

The SMB Guide to Interviewing

Learn how to coordinate and conduct world-class interviews
that consistently result in better hires.



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Setting The Interview Stage

A bad interview can feel like a bad dance. Everyone shuffles around unsure of what to do or say, quietly wishing the song would end. Don't laugh, you may have caused this very uncomfortable situation. Bad interviewing can cost you more than just a little embarrassment, too. CareerBuilder reports that nearly one in four businesses quantify the price of a bad hire at over \$50,000 per position. The interview is usually your last chance to get the decision right. So before you head to the dance floor, you may want to evaluate your interview process to ensure you can keep things on track and in sync.



**TIP NO. 1:**

Do your homework! The best performances are rehearsed, and that stands true for both the interviewer and interviewee. Make sure you're prepped on the job, your candidates, and overall interview objectives.

Preparing for the Interview

Everything stems from good preparation. It's the tree trunk from which the branches of good conversation and clever anecdotes blossom. Everyone loves witty leaves! So do your homework ahead of time.

As you prepare for the interview, you should already have a pretty clear picture of your applicant pool. They've passed your basic set of tests, so now's the time to dive deeper. Boil your goals down succinctly; you really need to accomplish three things:

- Check their facts to make sure your candidates are honest and trustworthy
- Understand their career goals so you don't need to hire someone new two years later
- Determine their fit inside of your company culture

Scheduling Tips

We empathize with your position, really. It's a tough job, but don't use that as an excuse to rush the interview process or let too much time lapse. Once you take these scheduling steps, stick with them and treat your applicants the way you'd like to be treated. Give them feedback in a timely manner and don't let their resumes fall into business oblivion.

Don't let too much time pass between your initial outreach and subsequent interactions. Time can prove toxic to sales and hires, so don't be a stranger for longer than a couple of weeks. Think consistency. You shouldn't call a candidate a day after receiving their resume only to take a month to get back to them. Think about it this way: truly great talent won't hang around the open market very long before getting swept up by someone else.



Avoid speeding through sourcing, screening, and interviewing to hire as soon as possible. Most small businesses can't afford to wait months in their search for the right person. Still, you have to get your ducks in a row:

- Give yourself plenty of time to be prepared
- Have the list of interview questions ready
- Set the location
- Gather a team of co-workers to assist in evaluations and decision-making
- Know what you want in the position

If those bases are covered and your applicant pool impresses you, then go for it! Remember to take a breath and be sure your preparations at least match those of the applicant.

But keep in mind, there is no perfect time frame. No magical number on the calendar will deliver the best candidate experience. Look at the number of jobs you need to fill, the availability of the interviewing team, and what an efficient time frame would be for your company.



TIP NO. 2:

Avoid speeding through the process. According to CareerBuilder, the cost of a bad hire can be upwards of \$50,000. Slow and steady wins the interviewing race!

Gathering the Team

We highly recommend assembling a group of coworkers to assist with your hiring efforts. These coworkers should be objective, reliable individuals who would interact with the new-hire in some capacity. Once you've decided on your group, the team should come to agreement on a common set of goals for the new position:

- What the position entails
- What tasks the position performs
- The culture your company wants to expand
- The list of overlapping and exclusive interview questions each interviewer will ask
- Who will interview the candidate and when



HIRING MANAGER



HIRING TEAM

**TIP NO. 3:**

Plan out your interviewing logistics ahead of time so your candidates (and interviewing team) aren't overwhelmed come the day of the interview.

Will you hold multiple interviews in the same day? Will multiple interviewers take part in the same session? Let your personal situation guide you. We recommend saving time by holding multiple interviews in the same day. Just have single interviewers conduct each one.

That doesn't mean 13 straight interviews.

This way, you don't have to invite the candidate back needlessly, and you don't exhaust him or her through hours of interrogation. Plus, it'll be easier for the interviewers to compare answers in the same day. Reality has funny ways of messing with plans though, so evaluate your company resources and, try to find the most efficient solution for you.

