

ATTRACTING TOP TALENT

Job descriptions, interviews, and
recruitment tools



Attracting top talent — job descriptions, interviews, and recruitment tools.

Hiring is an expensive and lengthy process. All the while, you're down a filled position and losing productivity. That's why it's vital that you get it right the first time. The first step in the process is attracting good candidates. Then you must them through an interview process that doesn't just check the box, but gets to the heart of if the candidate is a good fit.

In this special report, we've collected the best of Business Management Daily's advice on how to use job descriptions and recruitment tools to bring in top talent, as well as how to elevate your interviews to find your next rockstar employee.

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12 strategies to find the best candidates

While the unemployment rate has not returned to the historic lows posted prior to the pandemic, finding new employees remains difficult for a large number of hiring managers. Already dealing with challenges ranging from productivity and a distributed workforce to safety and morale, companies want to bring new hires aboard as efficiently as possible. There simply isn't time and energy to waste.

Finding the best candidates, however, rarely proves a simple process. A single "right" way to attract and sign your next great hire does not exist. Rather, savvy organizations explore a variety of techniques to see what nets the best results.

Here's a look at 12 recruitment strategies that can assist in bringing great candidates to the surface.

1. Create a good job description

Finding the best hire involves top talent seeing your job posting and being inspired to apply. To that end, forgo "human resources rock star" and other unusual job titles in favor of SEO-friendly terms ("human resources generalist," "HR specialist," etc.) on which job applicants typically search. List "must-have" skills, degrees, work experience, and the like without creating a lengthy laundry list that scares people away. Help readers envision themselves at your company by using active verbs to describe daily duties. Tout what you offer in terms of salary range, benefits, and other perks. And definitely spend some space talking about company culture. The best candidates want more than a job — they want the opportunity to be part of the greater picture and truly make a difference.

2. Expand your geographical horizons

For many organizations, gone are the days when new employees had to live within so many miles of the office. If your company operates remotely, market yourself accordingly. Eliminating location barriers increases the number of great candidates eligible to throw their hat into the ring. Also, many of the best candidates want to

telecommute because of the better work-life balance such an arrangement brings. Demand for their services is often such that they can afford to be choosy and not bother applying for positions requiring on-site work (or on-site work exclusively).

3. Tap your network for prospective employees

The possibility exists that people you know from previous jobs, professional associations, LinkedIn groups, and other means of connection are searching for new opportunities. Take time to approach them with your needs and see what happens. They may express true interest or offer a referral to someone they know who might prove a good fit. At the very least, they will be flattered you thought of them, and perhaps they will keep their ears open for quality job seekers to send your way.

4. Enlist the help of current employees

Satisfied workers make great brand ambassadors. Encourage staff members to talk about the company with people in their network. Listeners generally put more stock in information delivered casually by those they know and trust compared to when they sense a recruitment pitch. To generate interest among your workers, consider implementing an employee referral program in which individuals receive money or other incentives for their efforts.

5. Build a pipeline of job candidates

When you think of the hiring process as an ongoing activity rather than as something that demands attention only when job openings arise, your company can build an arsenal of potential job candidates. Maintain correspondence with promising individuals who express interest in your organization during periods when you aren't hiring in order to turn to them when open positions do come up. Similarly, when you conduct a job search, be certain to keep noteworthy job applicants that you didn't hire on your radar. A better match may evolve for them at your company, and the fact that they liked your organization enough to apply the first time proves promising.

6. Attract talent at the source

Establish a mutually beneficial arrangement with an area college. You'll get your brand out there by sponsoring events or contests, participating in job fairs, and guest lecturing in classes. Not only will you generate notice from students, but the school itself may also be able to point exceptional graduates in your direction. Consider working with the institution on summer internships or for-credit practicums. Seeing fresh talent in action provides a chance to evaluate if they may make good permanent employees.

7. Build a great career area on your website

Getting someone to go to your website to learn more about your company is half the battle. Don't squander the opportunity when a potential candidate takes enough interest to look! Create an informative, engaging career page that offers a true sense of what your organization is about and what makes it a great place at which to work. Include clear information on current job openings and how to apply.

8. Highlight company culture on social media

Prospective employees yearn to know whether they'll be a good culture fit with your organization. LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and other social media platforms provide an ideal outlet to show what you are passionate about and get potential candidates excited about joining your mission. Aim to enable them to envision themselves as active contributors to what they see.

9. Use niche job boards to discover the best candidates

Modern job seekers possess a plethora of options of where to turn for job opportunities. Employers looking for a specific certification or skill set may find that industry job boards rather than general sites yield a talent pool more in line with their needs. If location is a major factor because you seek on-site workers, consider posting on local job boards. Community organizations such as the

chamber of commerce and neighborhood libraries often post regional job opportunities.

10. Hire a recruitment agency that specializes in finding the right candidate

While turning to outside help for talent acquisition does cost money, the fee may be worth it in the long run. Recruiters can save time during the hiring process by finding qualified candidates, asking questions through phone screenings, conducting job interviews, performing reference checks, and negotiating job offers. Their recruitment strategies can make pinpointing ideal candidates a much easier process, especially when your new employee requires a certain background or hard-to-find set of skills.

11. Think outside the box

If your company experiences difficulty drawing in potential candidates, perhaps it is time to try something new. Look at the essential functions of the position. Might targeting an overlooked segment of job candidates yield good results? Military spouses, for instance, are often highly educated and crave well-paying, steady jobs, but they have a harder time securing them due to frequent moves. If your job opening is remote and can be performed from anywhere, making this group aware of your needs could prove mutually beneficial. Similarly, employers who have individuals with learning disabilities often rave about their performance and work ethic. As a group, however, they continue to experience high rates of unemployment.

12. Put up a sign

Lastly, don't discount posting a good old-fashioned "help wanted" sign at your establishment. That loyal customer who already loves your brand may never have even thought about employment opportunities. And since those who view your sign obviously live close enough to your business to see it, you get a leg up on attracting local talent.

