On the other hand, I hate questions that are intended to trick the candidate. We collaborate as a team, and we want to collaborate during the interview process. We don’t act in an adversarial way as a team, so why would we do that in the interview room? It’s not reflective of how we want them to act when they get here.”



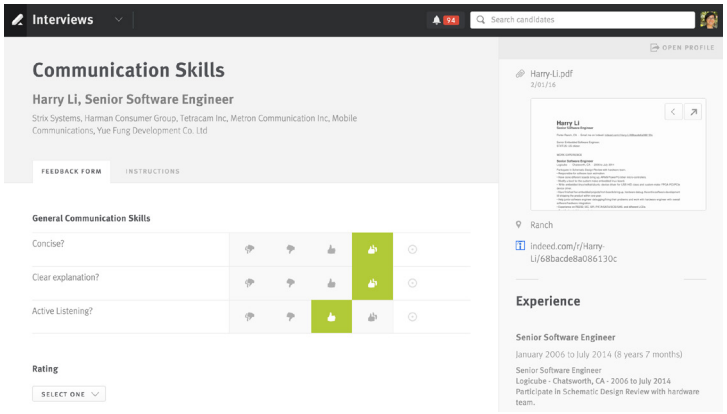
Anna: **The first step in our interview process is a “life story” interview.**

“The life story allows us to learn about a candidate’s impact, transitions and experiences throughout their career, from their perspective and in chronological order. We’re an impact-driven company, and focus on finding people who are fully engaged in their work and have made an impact in their previous roles, including volunteer work and side projects.”



Rich: **I like to ask behavioral interviewing questions to determine if the candidate possesses the values we look for in employees.**

"For instance, if I'm looking for someone who's detail-oriented, I might say, "Tell me about a time where you made a mistake in your work. How did you find the mistake?""



Provide interview questions through Lever

Equip your interviewers to conduct high-impact conversations by including suggested interview questions in your feedback forms. Interviewers can use this to guide the interview, so they can focus on the candidate – and not on which question to ask next.

Expert spotlight

Sample interview questions from Jordan Burton



Jordan Burton is the founder of Burton Advisors LLC, serving a select group of technology companies and their investors to help them identify, attract, hire and retain top talent at all levels. Prior to launching Burton Advisors, Jordan was a Partner at ghSMART & Company, a boutique talent and leadership advisory firm.

Jordan's two guidelines for great interview questions:

1. Keep your questions open-ended: A great interview question is short, simple and open-ended. If you ask something with multiple layers such as, "Tell me about a time you were on a cross-functional team, and had a conflict with a peer under a tight timeframe," it's more difficult to come up with an answer that meets all of those criteria. If they do come up with an answer, it's more likely to be less meaningful, like a second-tier accomplishment. Instead, ask, "Tell me about your most challenging relationship," or, "Tell me about your biggest accomplishment related to fast turnaround time."

2. Avoid hypothetical questions: A great interview question should be about the candidate's actual, specific past performance. When you ask hypothetical questions (such as "What would you do if…"), the candidate can weave a really good story that may be very different than what they would do in real life. Instead, ask questions about actual things the candidate has done.

When it comes to interviewing there are no magic questions. “There’s a misnomer in the world, that if you ask the magic question, a candidate will reveal their awesomeness, or their awfulness. The idea that I ask a question, and the candidate replies with their final answer, is misleading – it’s all about the dialogue that comes from follow up questions.”

The following are Jordan’s suggestions for how to kick off interview discussions, what kind of questions to follow up with, and what to look for:

Take a walk through the candidate’s career path

Jordan always recommends that interviewers walk through the candidate’s career path chronologically, asking follow-up questions throughout.