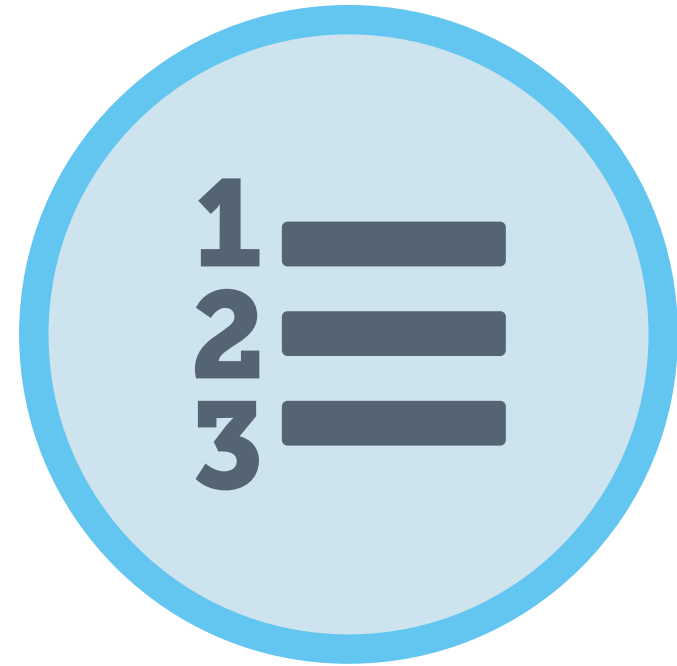
Developing Questions

You'll want to come up with questions before the interview. All the interviewers should ask a set of questions they deem valuable, although they can personally tailor and direct the style of the conversation to their liking. Use a mixture of behavioral, fact-based, hypothetical and left field questions to paint a full picture of the candidate.

Fact Based

Clean and simple, these ask: who, what, when, and where. Tee these easy questions up first so the candidate feels comfortable early in the conversation:

- “Tell me about yourself?”
- “What was your last job?”
- “How many years have you performed this job?”



Behavioral

Now you look for something the candidate did in the past that would likely repeat in the future. You get into the “how” with these personality-seeking questions:

- “How did you lead a group of people at your last job?”
- “What’s an example of efficiently working as part of a team?”
- “Tell me about a time when you overcame a workplace obstacle to meet a deadline.”

Hypothetical

These questions can frustrate both sides, but don’t ignore them:

- “How would you react if you found out your boss was doing something illegal?”
- “Would you ever steal if you knew you wouldn’t get caught?”

Left Field

Unexpected, weird, and possibly irrelevant, these questions are not always necessary, but can help uncover the candidate’s personality:

- “Would you rather live on the Moon or Mars?”
- “What books have you read lately?”
- “What’s the coolest new product you’ve heard about?”







TIP NO. 4:

Use a mix of interview questions to get a feel for both qualitative and quantitative information. Also, make sure your questions are consistent for each candidate so you have a solid baseline to compare and contrast traits.




Keeping Things Legal

Not all interview questions are created equal, nor are they all legal. Let's go through a few examples of what you should and shouldn't say and how to legally express your ideas.

Question 1)

-  **Illegal:** Where were your parents born?
Are you a U.S. citizen?
-  **The Goal:** Can this person work in the country and do they have the necessary paperwork to prove it.
-  **Legal:** Are you authorized to work in the United States?
-  Also, if multiple languages are relevant to the job function, you can ask about their lingual abilities.

Question 2)

-  **Illegal:** How old are you? When did you graduate from college? What year is your birthday?
-  **The Goal:** Is this person old enough to work for you.
-  **Legal:** Are you over the age of 18?





⚠️ Remember that age discrimination is illegal. Don't risk setting yourself up for an age discrimination lawsuit.




Question 3)

- 🗣️ **Illegal:** Are you married? Do you live with someone? Do you want or have a family? Do you want or have kids?
- 🏆 **The Goal:** This can get tricky very quickly. If the job requires a lot of travel and you fear family obligations would hinder performance, ask more specific questions. The same goes for overtime obligations if you know the job demands certain extra requirements.
- 👍 **Legal:** This job requires travel. Will you be able to easily travel often? This job requires a great deal of overtime. Will you be able to fulfill that obligation?

Question 4)

- 🗣️ **Illegal:** What is your weight?
- 🏆 **The Goal:** You want to ensure this candidate can physically perform the job's necessary tasks.
- 👍 **Legal:** Are you able to lift [x] lbs of weight? You can only ask physical questions if minimum standards are essential to safe performance of the job.