Recommendations for writing job descriptions to attract good talent

Finding your next outstanding new hire starts with writing an effective job description that yields a pool of promising top talent. In today's competitive climate, a good job description can be the difference between your ideal candidate applying for the position or passing it over completely. Job seekers need to be able to find your job opportunity among the multitude out there and be convinced the role suits their background and desires.

Unsure what constitutes a great job ad that gets results? Here is a look at writing job description best practices.

Construct the job title carefully

Employers may think coming up with a unique job title will help their company stand out from the crowd. The problem, though, is that using a non-standard title increases the odds that the right candidates never see the job listing. Job seekers search on terms such as "marketing specialist" or "marketing associate," not on "marketing ninja" or "marketing rockstar." Save the creativity for elsewhere in the job description, and stick with an SEO-friendly job title.

Present the basics immediately

Individuals browsing through job postings want to know right away whether or not continuing to read on is in their best interest. No sense wasting time if the job is located in a faraway city or is only part-time when desiring full-time. Thus, employers should present the job title, where the position is based, and its type (full-time, part-time, permanent, temporary, contract) clearly from the get-go.

Nowadays, smart companies also quickly address the issue of off-site work. Use words such as “remote,” “virtual,” “distributed” or “work at home” to convey when a job can be done from anywhere. If the job has a hybrid arrangement (some time in the office) or requires enough proximity to the office to come in on certain occasions, spell that out.

Determine the “must-haves”

To get everything you want, you need to ask for it, right? Not exactly. A laundry list of prerequisites has the potential to scare away a large number of applicants, especially females. [Research](#) shows that men apply for a job when they meet only 60% of the qualifications, but women apply only if they meet 100% of them.

Remedy the situation by focusing on what the new hire truly needs for the position. What competencies must someone absolutely possess to perform essential job duties? Common criteria include a certain educational attainment or degree, a license or certification, mastery of industry-specific software or procedures, and previous experience performing specific skills. Avoid labeling anything as “mandatory” unless it truly is non-negotiable.

Watch, too, that you don’t overdo the required years of experience. While the position may demand someone with a track record of success, putting an exact numerical value can deter applicants. Is there really a magic number of years of experience? Consider offering a range or rewording to seek applicants with a “solid work history” rather than a specific length of time logged.

After figuring out the core requirements, hiring managers likely have in mind remaining qualifications that would be wonderful for an applicant to possess. Consider including the ones you feel most strongly about in a separate paragraph or section as “preferred qualifications,” “desirable attributes,” “good to have,” or “bonus points for candidates possessing X, Y, and Z.”

When discussing the skills for which you are looking, aim for clarity. Acronyms and internal jargon can confuse readers. Stick with standard, industry-appropriate

terms. Language such as “entry-level” or “senior staff” works better than classifications such as “Level II” or “Pay grade IV.”

Convey what the open role entails

Just because someone deems himself qualified for the role does not mean he wants to take it. Candidates yearn to know what they will be doing each day, who they will report to, and how their position fits into the company’s overall objectives. They want to get excited about the job and feel like they could make a true difference.

A great job description enables a qualified applicant to envision herself in the open position. She can imagine performing the list of responsibilities and interacting with other team members.

Employing terms such as “you” and “we” instead of speaking in the third person (i.e., “the applicant” or “the company”) adds an element of personalization that promotes forming a connection. Draw the prospective new hire in with phrases such as “Your expertise on ABC will lead us to achieving better XYZ” or “You’ll make your mark by overseeing our projects involving QRS.”

Using action verbs helps with visualization and creates more energy around what the job entails. Some strong verbs to consider for job descriptions include:

- Advise
- Interpret
- Investigate
- Compile
- Arrange
- Confer
- Coordinate
- Initiate

- Recommend
- Verify

Describe what is in it for them

Compensation, of course, ranks high among things potential candidates want to know. Providing a salary range enables applicants to judge whether or not the two of you have a chance of being on the same page.

Be sure to tout benefits, too. An excellent health plan, generous PTO, assistance in paying off student debt, on-site yoga classes, or even pet insurance can be perks that nudge a candidate in your direction.

People also like to know that a potential employer takes an interest in their future. Mentioning opportunities for training and development attracts individuals looking not only for a job now but for a chance to grow their career path.

However, be sure not to over-inflate these offerings. Overpromising and under-delivering is a sure way to lose a promising candidate down the road.

Remember the importance of company culture

Many job opportunities post similar qualifications, duties, and pay. Distinguishing your organization from the pack often comes down to your work environment and culture fit. What is different about you and your employer brand? What makes your company a great place at which to work? How is your company's mission helping customers and the world at large? Millennial workers especially find such information critical to job decisions. They want to connect with those with whom they work, feel a sense of belonging, and contribute to the big picture.

As your company aims to distinguish itself from others, consider putting in some interesting tidbits. Has your organization won any industry or community awards? Does your business support certain causes or perform volunteer work as a group?

Do any fun facts stand out in your company's history? Present what makes you memorable.

With many candidates concerned about diversity, job ads frequently contain an EEO (Equal Employment Opportunity) statement. Many employers, though, go beyond letting candidates know that all applicants receive equal treatment. These companies actively encourage applications from underrepresented groups such as women, minorities, and people with disabilities. The job posting also may note specific organizational efforts to create a diverse workforce and a welcoming work environment.

Additional best practices when writing job descriptions

When a job opening arises, employers oftentimes are tempted to dust off the open role's previous job description or settle for something "close enough." However, failure to evaluate if what you are putting out there truly grasps what you're looking for and is written in a way that will draw in the top talent you desire can lead to a sparser or less desirable candidate pool. Job analysis is worth the time as it enables you to craft an effective job description.