1. What is your proudest accomplishment in [role]?

With each chapter of their career, Jordan says one of the most powerful questions is, ‘What is your proudest accomplishment in that role?’ Depending on the response, Jordan may ask a series of follow-up questions that dive into one anecdote. “When somebody shares what their biggest accomplishment is, I want to know specifically what their role was in delivering that accomplishment, how it compared to expectations, and how it compared to peers. I’m looking for the net impact the candidate made in their role. When candidates talk about accomplishments, they often get stuck in the ‘We’s’ – we did this, we did that.

I think it's great when people acknowledge team effort, but I like to follow-up with a question like 'What was your unique contribution to that?' or 'What wouldn't have happened if you weren't there?' Those are really powerful ways to tease out their individual effort. If someone struggles to talk through what they added to it, they may be riding the coattails of their colleagues."

2. If you could replay in hindsight, what's one thing you would do differently?

Another very powerful question to find out about each career chapter is, 'What was your biggest mistake in that chapter?' However, a lot of time when you ask for a mistake, candidates are not very forthcoming, or they struggle with the question. That's why Jordan suggests having many different ways of asking the question, like, "If you could replay it in hindsight, what's one thing you would do differently?" This often becomes a series of questions: "What was the mistake? What was your personal contribution to that? What should you have done differently? What kept you from doing that?"

In an answer, look for the candidate to share openly about their own mistakes and not externalize things. "You'll often have candidates who will say, 'My mistake was trusting a colleague who made a big mistake,'" says Jordan, "Instead, you want to see that a candidate is willing to say, 'You know what? I was in a hurry and I ended up sending something out that was a little buggy. If were to do it over again, I'd set up a better quality control process with my team. I didn't do that in this instance because I had another project I needed to get to, and I probably should have asked for help.' Now you have a real mistake, and an understanding of the true root cause."

3. Why did you make each transition in your career?

In addition to learning about a candidate's accomplishments and mistakes in each role, Jordan advises learning the candidate's motivations for taking on new roles, and leaving old ones. Jordan likes to ask "Why did you make the transition from role X to role Y?" for each transition point because it gives him interesting insight into how realistic their motivation is for seeking out an opportunity. "Let's say that the candidate is primarily motivated by money – if that's counter-culture, it would be a concern," says Jordan. Asking about career transitions is another way to discern motivations for a strong candidate. For example, if you know the candidate's most recent two to three job changes were related to lack of autonomy, and that your opportunity offers autonomy, you can tailor your selling message to the candidate's motivations when you make an offer.

4. What did you like most about each role, and what did you like least?

You can also learn about candidate motivations by asking for each role, "What did you like most about this role, and what did you like least?" Jordan says, "Typically things people like most about a job are things that are inherent motivators, and you want to see a correlation between those elements and what you have to offer in your role. On the other hand, people typically underinvest in the things they like least about a job, and may therefore do them poorly. So if somebody tells you their least favorite part of their last job was having to do cold calls, and there's a big outreach component to your role, you can bet they're going to be prone to underinvest in that."

5. Tell me about your ultimate career goal and your ideal next step.

Rather than ask, “Why do you want to work at our company,” Jordan recommends, “Tell me about your ultimate career goal.” By asking for their ultimate career goal, you can see whether the job you have to offer is aligned with where they’re headed in their career.” For example, if you have an individual contributor role and the candidate’s goal is all about leading teams, it’s likely that they see your opportunity as a stepping stone or short term job that they’re not going to want to stay in for long. It’s questionable as to whether they are really pursuing your opportunity for the right reasons, whether they’re going to be fulfilled, and how long they will stick around if you won’t be able to offer what they want quickly enough. He suggests following this discussion by asking “What is your ideal next step?” to allow them to paint their own picture of what they are looking for today. He says, “Most candidates have prepared an answer when you ask why they want to work at your company, and will regurgitate information from your website. Also, this question tends to be overused across an interviewing team. This can be annoying to a candidate, and can also lead them to artificially tweak their answer as they digest cues from one interview to the next.”

