

10 Tips for Conducting Effective Phone Interviews

Phone interviews are an important step in every recruiter's hiring process. In a relatively short space of time, you can verify a candidate meets the role requirements, assess their salary expectations and get a sense of their potential culture fit for your company - all without having to leave your desk.

Learn how to take your phone interview skills to the next level and provide a positive experience for your candidates with these 10 tips.

1

Manage your time effectively

Firstly - be on time. When you have numerous calls scheduled throughout the day, being on time will not only help keep your diary on-track, but create a solid first impression with your candidates.

Confirm via email the time, date and call length beforehand. With candidates often taking calls during their lunch breaks, a late call may mean they're put in an awkward position at their current job or they won't pick up at all. While it's tempting to cram all of your calls into one morning, make sure you're leaving enough time between each call to write up any notes.

2

Prepare for success

Prepare for the call by ensuring you have the job spec, the candidate's CV, and a list of key questions to hand.

If you're unsure how to answer more specific questions around a role, don't fall into the trap of presenting guesswork as fact. Instead, adopt a positive and open attitude - tell the candidate you'll ask the hiring manager/team directly and report back. Follow up on your commitment quickly and you'll have a happy candidate on your hands - even if it's not the answer they want to hear.

3

Keep detailed notes

When you're dealing with multiple applicants across multiple roles at the same time, taking effective phone interview notes is essential. Keep Notepad, Microsoft Word or Google Docs open on your desktop - or type your notes directly into your company's ATS - detailing the candidate's answers and experience.

By keeping accurate, up-to-date records, you can provide the candidate with valuable feedback after the call. You'll also have a record of your interactions, so - should another opportunity arise later - you can reach out to them without having to re-screen in detail.



4

Give your undivided attention

To get the best out of your interviewee, ask questions and listen closely to their answers. Refrain from interrupting, prompting or starting another task, such as opening your emails, while they talk. Remember, they're assessing you as much as you are them.

It's common for candidates to use unfamiliar terms and industry jargon to explain their experience, so give them the opportunity to elaborate; you'll get a better picture both of their communication skills and of their suitability for the role you're trying to fill.

5

Improve your phone manner

Convey your expertise and build rapport with a candidate by maintaining a professional phone manner throughout the call. Begin the call by asking if the candidate can hear you properly and encourage them at regular intervals to ask you to clarify something if it's unclear.

Keep in mind candidates are sometimes forced to take working hours calls from less-than-ideal locations, like a coffee shop or public space. If a candidate asks you to repeat yourself frequently, you might be talking too fast or not clearly pronouncing each word. In this case, try to slow down, speak clearly and only use complex language when it's absolutely necessary.

6

Create a phone-friendly work environment

While music, laughter, and chatter can contribute to a friendly office environment, it can be distracting for the candidate on the other end of the phone in a screening interview. Consider implementing a "phone-friendly" office policy during certain hours of the day, so you can focus on making calls without being disturbed. If this isn't possible, consider booking a meeting room or taking your call in a quiet area of the office.

If possible, avoid interrupting a phone interview – if you must pause the call for something urgent, always ask the candidate if they wouldn't mind holding and thank them as soon as the call resumes.

7

Set the candidate's expectations

Candidates aren't always aware of what exactly is involved in the hiring process – or how long it might take. Giving them a brief overview of the process at the start of the call can help them feel more prepared and gives them the opportunity to plan their job search accordingly. If they understand that the initial phone interview round will be in progress for the next week, they won't be hanging onto their phone waiting to hear from you prematurely.

If the process encounters delays and is likely to take longer than was initially communicated to the candidate, reach out and make them aware of the delay, to ensure they feel they're being kept in the loop.

8

Finish the call with clear next steps

Before ending the call, let the candidate know what the next steps are; a homework task or in-person interview, and when they can expect to hear from you. Now is also the time to summarise any actions you'll be taking following the call, such as following up on a specific questions. This kind of diligence finishes the call on a positive note and is the mark of a professional, competent recruiter.

9

Focus on building relationships

Aiming to build genuine relationships with your candidates will ensure you get the most out of your phone screens. Not everyone is going to be the right fit, but they might be next time. By being empathetic, patient, competent and friendly on the phone, you'll be creating a good impression of your company for the candidate, increasing their likelihood of reapplying later.

Your company's Glassdoor interview reviews will reflect your efforts. Regularly assess the reviews left after interviews and consider what improvements you can make to your screens.

10

Avoid phone fatigue

You've jam-packed your day with calls and now you're struggling to engage. Avoid slipping into robot mode during a phone interview by scheduling a quick break between back-to-back slots. The last thing you want to do is appear uninterested or bored, so give yourself a little refresh before hitting the phone.

Be careful not to oversubscribe yourself with screening calls on any given day - only allocate a portion of your day, or divide your day into manageable slots with breaks in between.