

Four steps to successful virtual hiring

Article

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Laker, B. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0850-9744>,
Godley, W., Patel, C. and Kudret, S. ORCID:
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Four Steps to Successful Virtual Hiring

Learning how to ace the virtual interviewing process in 2021 is crucial for companies seeking to hire top talent.

Hiring processes changed drastically over the past year as the pandemic forced interviews and candidate assessments to occur remotely. When approached correctly, virtual hiring can be far superior to its in-person counterpart — with speed, ease, and access on its side. Even though remote arrangements nix the opportunity to meet candidates in person, observe how they act in a team setting, and assess how they fit the company culture — core elements of the face-to-face hiring model — our latest research study concludes that the benefits of virtual hiring outweigh the challenges.

In our current climate, organizations have no choice but to embrace remote recruitment, so learning how to ace the virtual hiring process in 2021 is crucial for companies seeking to hire top talent. [Seventy-five percent of organizations](#) that have been hiring during this crisis have changed their recruitment processes since the pandemic began.

We sought to discover the secret to successful remote hiring by analyzing 300 recruitment interviews that occurred during March 2020 and December 2020. In our research, we found four ways in which organizations can improve the way they approach remote hiring.

1. Allot sufficient preparation time. Significant preparation, from writing an appealing job description to troubleshooting video platforms, is required before a single candidate can be interviewed, and all of it takes time.

Organizations should carefully craft job postings that are focused, clear, and [free of bias](#) to attract the most-qualified and diverse candidates. As Liz Wessel, CEO and cofounder of WayUp, explained in the course of our research, “The way your job post is written predicts who you’ll hire, because the language affects who applies to your job.”

To effectively identify the most-qualified candidates of the applicant pool, recruiters should determine in advance what they want to see in applications — and, critically, should ensure that they’ve blocked out enough time to review applications and to interview candidates properly. In more than 150 virtual interviews, we found that interviewers had underestimated the time needed.

Another significant preparation activity is to become familiar with the platform of choice — whether it be Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, Zoom, or Skype — so that interviewers can prevent potential tech problems and effectively troubleshoot any that arise. Companies should provide candidates with detailed instructions for any platforms used in the interview process and encourage them to test the technology in advance too. (If 2020 taught us anything, it is to expect the unexpected — and with children, pets, and temperamental technology at hand, [anything can happen](#).)

2. Be deliberate and attentive to detail. When candidates lack the opportunity to visit an office in person, many attributes of the organization and the role itself may not be as self-evident as they once were and will now require clear descriptions or explanations. Our study concluded that organizations should, in both the job description and interview, be deliberate and detailed in describing the position and the responsibilities it will entail.

Interviewers should also be deliberate in the questions they ask to get the answers they need. Instead of falling back on the generic “Tell me about yourself,” ask specific questions for the

candidate to address — such as, “What was most challenging about your role at organization X?” Don’t be afraid of taking a moment to jot down notes; during periods of silence, candidates can expand on their answers if they wish. Instances where interviewers wrote down parts of candidate answers increased candidate satisfaction by more than 70% because it provided them with an opportunity to think and reflect midway through the interview, improving their confidence.

Details matter in presentation as well as in conversation: We found that more than 60% of candidates were distracted by virtual backgrounds. To ensure that interviewers represent the organization well, they should choose a suitable image — such as a virtual office or corporate branding — as a background if need be. Choice of microphone and webcam are also crucial, along with remembering to mute yourself as necessary (lest the conversation go [horribly wrong](#)). Conducting interviews from a well-lit place with excellent internet connectivity not only improves the employer brand image significantly — by more than 80%, we found — but also eases communication.

3. Spark an authentic conversation. Video interviews may now serve as the first substantive interaction a potential employee has with an organization. But the fact is, Zoom calls are dull; 80% of respondents deemed video calls more monotonous than their in-person alternatives. This is a particularly difficult problem when conducting many interviews in one sitting. The first challenge for any recruiter, then, is not to get bored — which is easier said than done. Traditionally, interviews consist of a “question-answer, question-answer” pattern — which works less well onscreen than in person, given that missing social cues can lead to awkward pauses or long, monologue-style answers.

Our study suggests that interviewers instead spark a genuine conversation with each candidate and tailor each interview to the answers they give, to stay engaged and present. In more than 275 interviews, we found that this approach increased candidates’ satisfaction by more than 90% and made them feel at ease — which in turn enabled their interviewers to glean useful information that improved the recruitment process. Given that [75% of candidates](#) are likely to share a positive interviewing experience with their network, compared with 62% likely to share a negative experience — whether or not they’re eventually hired — more authentic conversations can attract even more candidates.

4. Address candidates’ uncertainties head-on. Our study concluded that it’s crucial to address any uncertainty head-on: In more than 264 interviews, we observed candidates looking to their interviewer to address questions about pandemic-era remote work arrangements and organizational culture. Wessel of WayUp identified some of the main uncertainties early-career candidates face and suggested some potential answers.

Remote work arrangements spiked in 2020, creating a new dependence on effective home office setups. “Before accepting a remote role, a candidate will want to know what technology they need to be successful in their position,” said Wessel, noting that candidates may be concerned about access to needed tools — “anything from providing a laptop, to access or a stipend for Wi-Fi.”¹ Candidates hired for particular roles may require equipment that would typically be located in an office, such as a video editing suite, or something less pricey, like a specialty headset or second monitor.

Aware that organizations worldwide have adopted new policies in light of modified work arrangements, candidates will also be eager to learn how the company culture has changed as a

result of the shift to remote work. Interviewers should share details with candidates about how the organization has fostered a community spirit or improved productivity virtually. Wessel noted the example of Apex Systems, which “created [branded content](#) that showcased how they provided more flexible solutions for their staff and how the company culture ultimately came out stronger during the pandemic.”

The Final Word

Remote hiring is here to stay. The benefits of access, speed, and ease can significantly enhance the candidate’s interview experience while helping managers make better, more informed hiring decisions. That said, the remote hiring process must be underpinned by the four pillars we’ve identified here to find and hire the best and brightest talent.