Things to think about as you perfect your job ad include:

- How is the overall tone? Does the job posting sound personable and friendly?
- How is the presentation? Bullet points, headers, and proper spacing aid in understanding and are helpful to the reader's eye.
- How does the final product look on various devices? Applicants have many forms of tech available to them, and they do not have patience for jumbled, confusing layouts.

Finally, answer the question "Are we being honest?" While your company wants to present itself in the best light possible, fabrication ultimately helps nobody. If the new hire will be expected to travel twice a month, she should know that from the get-go rather than have it sprung on her after accepting the position. Likewise, do

not tout a wonderfully stocked breakroom if all you are offering is a pot of coffee and a package of Oreos. Remember, you don't want to be back to square one of the hiring process for this position because the person you selected feels deceived.

Determine which recruitment tools work best for you

Remember the days when putting up a "Help Wanted" sign in the window or posting jobs in the local newspaper were the main recruitment tools? Thanks mostly to technology, attracting qualified candidates nowadays has become a much different process.

Employers face a variety of decisions about where to advertise their job openings — job boards, social media, and company websites, to name a few. They need to figure out which methods yield the greatest possibilities of being seen by the top talent they desire.

What a company chooses to say and how they say it is equally important. Employers must create an inviting candidate experience that generates interest, enables potential candidates to envision themselves in the role, and presents company culture. Job seekers rarely waste their time on confusing instructions or poor technology, so employers also need to ensure the application process itself operates smoothly.

Upon receiving resumes, businesses need solid talent management systems to keep track of their applicant pool. While staying organized always has been a priority for HR departments, it is especially important in light of the pandemic. Many HR teams still contain remote staff all or part of the time. They need ways to work together seamlessly to keep the recruitment process efficient and effective despite the distance.

Likewise, as the jobs for which they are hiring also can be remote, HR departments are dealing with candidates from a wider geographical region. HR

professionals must watch time zones and figure out the logistics of virtual or on-site interviews. And remember, recruitment is only one of the activities going on in HR. From onboarding and legal compliance to safety measures and employee mental health, most HR departments are incredibly busy.

The challenge for an organization becomes deciding which recruitment tools best suit its goals and budget. To help in this process, here's a look at some common options.

Job postings

Job ads do two things. First, they alert potential candidates to an open position, what that role involves, and what qualifications the employer desires. Second, job listings inspire readers to apply. While this may sound rather straightforward, modern recruitment marketing is far from simple. Employers need to stand out in the crowded job marketplace.

To even be found by job seekers, job descriptions need to include Search Engine Optimization (SEO)-friendly terms. These are words, phrases, or job titles targeted job applicants typically type in when conducting their job search.

Then, successful job ads paint a welcoming picture of what the open position involves and what qualifications are essential for new hires to possess. They talk about company culture so that readers know why this is a great place to work and get excited about the contributions they can make. Job listings also frequently tout "what's in it for the candidate" — salary range, benefits, and desirable perks.

While HR professionals may write such job postings themselves, technological recruitment tools exist to aid the process. Artificial intelligence (AI)-driven writing tools such as Boost Linguistics can assist in producing engaging content, strengthening verb choice, and removing business jargon that confuses or alienates readers. Concerned about diversity hiring? Employ software such as Textio that reduces unconscious bias and analyzes language for its impact on women and minorities.

Job boards and job aggregators

Once you have created a well-written job description, the question becomes where to place it. Employers frequently opt for one or more online job boards. Job boards vary considerably in size and scope. Major ones such as CareerBuilder cover a wealth of industries and reach a huge audience. Others are tailored to a particular niche. FlexJobs, for instance, attracts job seekers looking for remote employment, alternate hours, freelance work, and other flexible opportunities. K12JobSpot focuses on employment in the education sector.

Functioning in a manner very similar to job boards are job aggregators. These are websites such as Indeed and SimplyHired. They operate as job search engines — aggregating listings from thousands of job boards, career sites, and staffing agencies — as well as posting directly from individual employers.

Costs associated with job boards and job aggregators vary considerably. A job board operated by a local chamber of commerce, for instance, may allow members to put up job ads for free. Larger job boards sometimes offer a limited number of job postings at no cost but then charge a fee beyond that point. Employers who hire frequently may opt for package deals that set a base price for services. Prices also differ based on factors such as priority placement of your job ad and how long it runs.

Company website

Job seekers often do more online than scour job boards. Those already aware of your company may look directly at your organization's website. Reward their interest with a solid "career" section. What is it like to work there? What is your mission? What perks do employees enjoy? What is unique about your company culture? What are the current job openings, and how does one apply?

You may even want to provide a recruitment chatbot, a software application that mimics human conversational abilities. Potential candidates value the ability to

ask questions and get real-time answers, and you benefit from a great way to collect info and screen individuals showing interest.

Social media

Social recruiting has become a popular method to engage both active and passive candidates. Employers use social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter for multiple purposes. Sometimes, methods are direct, such as posting job ads. Other efforts build connections over time through posting interesting content and developing a favorable perception of the employer brand. In addition to official company channels, leaders may choose to turn to their own social network of acquaintances and groups to make them aware of career opportunities.

Both HR departments and marketing teams often get involved in a company's social recruiting efforts. They may strategize about sourcing and engaging potential candidates. To improve results and track social listening, they may turn to social recruiting management tools such as Agorapulse or Sprout Social.

Applicant tracking system

An effective applicant tracking system (ATS) can be a busy HR department's best friend by improving metrics such as time, cost, and candidate quality. Instead of looking at every resume received, an HR professional can use this recruiting software to bring the most qualified candidates to the forefront. Set keywords and predetermined criteria to have the ATS screen candidate resumes for the background, experience, and skills you want most in a potential candidate for an open position. Your talent pool quickly becomes a ranked list suggesting where to direct your attention.