Use problem solving questions for analytical and technical roles

Jordan uses a different approach to interviewing for highly analytical or technical roles, which he calls problem-solving questions. These are novel business problems or technical problems that you ask the candidate to solve in front of you, in real time. However, he says, "I can't give you *any* good problem solving questions to ask because as soon as they're published, people can prep for them – leaving them ineffective."

An example would be a case interview question for investment banking or consulting, or a coding or algorithm question in a software development interview. The interviewer would describe a typical issue the candidate would be solving on the job, and the candidate would walk through diagnosing the issue and proposing a recommendation.

Jordan has five best practices for problem-solving questions:

1. Make the problem relevant to the kind of work that you do. This will allow you to better gauge hard skills, and it gives candidates insight into what you do so they know the kind of business problems you face.
2. Choose questions that offer multiple paths to the solution so you can evaluate the candidate's flexibility, creativity, and ability to see tradeoffs between approaches.
3. Have safety nets – guiding questions – so you can avoid an uncomfortable "crash and burn" in case they get stuck somewhere.
4. Keep it interactive, where they're talking out loud and you can observe their thinking process. The best questions involve multiple steps or phases to help generate a rich dialogue.
5. Standardize your questions whenever possible to improve calibration and ensure you are holding candidates to the same bar. Check Glassdoor periodically to ensure your questions have not been made public.

Cultural fit

For many companies, a candidate’s cultural fit is just as important as their skillset - but it can be a little more challenging to screen for. Think about the traits a candidate should have to be successful in your organization, but keep an open mind.

See how candidates respond to your environment

Nicole says, “We want people to get a sense of who we are outside of the interview room. Candidates are invited to our office to have lunch with our team, sit with us in our natural habitat, and have a more normal, ‘non-interview’ conversation. We want to see how they get along with everyone. Do they contribute? Are they asking questions? This is not about finding out if we can be the person’s friend and grab a beer together, it’s about whether we can sit and talk with them for half an hour. And on the candidate’s side - do they like us? Do they like how we act? Sometimes candidates may not and that’s okay.”

Define your culture

Anna says that Shopify places equal weight on cultural fit and skill fit, but suggests that employers define their culture in order to eliminate bias. “Shopify is looking for people who care about their craft, and are impact-driven, engaged, and self-aware. These traits are inclusive and can exist in anybody who wants to have an impact in an organization.”

Machine Zone dedicates an entire interview “that is more social in nature, to determine if the candidate has the company values, if they are driven in the same way we’re driven, and if they can do well in our environment,” says Rich.

Keep an open mind

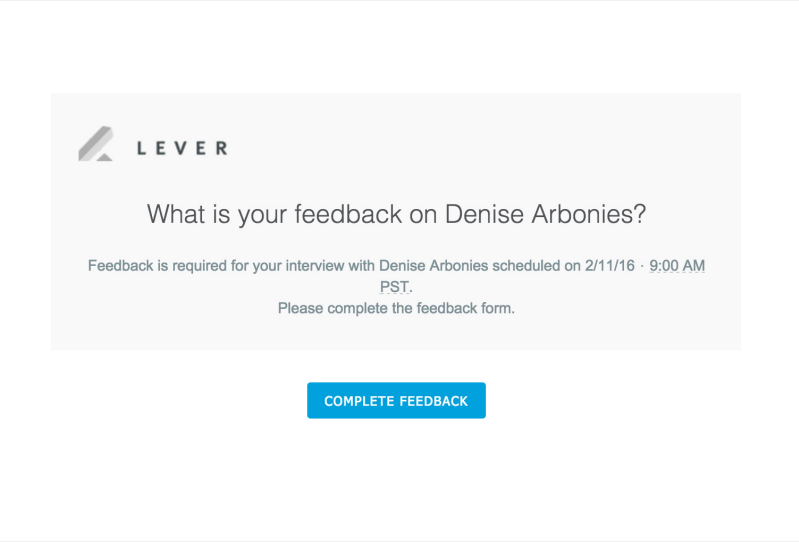
Companies often ask candidates to describe their previous company, what they liked, and what they didn’t like. However, Arthur says that people are a lot more adaptable than we like to believe. “They may describe a culture they like, but it doesn’t mean they can’t be good in your culture. It should be based on the work they want to do.”

