

Hiring

How to Hire Someone You've Never Met in Person

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Summary. The shift to remote hiring, whether voluntary or not, has brought with it not only new opportunities but new challenges as well. When we are making hiring decisions, we've traditionally done that only after having sufficient time interacting with potential new... [more](#)

Hiring has always been one of the most vital elements of a leader's role. Finding the right person to do a job is tough and likely the single biggest decision most managers make because of how it impacts the

team's success or failure. Add to it the complexities of hiring remotely, without really meeting someone in-person, and you've got yourself a unique challenge.

As a hiring manager, you'll likely agree that most of us prefer to make a hiring decision only after having sufficient time interacting with potential new hires, mostly in-person. We don't just want to know if the candidates have the needed knowledge, skills, and experience, we want to be able to understand if we can work well with them. And we assume that means getting to know them in-person. But the coronavirus pandemic changed that for us. The shift to remote hiring, whether voluntary or not, brings not only new opportunities but new challenges as well. While the good news is that hiring has largely become location-agnostic so you have a wider talent pool to dip in to, there are many new variables that you need to keep in mind to find someone who's going to be a great new addition to your team.

To improve your chances of finding the right person and give them the best chance of success as a new teammate, there are a few adjustments you should consider.

Interview on multiple platforms

It's tempting to assume that since you used to interview candidates face to face, just switching to conducting interviews via video is a sufficient way to hire remotely. But in a remote environment, very little of your communication with teammates, or their communication with each other, is synchronous and face-to-digital-face. So, if the goal is to use the interview process to accurately evaluate how someone's communication style matches the team's, then you'll likely need to vary the platforms or communication mediums you're using during the interview process.

Matt Mullenweg, founder of Automattic, used to conduct final-round interviews with all job candidates via online chat. He didn't know gender or ethnicity of anyone he interviewed and just relied the

words on the screen. In this 2014 HBR article, Mullenweg explained how this process was as close to a double-blind process as you can get. What he was looking for was passion and cultural fit.

For you, this might mean one round of interviews is held on video, but another is held via email, and another on an audio-only call. You should include whichever media your team uses to collaborate in the interview process. You might even consider giving candidates a few questions ahead of time and asking them to record answers in 2-minute videos (which evaluates not just how concisely they can provide information, but also how well they follow instructions). These questions can be technical or situational, but they should be questions asked uniformly of all candidates, so that you can compare videos later.

Bring the whole team in

We've assumed for a long time that individual performance is the result of an individual's knowledge, skills, and abilities. But the more we research, the more we learn that there is more to it. Collaboration and team dynamics have a significant impact on individual performance, since even individual performance is affected by the team you're serving on and the resources that team (and the whole company) can provide.

Even in a remote context, the team that new hires join will have a dramatic impact on their short-term and long-term performance, so it's worth involving as many people from their future team in the hiring process as you can reasonably fit. This might mean letting certain teammates conduct a one-on-one interview with the potential hire. Or you might want to put together a panel with a few members of your team and conduct one informational interview. If you're capturing text responses or video answers like in the above suggestion, then share those answers with the existing team so that you can get their feedback before making a final decision.

Fully-distributed company Parabol takes this a step further. During the “cultural fit” round of their interview process, they make sure to include at least one representative from every team in the interview.

Add a trial project

The ultimate way to involve the team in the hiring decision and evaluate how candidates work with the team is to have them ... work with the team. Many companies use trials, auditions, work samples, or something similar to get a feel for the work styles and fit of candidates. Ideally, this isn't a large and pivotal task; it's not about getting free work out of candidates. But it is a significant enough project to provide a chance to observe and collaborate with each candidate. You could even design the trial project as a means to gauge adaptability or creative thinking by intentionally leaving out a resource or instruction step and observing how the challenge is handled.

At fully-distributed company Zapier, trials are used in the interview process for a variety of functions. Potential software engineers work on the company's product while potential marketing hires may collaborate on an article for the company's blog. Some companies have gone so far as to offer paid, long-term trials to candidates, but for most, a simpler project that only takes a few hours is likely sufficient to judge how candidates work and if the team can work well with them.

Communicate expectations early and often

The mere fact that one might need to interview and hire remotely has come as a surprise to many leaders, but as companies navigate a gradual (and probably hybrid) return to the office, there are bound to be a lot more surprises in store. When it comes to just how remote new hires will actually be, make sure to communicate that to candidates early and often in the process. If your organization has documentation around remote work, share as much of it as you can in the job listing and initial interviews. If not, then at least do what you can to communicate what's known about the company's remote plans

or what's being discussed in terms of future policies. You don't want to hire a stellar remote teammate only to have her leave six months later when she's told she can only be remote two days per week.

In the same way, be upfront with expectations for communication and other team norms. If your team has a social contract or working agreement that helps establish norms for collaboration, share as much of it as you can as a sort of "user's manual" for new teammates.

When you do make the offer, and it's accepted, make sure to prioritize connection with the team and the whole organization when onboarding. Yes, you've got to get the paperwork done. But that doesn't mean that it takes priority over building a connection between yourself and your new team member, or between the new hire and the rest of the team. You could schedule a welcome video chat for the whole team to meet and greet their new colleague. Or, ask each teammate to write a welcome email or record a video. If you followed the suggestions above, then many teammates already met the new hire during the interview process. So, ask the team to share what stood out to them and why they're looking forward to working together.

If it sounds like the common thread through each of these ideas is "team fit," that's because it is. Despite what it may seem, remote work makes teamwork even more important — which makes considering team fit even more important. Remote workers don't work alone; they work alone together.

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