Applicant tracking systems also keep your hiring process organized and streamlined. Whether in the office or working from home, HR team members can check who has evaluated a potential candidate and if any actions have been taken. Such ability has taken on added significance in recent months as many HR departments operate on hybrid arrangements with both remote and on-site staff.

An ATS also can improve the candidate experience through actions such as an immediate email notification that the resume was received and what steps happen next. When a hiring manager wants to schedule an interview, she can input dates and times available into the applicant tracking system. The ATS sends an email message with the interview request and allows the job applicant to claim a spot from what is available.

Material collected by an ATS remains useful after a company fills an open position. When other job openings occur, the applicant tracking system has a database of potential candidates who exhibited enough interest in your company to complete an application. While the organization ultimately may decide to run new job ads, it first can screen candidates already on file using new criteria tailored to the openings at hand. Qualified candidates may be right at your fingertips.

While any size company may use an ATS, companies that hire regularly and receive a large number of applications especially benefit from this recruitment tool. HR departments can obtain some basic ATS software for free. Obtaining greater capabilities, though, requires purchasing recruiting software and service plans. A few of the most popular companies for applicant tracking systems are Breezy HR, Jobvite, and Workable.

CRM

The technology known as CRM (Candidate Recruitment Management) focuses on talent pipeline development and oftentimes gets bundled with an ATS. The CRM system keeps track of active candidates, passive candidates, former candidates, independent contractors who've worked for the company, job fair attendees, and anyone else who might make a great hire at some point. Nurturing relationships with them through personalized marketing provides quality leads when job openings arise, potentially filling positions quickly and with less effort. A CRM also can provide a wealth of information, such as identifying where you lose talent, analyzing the diversity of your talent pool, and rating the performance of your different sourcing channels.

Employee referrals

Effective recruitment tools need not always involve technology! Happy workers make great brand ambassadors, so enlist the help of your team in the recruitment process. Encourage them to talk about the company and its job openings with people in their network or get the word out via their personal social media accounts.

Potential benefits of employee referrals include:

- Better quality candidates since people generally do not want to recommend someone who reflects poorly on them.
- Greater chance of reaching passive candidates who aren't actively looking to change jobs but might be intrigued by what they hear from a friend or acquaintance.
- Candidates arriving for interviews with a greater understanding of company culture because they've likely asked the person who recommended them many questions about what it's like to work there.

To spur your staff to generate employee referrals, consider offering a monetary award or other incentive. Be certain to lay out the conditions in detail to avoid misunderstandings and hard feelings. For instance, does someone receive a reward if his suggested job applicant goes through the interview process but declines the job or only if that person joins the company?

Recruitment agencies

Businesses sometimes decide it is in their best interest to hire a third party to handle the recruitment process. Their own HR department may be small, overwhelmed, or busy with other projects such as retraining current employees or initiating diversity measures. Leaving talent acquisition to an outside source may prove worth the money.

When time is of the essence, enlisting a talent agency may accumulate a pool of top talent at a faster rate. Not only do recruiters maintain ongoing relationships with active candidates, they know the best recruitment methods for your particular situation. Niche agencies, in particular, may prove quite valuable at filling job openings involving hard-to-find skillsets.

As with all recruitment tools, companies must conduct a cost-benefit analysis to determine whether the services of a recruitment agency are worth the price. Spending money to quickly locate a qualified candidate who can begin the onboarding process and start contributing to your company's productivity can make more sense overall than handling the recruitment process yourself at a slower pace. Remember, there is no single perfect recruitment tool; the best recruitment tool is the one that works for you.

How to get the most out of pre-screening interviews

Recruiters and hiring managers know time is of the essence when filling open positions. The sooner a qualified candidate gets into the role, the sooner he or she can start making valuable contributions to the organization. At first glance, then, it might seem odd to add another step to the hiring process by conducting pre-screening interviews. Why not simply bring promising candidates in for "real" job interviews?

In the overall scheme of things, pre-screening interviews can actually save time. They reduce the talent pool to those individuals most likely to be a good match for the position and fit in with company culture. Pre-screening raises the confidence level that one of the applicants brought in for a formal job interview will work out. And with COVID-related safety restrictions still in place at many businesses, pre-screening interviews help limit the number of outsiders brought into the building.

A pre-screening process often benefits applicants, too. With fewer people moving on to the next round, the hiring process frequently moves faster, which makes for

a better candidate experience. The interaction also provides job applicants with the chance to learn things that can help them judge whether or not they feel like the right candidate. A job seeker may not see the sense in moving forward if, for example, salary expectations differ greatly or the responsibilities presented do not align with his or her career goals.

What is a pre-screening interview?

A pre-screening interview collects information and impressions that assist recruiters and human resources professionals in deciding who to move on to the first round of the formal interview process. If done via phone call or video chat, the conversation typically takes between 15-30 minutes. Pre-screenings also can be done online in the form of a short survey or a basic skills test.

Employers should not feel they must pre-screen every person who answers their job posting. Only potential candidates who demonstrate the most promise — perhaps those ranked highest by the company's Applicant Tracking System (ATS) — warrant a phone screen or other pre-screening measure.

Besides narrowing the field, pre-screening provides a benefit when the actual interview occurs. Candidates often arrive feeling less nervous because the ice has been broken already. The conversation may flow more naturally, and they may come in with good questions formulated from thinking about what went on in the pre-screen.

Examples of pre-screening interview questions

Don't look at a pre-screening interview as the chance to squeeze everything you would ask in a formal interview into a shorter time frame. Rather, think of it as an opportunity to form a clearer picture of the candidate beyond the resume.

For starters, you may want to verify credentials necessary for the job. For instance, if possession of a certain license is a must, confirm that the person holds the

document and it is up-to-date. No sense in proceeding if the applicant lacks an essential requirement.

