

How to get the most out of pre-screening interviews

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 résumé.

For starters, you may want to verify the 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 any unclear items on the résumé. 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 their current job seem unusual for their job title. Ask about the discrepancy. You might discover either someone who exaggerated on the résumé or a superstar who performs well beyond their 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 them express themselves, including how well they communicate and think on their 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 calls for mostly independent work.

- **What unique skills do you bring to this position?** This offers the person an opportunity to sell themselves 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 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 what this person values in a workplace jibe 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 the 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 to the comments before conducting the formal interview.

