Tips for Remote Job Interviews and Remote Onboarding

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As COVID-19 forces more people to work from home, it also presents new challenges to management. Challenges like how to hire and onboard new staff? In this article I will review some tips to help conduct remote job interviews and facilitate remote onboarding.

Remote Job Interview Tips

From the health issues to the requirements of reopening and social distancing, this period of time has changed everything. And it has enormous potential to change how we conduct the hiring process. While right now we are in the throes of great uncertainty — and some people are covering their ears at the mere mention of hiring new employees. But at some point, we are going to resume business — if not as usual, then as new.

While most managers have been participating in various online meetings since the pandemic, not all of us know how to conduct an interview online. Since even during a pandemic, hiring has to happen for organizations, here is some advice to help you prepare, and make the most of remote interviews.

1. Planning is key

Online interviews require some preparation. As the interviewer, it is up to you to set expectations with the candidate before the interview. To do this, you will need to figure out what online meeting platform you want to use. I recommend a commonly used platform that candidates are most likely to be familiar with and that can easily be downloaded to their smartphone, tablet or computer. You will want to make sure any other members of your interview team are familiar with your chosen platform as well. This will limit technical issues later. Give the interviewee the names and titles of any other people who may be joining the interview. Remember, clearly communicating the details of the interview will put the candidate at ease and help you get organized.

2. Test your tech

Prior to your interviews, test your technical equipment, video platform and your knowledge of their use. Some commonly used platforms include Zoom, GoToMeeting and Skype for Business. You will want to check these out a day or more before your meeting to give everyone time to figure out how things will or will not work. This will give you time to adjust your interview style, location, etc., to best suit your needs. You will want to check your computer camera, microphone and internet connection, and make sure you know your login information. This is especially important if you have not used the videoconferencing application or tool in a while. If you are using your laptop or tablet, check your Wi-Fi connection and ensure your equipment is charged and ready to go.

3. Always have a Plan B

To quote the author Robert Burns, “The best-laid plans of mice and men often go awry.” This quote presents itself in everyone’s life at some time. This is why it is important to put together a back-up plan. What if, despite all your preparations, the platform you planned to use does not work? Make sure you have the candidate’s and any other attendee’s email and phone number handy so you can easily connect. This way if your video technology fails, you can quickly switch to having a conference call instead.

Another common issue, especially if you or the candidate are working from home, is bandwidth. If more than one person is online in an apartment or house at the same time, it can cause delays or other issues with video conferencing tools. While not ideal, one way you can try to address this issue if it happens
is to turn off the video function on the application you are using during the interview. You will still be able to talk to each other on whatever platform you are using, just without the visuals. If this happens to you, it may be helpful to schedule the interview at a time when fewer people in your home are online.

4. Don’t lose focus

Working remotely can mean that you are always connected to your work in some way or another. This is why when it comes to video interviews, it is important to take the time to disconnect from everything to avoid distractions. Turn off alerts and chats during the interview and put a note on your door saying you are in a meeting. This will limit interruptions and noise outside your door. Avoid having remote interviews in high-traffic areas of your home. In addition, try to reduce movement during an online interview. If you are constantly shifting or walking around, it can make it hard for the other person to focus on the conversation.

5. Have a professional appearance

While it may be tempting to give minimal attention to your appearance before an interview, it is best to do the opposite. Dress as though you are going to work, even if you are at home, and make sure the background the candidate will see during the remote interview is free of anything distracting. Many videoconferencing applications allow you to set a blank background.

6. Be prepared

This is most likely a no brainer but just in case, be sure you and your attendees have a copy of the candidate’s resume before the interview. I always like to make sure the candidate has a copy of the job description before the interview as well. As the conductor of the interview, I would recommend that you log in to your meeting platform a few minutes early so you know all the technology is working and you are not rushing when the interview begins.

7. Watch your tone and try to keep them from being nervous

Maintain a calm voice (no matter what) and speak clearly through the interview. Also be sure you smile and laugh when appropriate, just like you would in person. You want to demonstrate to the other person that you are engaged in the conversation. You also want to have them not feel nervous during the interview. Helping the candidate feel more relaxed helps them to open up and tell you more about themselves. This will help you gain a better idea of who they are and how they work.

To help put your remote candidate at ease, start the interview with personal introductions from yourself and all of the other interviewers, explaining why you are hiring for the role. You could even create a shift in power (and an initial boost in confidence) by outlining some of the reasons you were interested in interviewing them in particular, for instance, “We are really glad you could join us today because we are looking for somebody with your level of experience in …” If possible give them an agenda to the interview, as this may help to ease some of the candidate’s fear of the unknown.