Likewise, address anything that is unclear on the resume. If work history is presented in a way that makes it difficult to figure out exactly how many years of relevant work experience a candidate has under his belt, ask outright. Or, perhaps the duties someone lists for her current job seem unusual for her job title. Ask about the discrepancy. You might discover either someone who exaggerated on the resume or a superstar who performs well beyond her basic job description.

For the most part, aim to ask things that require more than a simple yes-or-no answer. You'll learn more about a candidate by letting him express himself, including how well he communicates and thinks on his feet.

Employers can cover any subject they wish during the pre-interview based on what they would most like to find out before moving forward. Career accomplishments, hard skills, soft skills, and fit with company culture are some of the areas from which recruiters and hiring managers often select questions.

A few specific questions to consider asking include:

- **Tell me about yourself.** Every good candidate prepares a response to this softball. Regardless of the interview type or location, it remains an effective way to start a conversation and let the nerves settle.
- **Why do you want to work here?** You'll get a glimpse as to whether your role is simply a paycheck or if they did some research to determine that they'd truly enjoy being at your company.
- **What is your ideal work environment?** See if their particulars match your offerings. Someone who wants to work from home may not be content in a fully on-site role. Or, they may state how much they like to collaborate with others, but the job opening really calls for mostly independent work.
- **What unique skills do you bring to this position?** This offers the person an opportunity to sell himself and draw interesting information to your attention.

- **What are you looking for in a manager?** Employees differ in how much direction and input they want from their leaders. If the role is in a department run by someone with a very hands-off management style, one type of worker may get frustrated by the lack of involvement whereas another may relish the independence.
- **What is the most frustrating part of your current job?** This question provides a peek at why the person may be trying to find a new job. It also presents the chance to see if someone can talk about negatives or problems respectfully rather than assign blame or trash the employer.
- **What do you consider your biggest career accomplishments?** Again, this type of question allows the candidate to highlight achievements. It also offers insight into what the person defines as an accomplishment. Some may talk about awards or promotions; others may mention overcoming obstacles or making connections with colleagues or clients. You receive valuable information on what motivates this particular individual.
- **What is your definition of a great place to work?** Answers can run the gamut. Some candidates may focus on money, benefits, and perks. Others may cite interesting work and professional development opportunities. Trust, pleasant colleagues, an important mission, respect, and flexibility also are common responses. While there's no right or wrong answer per se, you can get an idea of whether or not what this person values in a workplace jives with the reality of your company.

Touch on key logistical questions

Posing a few questions requiring a short or one-word answer can be valuable to confirm understanding. For instance, stating “The salary range for this position is \$20-25 per hour based on experience. Are you comfortable with that?” gets at whether the two of you are on the same page. An employer can pose questions in a similar set-up to verify the person understands work schedule, location (especially if any remote work is involved), travel obligations, start date, or specific duties. At the end of the pre-interview, you might even want to ask “Now that you

know a bit more about the role and the company, do you still want to proceed with your candidacy?”

Whatever you choose to ask, make certain to input information and impressions into your applicant tracking recruiting software. This action enables others on the hiring team to learn more about the candidate and refer back to the comments before conducting the formal interview.

Beyond phone interviews

When pre-screening using an online form, make what you’re asking is as relevant as possible to the job at hand. Overwhelming job candidates with too many questions or things to fill out decreases the chance that they will do it carefully and completely. And while there’s something to be said for job seekers willing to go through many hoops, you run the risk of scaring people away.

A few possibilities for gathering information about hard skills, soft skills, competencies, personality, and culture fit include:

- A skillset test, such as proofreading or job-related math.
- A writing sample based on a prompt (to judge both content and communication ability).
- Presenting scenarios common to the open role and asking how they would handle the situation.
- Asking job candidates to describe an example from their past of a certain action or behavior — handling conflict, demonstrating [leadership](#) skills, working with a diverse group, etc.
- A work style quiz.

Potential red flags

Pre-screening interviews not only help a recruiter or hiring manager distinguish between qualified and unqualified candidates, the interaction may yield some warning signs. While a pre-screening is not as formal as a full face-to-face

interview, it still makes an impression. Be leery of job seekers who treat it too casually and do not put forth their best.

Think twice before moving along with anyone who seems unprepared. Company websites, social media, and the like make basic information easy to come by, so there's no excuse for being clueless. Likewise, if someone can't formulate a few good questions to ask you, it likely means he did not do his research or he doesn't really care about knowing more.

When pre-screening candidates do pose questions, watch the nature of the subject. Someone who focuses on salary range and benefits but asks nothing about the actual job opening may be more concerned with a paycheck than with whether or not he's the right candidate.

Finally, use the pre-screen to gain subtle information that could affect whether to move the person on in the hiring process. Is written material filled out completely and thoughtfully or thrown together haphazardly? If conducting a video interview, does the candidate appear poised and professional? Does the interviewee sound appropriately excited and engaged during the phone screen or like she can't wait for the conversation to end? Make the pre-screening process worth the effort by utilizing all the insight possible!

5 interview questions to stop using immediately, and what to ask instead

With so much riding on the decision, smart hiring managers know the importance of making each interview question count. However, many companies use this valuable time to ask questions that, frankly, simply waste time. Many outdated and ineffective questions are still seen frequently in interviews. These questions may seem classic or even creative at times, but they don't get to the heart of an interview's purpose — determining if a candidate is a good fit for the role and your organization.

An effective interview question gives you a glimpse into how an employee thinks, works, and how they might perform on the job. Well-intentioned interviewers may think they're doing this. However, if your list of interview questions hasn't been updated in a few years, it's probably time to refresh it.

With that in mind, there are 5 common interview questions that you should stop using immediately, and a few alternative questions to use instead.

Where do you see yourself in five years?

Interviewees expect this question. Knowing organizations value loyalty, they come prepared to say what they believe you want to hear.

"They usually answer that they intend to remain at the company where they are interviewing, excelling, and making significant contributions. This provides little insight into the candidate's career development goals," says Benjamin Rose, co-founder of Trainer Academy.

