

The Objective Approach: Candidate Evaluation



I hope you are enjoying a safe and busy summer!

Well here we are with the 4th and very crucial step in the recruitment process with being objective when selecting your next superstar!

Who among us can genuinely claim to be unbiased? Truthfully, we are all prone to subjective thinking, both as a defense mechanism and a legitimate way of making sense of a frequently challenging, rapidly changing world. What is subjectivity? Simply put, it is how your worldview and decision-making process is shaped by personal opinion. Conversely, objectivity is the ability to view facts on their own merits, unaffected by your particular likes and dislikes. Subjectivity often leads to cognitive bias. Biases in daily life are not necessarily a negative concept, as they serve the purpose of quick categorization of objects and ideas, and greatly improve the efficiency of our daily tasks. Making important decisions on the other hand is best done without any cognitive biases or one-sided perceptions, as this may lead us to not see the full picture, which consequently lead to mistakes which cost us time and money to correct.

As recruiters and hiring managers, we often focus the bulk of our energy on finding qualified candidates and getting them to apply, but that's only half the battle. Whether you wind up with two or 200 qualified applicants, you still face the critical task of interviewing them to decide which one is best to hire.

Here, I'll share a structured, strategic approach for evaluating interview candidates and discuss why such an approach is so important in today's market and don't forget that [go2HR](#) has an abundance of great information and an industry specific [HR Tool Kit](#) with downloadable resources!!

Importance of an Effective Candidate Evaluation Process:

Speed

Scheduling and conducting interviews are one of the most time-consuming parts of hiring, with hiring managers/recruiters allocating a whopping two-thirds of their time to it. At the same time, competitive candidates expect a near-instant response to their application and consistent, timely follow-up throughout the hiring process. This means time is of the essence.

A streamlined candidate evaluation process allows you to move through interviews quickly, so you don't miss out on top candidates who are likely in the running for positions at multiple businesses.

Scalability

When you're a small company hiring for just a handful of positions a year, you might be able to manage without having a methodical evaluation framework. Once you begin to grow beyond that, however, you need a more systematic approach.

Following a candidate selection process that's the same every time conserves resources and ensures that the process can be duplicated whether you're making a few or dozens of hires.

Objectivity

Interview bias leads to more homogenous teams, which is detrimental to creativity and innovation. An objective candidate evaluation process helps you assess candidates on an equal scale while minimizing personal biases that can lead to hiring mistakes.

Accuracy

At the end of the day, you need to select a candidate with the skills and qualifications to do the job. A thorough evaluation process ensures that you get the right person on the first try so that you don't have to waste time and money repeating the hiring process all over again.

How to Evaluate Candidates:

Evaluate against the job

This is a key concept that even seasoned interviewers get wrong: evaluating candidates against one another instead of the job description. Yes, it's important to compare how candidates stack up against each other, but this is impossible to do with any level of accuracy when you're working with a large candidate pool.

The better approach is to first evaluate interview candidates against a fixed set of criteria for the job, which we'll talk more about below. Only then, once you've narrowed it down to the top two or three contenders can you assess them side by side.

Establish assessment criteria

Create an assessment matrix to evaluate candidates on various aspects, and use a scoring system to assign them a numeric score in each area. Once it's time to narrow down your choices, these scores make it easy to weigh candidates against one another.

If multiple interviewers are involved in the process, everyone should use the same matrix and rating scale.

Key Assessment Criteria to Incorporate:

Skills

This is one of the most important assessment criteria and one of the most straightforward to evaluate. Do they or do they not have the skills necessary to do the job?

Assess both hard and soft skills, as these both play into a candidate's fit for a role. Consider using skills assessments to supplement your interview questions and more accurately judge a candidate's abilities.

Relevance of background

Look at the positions the candidate has held prior to this one. Did they employ similar skill sets? Do they serve as a strong foundation for the candidate to build upon? What were they able to achieve in these roles?

Examine their background from a holistic view, not just the most recent one to two jobs, to understand how their total experience might serve them in this new position.

Education and training

For some jobs, like positions in management or flight attendant, specialized training may be a minimum requirement to complete the duties of the job. Other positions may be more flexible with the type and level of education that's acceptable.

Look at their education basics, like degree completion and major, as well as details like specific coursework and additional technical credentials.

Career objectives

While this criterion isn't typically specified in the job description, it can play a big role in a candidate's success or failure in a position. Do their professional goals align with your organizational mission? Are they on a path that sets them up for a successful future at your company?

Culture fit

Culture fit is notoriously one of the most difficult hiring criteria to uncover. It's also frequently mischaracterized as an evaluation of the candidate's personality—i.e. whether or not they're similar to other members of the team—but this isn't an accurate predictor of new hire success.

Instead, culture fit criteria should be based on whether the candidate is in alignment with how your company operates. Ask questions that will shed light on their values, work style, and communication preferences. Do they prefer to work alone or on a team? Do they prefer to address problems head-on, or handle them with a softer touch?

Though these criteria have nothing to do with skills, they can make or break whether a candidate is a right fit to succeed on a particular team.

General impressions

While it's important to weed out personal bias from the evaluation process, there's still a place for the interviewer's general impressions of a candidate as it can help you draw conclusions about their broader fit for the role.

Take the candidate's attitude, for example. Did they come in with a warm smile and a strong handshake, or did they seem indifferent and cold? If they're interviewing for a customer-facing role, the latter probably isn't a good sign.

How the candidate presents themselves, like whether they seem prepared for the interview, whether they came dressed in appropriate attire, and their body language can also serve as useful data points in your evaluation.

Salary expectations

Asking about salary expectations is necessary to determine whether you can afford a candidate. If you'll need to expand your budget to acquire a top pick, this is good information to know during the evaluation process.

Weaknesses

You're not just assessing candidates on the skills they possess; it's also important to ascertain which criteria they lack. Allocate space in your assessment metric to note areas of weakness, like a lack of leadership experience or a missing technical credential, that could tip the scales in who you hire.

Get a Second Opinion

For many roles, two (or more) heads are better than one in evaluating interview candidates. Consider using interview techniques like panels and job auditions to bring more decision-makers into the hiring process and sharpen your evaluations.

As a final check, consider asking yourself the following questions before making a final hiring decision:

1. Will the candidate's knowledge, skills, and abilities fill any gaps on the team?
2. Will the candidate help create a dynamic, diverse work environment?
3. Will the rest of the employees be excited about this candidate joining the team? Will this candidate be the right fit for the team?
4. Will this candidate be a brand ambassador and contribute to the success of the company culture?
5. Is this the best candidate, and should we stop searching?

If you answered 'no' to any of these questions, you might want to re-evaluate or consult with your team before making a decision. Take your time to select the best candidate. Settling for unqualified candidates can put your business at risk.

Taking the time to find and keep a great employee can have an enormously positive impact. Invest the time to interview thoroughly, and you will see the positive impact it has on customer service and your bottom line in the long term. Once you find the right candidate, move quickly to make an offer or risk losing them to another employer!

Join me next month as we continue the recruitment process and take a look at:
"Interviews 101 and Beyond!"

If you have any questions or if I can help in anyway please reach out, I am your HR on speed dial!

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