Leave a few seconds at the end of sentences or after you ask a question to minimize talking over each other. Remember to look at the camera when you are speaking, not your own image or the other person’s image, as tempting as that may be. Make sure the candidate never feels as though they weren’t listened to.

8. Have a good ending

End your remote interview with next step information, tell candidates what is going to happen next in the process and ask them if they have any questions. Always be sure to thank them for their time as well.

Remember, as the interviewer you are the representative of your organization, how you look and conduct your interview is how your organization will be perceived. This is the case for all interviews. Conducting effective and organized interviews will leave a positive view of you and your organization.

Remote Onboarding Tips

Okay, you did all the interview steps, you got a great new employee starting in two weeks. Now what do you do? Well, considering how vital an effective new hire onboarding is, you have to do something even if it is done remotely. Below are some tips to help the process go as smoothly as possible.

1. Make sure they know the basics

Prior to your new hire starting, you want to put together a schedule that outlines when and how they will receive the basic information needed to succeed at your organization. I refer to this basic list as the Four C’s — Compliance, Clarification, Culture and Connection. You may already have systems in place to ensure these areas are covered, I like to list them to make sure they don’t get over looked.

COMPLIANCE — The most basic aspect of an
employee’s job. Compliance includes essential company rules, policies, and legal procedures. Dress code, clock-in procedures, and government policies fall under this category.

**Clarification** — Even the most qualified and experienced new hires need a specific breakdown of their job requirements. The Clarification process lets employees know exactly what is expected of them. You should also include in this process a summary of your company’s structure, providing information on who is in charge of what and to whom your new hire will be reporting.

**Culture** — Give your new hires a sense of what your company culture is like. What are the official norms of the workplace? What are the unspoken norms? How is work ethic valued? What kind of leadership can your new hires expect from their supervisors?

**Connection** — Networking is key to getting ahead. Your new hires know this, and they need to be able to network with other employees for information and cooperation. But more than that, your new hires need to be able to connect with others, forming relationships and giving human meaning to showing up at work every day.

2. **Help them feel connected**

   In a traditional setting, a new employee would be shown around the office and introduced to their coworkers and team members. Establishing these connections is an integral part of the onboarding process and should not be overlooked just because your staff is not in the office.

   Use virtual meetings to help. By utilizing virtual meeting tools, new hire welcome introductions can be as seamless and effortless as they would be in person. This allows new hires to connect and engage with their managers and teammates.

   Consider a “Mentorship Program” to provide more direct support on the first day and for some time after. They can be agreed upon and assigned ahead of time. This might be an existing employee of a similar position, or a friendly staff person who has recently gone through the traditional onboarding process and can advise on how to have a successful start.

   My organization uses our video platform heavily during the onboarding process. We use Zoom to facilitate these introductions. But whatever the platform your organization uses, encourage video during these introductory meetings to kick-start deeper connections and limit any feelings of isolation new employees might have.

   Moreover, “face-to-face” exchanges can help bridge potential communication gaps by providing the ability to express via tone of voice and body language. These seemingly simple benefits can help convey a company’s workplace culture in more meaningful ways than written communication.

3. **Roadmap for success**

   After the first day or week, it is easy to move on to other projects and assume the new hire is fine, however this is most likely when your new hire will need the most assistance. It is important to not let the onboarding process fizzle out.

   Establish a sort of connection roadmap. Ideally this would be one that extends for at least four to six weeks to help connect new employees with other individuals they should know to build their internal networks while working remotely. This also helps them learn more about the organization by talking to employees in other departments and gaining a deeper understanding of the roles and responsibilities of their colleagues.

4. **Document the onboarding process**

   Lastly, it is important to document the process and any changes made. This will help you in the future. If possible, design remote onboarding guides to keep other managers informed and to ensure consistency wherever possible. While everyone is transitioning to working remotely, things can become more ambiguous. Having access to documentation that outlines roles, responsibilities, and changes to onboarding in a remote environment helps keep everyone informed and accountable.

   In closing, while it may be difficult to do in such uncertain times, at the end of the day we still have a job to do. Focusing in and creating successful recruiting and onboarding programs ensures a clear path for success for managers, employees and interview candidates. By implementing new practices to support the remote working model, employers will make themselves more attractive to prospective employees, while maintaining business continuity.

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professional, with a proven track record of building/enhancing and managing human resources departments. She is also well experienced in establishing operational policies and procedures setting and setting operation procedures, coaching management, writing policies, succession, emergency response, and strategic planning to grow organizations.

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