Even if their intentions are honest, circumstances change way too often to put stock in the response. Individuals suddenly relocate when a spouse gets a transfer. People take time off to raise children, care for an elderly parent, or go back to school. Interests shift and a new occupation becomes appealing. Technology changes and opens up an exciting role that didn't even exist back when the interview took place.

Rose suggests "Where does this position fall along your career path?" as a replacement.

"This question allows the applicant to discuss the skills and experiences that have prepared them for the responsibilities of this role, as well as giving the interviewer an idea of the candidate's desired outcomes," he says.

Another option: Substitute in a timely question that helps you determine how well the person fits your business's current needs. As the COVID-19 pandemic made

clear, companies often can't see five years into the future either. Use your limited amount of interview time to inquire what qualities make the person well-suited to telecommuting or what techniques the candidate employs to stay self-motivated and productive when working remotely.

What is your greatest weakness?

Candidates hate this question. They fear revealing something that will cost them the job. Thus, interviewees follow the popular advice to spin "imperfections" into something positive. All you learn is that they know how to Google "answers to popular interview questions."

"Every job seeker expects this query and has prepared a response to avoid admitting actual weaknesses: 'I get so wrapped up in my work that I neglect to take care of myself' or 'I'm always there for my coworkers and don't always take credit for my own ideas,'" says Brian Chung, CEO and co-founder of Alabaster.

Want a better chance of getting at the truth? Try asking "When I contact your previous employer, what will he or she tell me you could improve upon?"

"This question leaves no room for a candidate to hide!" Chung says. "They'll be more likely to confess if they know you'll get the whole story anyway — you have a hard time meeting deadlines on occasion or you get flustered when juggling too many tasks at once."

Why do you want to work here?

The response to this age-old question might prove flattering. Good interviewers, however, prefer useable information to an ego boost.

"We all know that the most popular answer is for the candidate to ramble on about how wonderful the company is and how great of an opportunity the role provides. In any case, the honest response is that the candidate is not rich enough to be able to live on their own, so they are looking for work. Neither of these

answers reveals something about the candidate's work style or career ambitions," says Shad Elia, CEO of We Buy Houses Here.

He recommends instead asking "What particular skills or experiences make you the best match for this position?" or "What qualities will your most recent supervisor say make you the best candidate for this role?"

"These questions allow the applicant to illustrate the aspects of the role that they found important during their research and their vision of how they could fit into the business," Elia says.

What was your salary in your last position?

In an era of increasing concern over gender and racial equity, this formerly popular question is on the way out. In fact, some state and local governments have adopted laws banning employers from asking it. This effort aims to break the cycle of historically underpaid workers carrying pay disparity into new positions they take on during their careers.

"The answer to this question really doesn't have any bearing on a candidate's value for the position they're applying for. The question only exists to give the hiring company leverage in negotiation," says Andrea Ahern, vice president at Mid Florida Material Handling.

Interviewers looking for a revealing replacement question might try "What motivates you to work?" Answers may demonstrate a true passion for the industry, a deep desire to contribute to a cause, an aspiration to climb the corporate ladder, the satisfaction of being part of a team, or any of numerous other reasons that inspire someone to come in each day and perform well.

If you were a vegetable, which one would you be and why?

Yes, such a question does force applicants to think on their feet. Why waste precious interview time, though, finding out if someone is a carrot or a turnip (and

making some poor candidate who said “tomato” worry that she’ll lose the job because the manager deems it a fruit).

“If you ask this question, or a whimsical one like it, my recommendation is to stop immediately,” says Michael Alexis, CEO of TeamBuilding. “Interviewers ask questions like this to try to inject a little fun into the interview, but if the result is confusion, then it kind of backfires. This recommendation doesn’t mean your interview questions or tone can’t be fun. Actually, that can be a great way to go, especially if you want to hire for organizational culture fit, but make sure that your questions are still functional and have meaningful utility.”

Try a pertinent, yet interesting, question such as “If resources were unlimited, what are some things you’d be excited to see our company pursue?”

“The ‘magic wand’ question is a test of someone’s ability to get creative but also think on the spot. The other information it reveals about the candidate is whether they did their research and if what they have in mind vaguely aligns with the company’s mission,” says Zoia Kozakov, vice president, product manager at a leading financial institution.

Or, consider “Tell me something about yourself that I can’t find online, in your resume, or in your cover letter.”

“I know that many people forget to ask this amid all the trick questions that are supposed to help them evaluate the candidate’s competence and personality,” says Mark Coster, owner and chief editor of STEM Toy Expert. “But it’s good because of at least two reasons: you’ll learn something about this candidate as a person, and it opens up some humane space between you, especially if you also tell them something about yourself in turn.”

4 ways hiring managers can assess a candidate's soft skills

Hiring in 2021 is about more than evaluating applicants for hard skills, it's vital to assess a candidate's soft skills also. Educational attainment and specific knowledge still play a role when deciding which person to bring aboard. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has elevated the importance of abilities such as flexibility, resiliency, and self-monitoring. Similarly, recent social movements have highlighted the need to find employees who can work well in heterogeneous groups and who share the company's commitment to equality.

"Soft skills have always been trickier to evaluate than other info on applicant resumes," says Jon Hill, CEO and chairman of The Energists. "This is partially because you're relying mainly on the candidate's self-assessment rather than a tested or certified skill. An applicant who says they're adaptable or self-motivated may completely believe that's true when they put it on the resume, but that doesn't necessarily mean they meet your company's standards."

How, then, might employers go about finding workers who possess the soft skills they seek? Try these four actions.

Pinpoint the most important qualities

Identify the soft skills you wish to assess, ones critical to the company and the position at hand. Then, ask for them in your job postings. You'll attract applicants who see themselves in your description. You may be seeking a self-starter capable of running a project with minimal supervision or a highly adaptable worker who can quickly shift focus based on the ever-changing current climate.