Question 5)

-  **Illegal:** Do you have a disability? Can you please report your medical history? Does your family have a history of illness?
-  **The Goal:** Can this applicant perform the job without extreme accommodation, while remaining healthy and safe?
-  **Legal:** First you should thoroughly describe the job, its tasks and physical responsibilities. Then ask: Are you able to perform these job functions individually or with reasonable accommodations?

Stick to the questions strictly about job functions, be wary of personal questions that can get you into trouble, and follow your prepared set of legal questions evaluating bona fide occupational qualifications (BFOQ).



TIP NO. 5:

Avoid asking personal questions. Often times these are not acceptable for interviews and could damage your employer's reputation. Stick to broad questions related to the job at hand.

Conducting the Interview

So the schedules were made, the interviewers assigned and the questions assembled, all systems go! Here are some things to consider in the actual interview.

Everything you do in the interview affects the way the candidate views your company. It's not just an evaluation on your part, they're evaluating you, too. Naturally, the interview process in general gives you more leverage in the interaction. Don't take the situation as your free pass to get whatever you want. The last thing you want is to push away the perfect candidate. You can go crazy considering the details, so we'll just limit it to a few that can have a major effect, with small fixes.



**TIP NO. 6:**

Details matter! Make your candidate feel comfortable by equalizing the playing field and staging a relaxed environment using couches, chairs, or scheduled a meeting over coffee.

Room

The room you pick to conduct the interview will say much about your office, coworkers, and culture. If you decide to host the interview at the office, think about what particular room best exemplifies your great company culture. On the other hand, if you lead the candidate through a sea of cubicles where everyone looks miserable they probably won't feel too enticed.

Chair Positions

This probably sounds mundane, but consider how you face your interviewees. You're trying to learn about people, so provide them with a comfortable environment to open up and express themselves. Try switching up the old, "I sit on this side of the desk, you sit on the other," and go with one where nothing separates you so dramatically. Grab lunch outside of the office, or reserve some couches in your company's lounge so things are more casual. You want to create an environment where candidates feel free to talk and where you can get the information you need to make an informed decision.

Once your arrangement is settled, follow your interview plan and enjoy meeting your new candidate. A good interviewer won't simply ask questions. He or she will turn those questions into a conversation. The ideal interview would be on where you don't need to ask anything at all. Don't rigidly cut the candidate off in subjects he or she sounds passionate about. At the same time, know where you and the conversation need to go. You don't necessarily power the ship, but you do need to steer it.

**TIP NO. 7:**

If possible, use electronic documentation to capture and save notes. This will help you easily search and find what you're looking for later.

Taking Notes

We can't stress this enough, take copious amounts of notes throughout the interview process. Take notes when your team goes over what everyone wants beforehand. Take notes throughout the interviews and then jot down your opinions afterwards.

Be as detailed as you can, as often as you can, so you have ample material to pull from during decision time. Days, weeks, and multiple interviews will blur those detailed memories you think you won't forget.



**TIP NO. 8:**

Get your team on the same page ahead of time. If you prepare and collaborate on questions prior to the interview, you should avoid most common errors.

Avoiding Common Errors

Things can go wrong no matter how much you plan, such as:

- Questions don't relate to necessary skills or behaviors
- Multiple interviewers don't use consistent questions
- Multiple interviewers don't agree on "correct" answers

Solutions

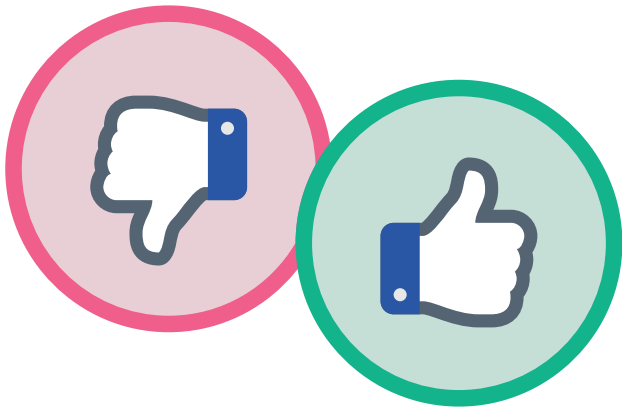
Comb through the good (responses) and get rid of the bad. For those responses that leave your team in disagreement, set-up a voting structure so the majority rules. Above all, it's important that your team has a shared consensus on each candidate.

Following the Interview

At the end of the interview, thank the candidate for their time. Let them know you'll be contacting them regardless of the result (yes, you do have to).