Candidate feedback

The final step of the interview process is evaluating the interviewer's assessments of each candidate, and making a hiring decision.

Gathering internal feedback

Nicole says, “We try to get feedback as quickly as possible because we don’t want interviewers to forget to do it. If I haven’t received it within 24 hours, I’m bugging them with a daily reminder. We want people to give detailed feedback, including examples about why they said things a certain way. We don’t arbitrarily pass on candidates – we want to know why. People are active when they’re interviewing, and we don’t want to miss out or be unresponsive to candidates.”



Send automated reminders for feedback in Lever

Lever makes it easy to collect interview feedback with automated reminders. You can prod interviewers once, daily, or even every six hours to help you get candidate feedback in a timely manner.

Twitch gathers as a group to discuss each candidate after interviewers have submitted their individual feedback. Arthur says, “You may find that someone gave the candidate a low score, when everyone else gave them a high score. After understanding the logic behind your peers’ scores, you may find that you looked at the candidate the wrong way - or maybe you still disagree. By gathering unbiased feedback first, you can have a more honest discussion.”

Shyp has a similar process, and Lumen adds,



“It can be difficult as a candidate to expose all the right information to every interviewer. The group discussion gets everyone on the same page, so they can build consensus and agree on who to hire.”

Providing timely feedback to candidates

Once you’ve made a decision on a given candidate, reach out to them so they aren’t left wondering. Arthur explains, “It’s a hot market for good candidates, so moving quickly and not leaving them twisting on your decision is important.” Timely communication is crucial to candidate experience, so try to let your candidates know of your decision either way.



Quickly follow up with candidates in Lever

Lever allows you to send bulk emails to candidates, so you can quickly update them on their status and next steps.

Feedback keeps your talent pipeline full

Anna says Shopify gets back to every single candidate who applies. “It’s important to treat people like human beings. Every applicant receives an email, and interviewed candidates receive a phone call. We aim to provide constructive feedback and, in several cases, candidates we’ve rejected have improved and come back to join Shopify later on.”

Conclusion

There's no magic formula for interviewing. Each company is looking for candidates with a unique balance of skills and cultural fit, and each interview process must be unique to accomodate that. However, companies that continue to explore new initiatives can build out, and improve upon, their processes. By continually testing new ideas, companies can optimize their interview processes to win the best candidates for their teams.

We hope this eBook gave you some ideas to develop your own secret hiring formula. Good luck establishing a winning interview process! In the world of recruiting, there are few things more important.

About Lever

Founded in 2012 and headquartered in downtown San Francisco, Lever is the world's first truly collaborative applicant tracking system. We've designed our software to be easy, clean, data-driven and hiring manager-friendly.

Lever supports hundreds of companies around the world from five employees to 10,000 in proactively sourcing, nurturing, and hiring the right talent. Among the factors that make Lever different from traditional ATS products:

ATS meets CRM

As well as including all the functionality you'd expect in an applicant tracking system, Lever offers comprehensive tools to help you source and nurture passive talent until they're ready to become candidates.

Built for collaboration

As your company grows, half the battle is keeping everybody on the same page. Lever helps hiring managers and recruiters stay in touch through multiple features like @ mentions, job following and two-way email sync.

Organized around the candidate

To increase your chances of success with a candidate, it pays to have a complete view of their every interaction with your team. See your company's full history with each candidate over time, helping you personalize your outreach and improve their impressions of your organization.

We'd love to show you why hiring teams are raving about Lever.

For a free demo, email sales@lever.co, call +1.415.458.2731, or visit https://lever.co.

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