Many individuals looking for employment come from industries hit hard by the pandemic. These job seekers may lack the technical knowledge needed for your current openings. However, they may possess valuable soft skills that are transferable to your company. Some examples include strong attention to detail,

ability to follow instructions, and excellent time management. Advertise for applicants with these relevant qualifications, along with a statement about your willingness to train promising candidates. It may yield a pool of possible talent for hard-to-fill vacancies caused by a skills gap.

Examine the past

When assessing a candidate's soft skills, start with their cover letter or resume. As previously noted, though, anybody can claim to possess these often-vague traits. Savvy applicants realize this problem and include specific examples to illustrate their competency. They don't just say they work well independently. Rather, they offer evidence of the situation and its results.

In many cases, you'll need to read between the lines. Looking for someone comfortable in a remote environment? Scrutinize her resume for potential, such as a history of telecommuting or performing contract work out of a home office.

Numerous employers today put a premium on finding life-long learners. People with a willingness to acquire new knowledge prove valuable as companies expand, technology progresses, and events such as the pandemic necessitate adjustments. Companies experiencing difficulty filling roles due to the skills gap also benefit from detecting individuals likely to be highly trainable.

"One great identifier of someone capable of being taught is to see whether they advanced in previous roles they held. If a person went from an entry-level position onto assistant manager and then manager, for example, you can be confident they were able to learn new skills at each stage of advancement," says Nerissa Zhang, founder and CEO of The Bright App.

Ask probing questions

Interviews serve as a great time to assess a potential candidate's soft skills in closer details. While this involves going beyond standards like "tell me about yourself," the effort will pay off.

“The soft skills necessary for success in 2021 are rooted in things like resilience, humility, intellectual curiosity, and emotional maturity. Ask questions that require the candidate to go a little deeper and talk about times when they have had to leverage those traits to get the job done,” says Kelly Chase, director of content marketing for Fracture.

A sample question Chase suggests is “Tell me about a time that a project that you were working on was not successful. What went wrong, how did you respond, and what would you do differently?”

“Not only will these types of questions give you a better chance to understand how a candidate tackles tough situations, but the way that they answer the questions can give you a lot of insight as well. Anyone can talk about their wins and successes, but it takes a level of humility and emotional maturity to be able to speak about times when things didn’t go your way. A candidate who has the self-awareness to talk about these situations and reflect on what they might have done differently likely has the soft skills that you are looking for,” Chase says.

Questions should get to the heart of the soft skills you’re interested in

Delve into any area you find important to becoming a successful member of the team.

Looking for leaders who share the organization’s commitment to building a tolerant workplace? Ask prospective managers about a challenge they faced and overcame in the past regarding diversity issues.

Want a glimpse into how someone operates in a remote setting? Ask about the obstacles he has faced while working from home and the solutions developed.

Remember, you’re not out to find “perfect” people who never experience difficulties; you’re interested in individuals with the soft skills in their arsenal to tackle an uneasy, often-changing world.

Consider a test run

Finally, look for opportunities in which candidates can demonstrate the soft skills you're assessing in a real-life setting. Try teaching a promising applicant lacking a hard skill a task or two to see how well he grasps unfamiliar information. Give a potential remote worker a short assignment and see how she delivers.

Hill says he has had success having the candidate participate in a collaboration session or project with his existing team. (This could be done virtually nowadays if unable to gather together for safety reasons.)

"Along with seeing their skills in action, you may see a different side of the candidate when they're interacting with potential future co-workers instead of a hiring manager. This also lets you bring your existing employees into the hiring process, taking advantage of their insights about the applicant's skills and fitness for the team," Hill says.

Or, try hypothetical problem-solving. Present the candidate with a scenario she'll likely face in the applied-for position and see how she addresses it. You'll see how someone might react to sudden workplace changes or remain productive in a remote environment. This enables you to hire with greater confidence during what promises to be a challenging year.

How to apply diverse hiring practices to your business

Examining diverse hiring practices encompasses everything from advertising open positions to hiring the selected candidate. Each step from your advertising copy, to your hiring software and screening tests, carries potential legal pitfalls. But there's also opportunity. Cast your net wide enough and take some risk, and you will attract the best talent. Rely only on word-of-mouth and recommendations, and your workforce will be stuck in the past.

Hiring practices do not exist in a vacuum. In the wake of the #MeToo and Black Lives Matter movements, many companies have launched diversity initiatives. Prominent corporate leaders have signed the CEO Action Pledge, promising to overhaul corporate culture and welcome women and minority candidates. But pledges only do so much. Without scrutinizing your current practices and rooting out those that perpetuate discrimination, change won't happen.

Concepts such as resume bias, systemic discrimination, and pay history bias only recently entered the HR lexicon. They have, however, become weapons in plaintiff attorneys' arsenals. If your hiring practices haven't kept up, you may face thousands in legal fees and settlements. Plus, you won't end up with that diverse, talented workforce you need to compete today.

Hiring is the first company process applicants experience and it tells applicants a lot about your company culture. Is the process welcoming or overly bureaucratic? Do the websites hosting your ads screen out protected employee classes disproportionately? Does the wording in your ads discourage some workers from applying? Does your equal opportunity statement advertise the opposite by leaving out newly protected classes?

Here's a step-by-step look at the hiring process and what to watch out for when trying to craft a more diversity-friendly approach.

Diverse hiring practices start with job descriptions

You cannot begin the hiring process without first crafting a job description. It's impossible to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) without a job description that outlines essential and non-essential tasks. Likewise, the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) allows leave for employees with serious health conditions. Serious health conditions are those that prevent an employee from performing essential functions of a job. The job description provides those. Make sure those job descriptions welcome disabled applicants by identifying essential functions and inviting accommodation requests.