Talk It Out

After the interview is over, corral your team for feedback. Notes, opinions, insights and feelings should be addressed. Go over any red flags and talk about front-running favorites. You don't need to be in the same room, but organized and detailed communication between everyone will help you realize the tangible characteristics of each candidate.



TIP NO. 9:

Organize candidate feedback into one area using software or another process. This will help your interview team quickly identify trends amongst good (or bad) candidates.

Informing the Unqualified

The unfortunate reality of hiring is its unforgiving nature. Even the Olympics have medals for second and third. The hiring process gives everything to number one and nothing to everyone else. Most people unfortunately fall on the side of everyone else.

Be honest, straightforward and sincere. Don't hide behind business-talk or double-speak. You're dealing with people here.

Candidate Categorization

If they haven't made the interview stage:

- Use a concisely written email explaining that they won't be eligible for the position any longer.
- Thank them for their interest and tell them (CLEARLY) that you don't think the open position matches their skills and experience.
- Use software to easily send emails to multiple unqualified applicants at one time.



**TIP NO. 10:**

Store all candidate information and documentation to remain compliant. Also, even though this particular job isn't a fit, that doesn't mean another job won't be a better match in the future.

If you've already spoken to the applicant on the phone:

- Give them the courtesy of using it again to inform them of the situation. Yes, it's tough and can get awkward, but you'd want the same respect.

If they came in for an interview:

- Gauge the applicant and decide between a phone call and another "exit interview." You don't want to waste their time, but you owe them human contact. If they ask for reasons, have one or two ready.

It all comes down to respect and honesty. Rejection is the largest part of the hiring process and never gets easier.

Silver linings may shine just around the edges, though. Just because a candidate doesn't fit the job now, doesn't mean he or she won't fit something later. You can even keep the applicants organized by merging their profiles, applications and resumes. You may just salvage a bridge if you handle yourself well.

Make the tough decisions and stand by your thoughtful choices. You'll both respect each other more in the long run.

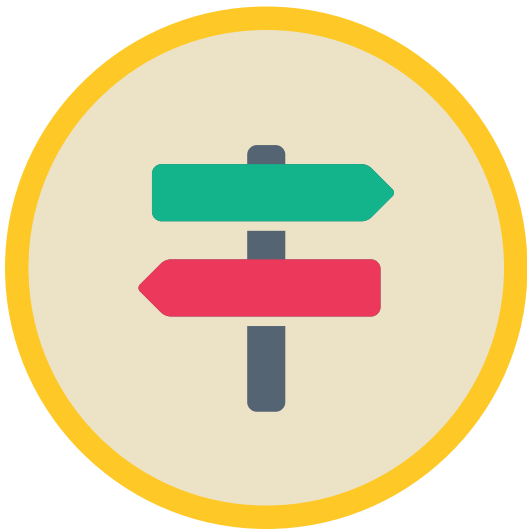
Interview Checklist:

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- ☐ Avoid speeding through the process. According to CareerBuilder, the cost of a bad hire can be upwards of \$50,000. Slow and steady wins the interviewing race!
- ☐ Plan out your interviewing logistics ahead of time so your candidates (and interviewing team) aren't overwhelmed come the day of the interview.
- ☐ Use a mix of interview questions to get a feel of both qualitative and quantitative information. Make sure your questions are consistent for each candidate so you have a solid baseline to compare and contrast traits.
- ☐ Avoid asking personal questions. Oftentimes, these are not acceptable for interviews and could damage your employer's reputation. Stick to broad questions related to the job at hand.
- ☐ Details Matter! Make your candidate feel comfortable by equalizing the playing field and staging a relaxed environment using couches, chairs, or a meeting over coffee.
- ☐ If possible, use electronic documentation to capture and save notes. This will help you easily search and find what you're looking for later.
- ☐ Get your team on the same page ahead of time. If you prepare and collaborate on questions prior to the interview, you should avoid most common errors.
- ☐ Organize candidate feedback into one area using software or a paper process. This will help your interview team quickly identify trends amongst good (or bad) candidates.
- ☐ Store all candidate information and documentation to remain compliant. Also, even though this particular job isn't a fit, that doesn't mean another job won't be a better match in the future.

Next Steps

Plan well, communicate often, and take great notes.
Do those things and you'll notice how much easier the interview process flows.

Who knows? You may even end up enjoying the dance.



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