While managers can often provide a good base job description, input from employees who have held the position is essential. Include workers whose position interacts with that job as well. Get job description input from as many employees as possible. This makes it less likely you'll omit a key part of the job.

Because duties change over time, you should update job descriptions regularly to ensure they accurately describe what workers do. Job descriptions are the first documents requested by lawyers representing workers, and by the administrative agencies that enforce the law. If you don't have one or it isn't accurate, your case is off to a bad start.

Job descriptions should include:

- The job title.
- The job's essential functions, such as whether it requires heavy lifting, and if so, how often.
- Secondary or infrequent duties.
- Job performance standards, such as sales quotas.
- Who is responsible for supervision.
- Whom the worker supervises.
- Any special training, experience, or education required for the position, including special certifications, degrees, or skills.

If your diversity plan includes wanting to close the skills gap, the job description can help. Is your organization open to training promising applicants? State it here. Highlight any skills gap programs you have or plan on launching. Repeat the information in the job advertisements too.

Job advertisements should reflect commitments to diversity

Once you have a good job description, the next step in implementing more diverse hiring practices is to look at the job listing.

The job listing or advertisement should include the following:

- Job title and number.
- Location of the position.
- Hours of work and whether travel/overtime is required.
- Salary range and a brief explanation of benefits.
- Description of essential functions of the job and experience and educational qualifications required.
- Instructions and deadline for submitting applications.
- An equal employment opportunity statement and a notice to disabled applicants about accommodation requests.

Note that your equal employment opportunity statement should be up-to-date. Last June, the Supreme Court expanded that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act's ban on sex discrimination. It now includes discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation. Leaving this out will subject your company to ridicule and discourage qualified, talented applicants seeking a modern, progressive workplace.

Additionally, consider the wording in your job description and how it may read to different diverse candidates. Encouraging employees with a "good sense of humor" to apply may seem harmless. However, a minority candidate may see that as an indicator of a toxic culture where tolerance of inappropriate jokes and behavior is expected.

AI systems may not be all they promise to be

Several new software programs claim to eliminate employment discrimination by using artificial intelligence (AI). It's tempting to 'outsource' your diversity recruiting to AI. Be forewarned: While a promising field, some programs may suffer from the garbage in, garbage out syndrome. Regardless of how objective AI promises to be, it must still make judgments based on human criteria. If the criteria contain biases, AI merely automates the bias.

Several states have moved to limit or regulate AI in hiring. In January 2020, Illinois passed legislation regulating how businesses can use AI in video job interviews. The law requires companies to notify candidates that the technology will be used to analyze their video interviews. Employers must disclose to candidates how the AI works. The candidate must consent to be evaluated by AI before any interview occurs. Other states are currently considering similar legislation. A New York City proposal goes even farther. It would regulate AI use in hiring, compensation, and other HR-related decisions. It would also require AI developers to validate their products by showing they don't discriminate.

This is a quickly changing field. Before choosing to implement an AI product as part of your diverse hiring practices, consult with counsel to determine what is permitted in your area.

Perpetuating discrimination in the hiring process

Basing job offers on past decisions can create legal jeopardy for employers. That's true even though a different employer is responsible for those decisions. If you're not careful, you inherit them. Recent legal and legislative initiatives have targeted employer's use of salary history as discriminatory. Critics argue the practice affects women disproportionately. Women have traditionally been paid less than men for similar work. Basing current salary on past salary may perpetuate past discrimination. Currently, 19 states and 21 municipalities ban employers from asking applicants for their salary history.

A similar situation happens when employers ask previous employers about absenteeism. This question often triggers a response that reveals protected leave usage. Several federal laws prohibit employers from penalizing employees for taking protected leave, workers' compensation claims, and disability. Employers who inquire about an applicant's attendance record should bear that in mind. It's best not to ask at all.

Criminal background and credit checks

The Ban-the-box movement calls on employers to not ask about criminal convictions on job applications. In locations where the ban has passed, employers must make a conditional job offer before requesting criminal records. The EEOC has long held that criminal background checks disproportionately impact minority applicants. They argue that even if the applicant has a conviction, the employer should consider the following when hiring:

- The nature and gravity of the offense.
- The amount of time that passed since it was committed.
- The nature of the job held or sought. This analysis is highly fact-specific.

To date, 35 states and over 150 municipalities prohibit public employers from asking job applicants about their criminal history. In fourteen states and 20 municipalities, the prohibition applies to private employers as well.

The EEOC has also long held that using credit scores in hiring disproportionately affects minorities. Following that lead, the City of Philadelphia recently passed an ordinance banning the practice in most cases.

Avoiding backlash for diverse hiring practices

Advances for women and minorities have increased in recent years. During the pandemic, one consequence became apparent. Those last hired were often first laid-off. And that means female and minority workers have once again seen progress erased. Plus, employers may face charges of reverse discrimination if they base hiring decisions on setting diversity goals rather than qualifications. Hiring a less qualified minority candidate violates Title VII. Fortunately, there are several strategies that can legally allow employers to create a diverse workforce.

The first strategy is to look in the mirror. Talk to current minority employees and find out what issues they face. Are minorities represented in management in the

same numbers as other company positions? If not, examine promotion policies with an eye to finding discriminatory patterns.

The New York Times recently held focus groups for minority employees to understand the challenges they face. Management at the Times has pledged to address the concerns raised. It's part of an effort to make minority workers comfortable enough to discuss problems. Bottom line — a workplace where minority workers are comfortable may be the best recruiting tool.

Employers may also hold networking events and job fairs in minority areas when health conditions permit. In the meantime, asking minority workers for references to fill vacancies may help guide recruiting efforts.

Beyond the diversity initiative

Diversity initiatives that have pre-determined end dates are doomed to failure. The point is to change workplace culture so that it reflects the workforce. It will continue to evolve. If your organization doesn't keep up, it will miss the best talent.