Hiring and Interviews

Formats has strong opinions on hiring processes. This document collects our team's principles and process for interviewing. It is a starting point, open to iteration as our team and hiring goals change.

Principles[1]

1) Decisions should be objective and free of bias.
Hiring decisions should be made using a clear evaluation system, not gut feelings. Humans are good at gathering information, but bad at ignoring bias. This harms candidates from diverse backgrounds.

2) Hiring should be standardized.
Candidates deserve a consistent experience and consistent evaluation. We cannot meaningfully evaluate people if we treat each one differently.

3) Processes should be streamlined.
We should have the minimum process that allows us to attract and evaluate great talent. We need to be efficient and respect the candidate's time.

4) Yieldmo is not Google.
We cannot afford to waste resources considering hundreds of people for a role. We need to stay humble and make compromises on requirements.

5) Hiring should constantly be iterated on and improved.
The hiring process is like a software product. We should iterate on the process to improve it over time.

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[1] Inspired by [Buffer](#) and [Triplebyte](#)

Process

Each of the following steps happens in order 1) Role Writing 2) Job Description 3) Choosing an Interview Team and finally 4) Interview Rounds. These steps are all required, even for an intern or opportunistic interview.

Role Writing

Only write a job description after answering these questions:

1) **What are the objectives of the role?**
2) **What goals need to be achieved a year from now for us to consider this a successful hire?**
3) **For a candidate to accomplish those goals, what do they need to do during their first 30 days?**
4) **What are the traits, skills, and qualifications this person will need to be successful?**

Job Description

The hiring manager typically writes an initial job description that the interview team edits. Pare down unnecessary requirements to the essential skills for the role. If we are seeing many unqualified candidates late in the pipeline, we can consider adding more requirements later.

When writing the job description, pay close attention to inclusion[2]. The language you use to describe the role is just as important as the requirements[3].

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[2] How to write inclusive job descriptions:
https://medium.com/@meb_57007/writing-effective-and-inclusive-job-descriptions-ace2a302f30a
https://www.glassdoor.com/employers/blog/10-ways-remove-gender-bias-job-listings/
https://thinkgrowth.org/your-job-descriptions-are-hurting-your-hiring-pipeline-52b5a406fb8f

[3] https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=gendered-wording-in-job-adverts.pdf

Interview Team

It is tempting to have a large interview team with every major stakeholder the role interacts with. Instead, choose the minimum group of people that can assess the candidate's abilities. Everyone on the interview team should have a stake in the candidate's success. Usually, this means that everyone on the interview team should be someone the candidate will interact with on a daily basis. It is likely that those who are involved in the initial role writing will not all be involved in an interview round.

In the case of a referral, anyone who knows the candidate should not be involved in an interview round.

Interview Rounds

Each round should have a specific objective[4]. For example: "skill in debugging with Javascript." Every question should be documented, including expected answers where relevant. Documenting questions reduces bias and allows us to swap out an interviewer if the main interviewer is not available. Avoid all-or-nothing questions that expect a specific solution — work through several smaller problems instead.

Each round's objective should be different from all other rounds. If there are two similar rounds (eg. "works well with designers" and "understands design process"), eliminate one.

Avoid trying to evaluate "culture fit." This is often shorthand for "this person is like me" or "I want to be friends with them."[5] Neither is required for a candidate to succeed, and both limit our team's diversity. Instead, evaluate what the candidate will add to our team, and how they think about solving problems with others.

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[4] Example interview rounds:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1-xSgPuxHikpxXxpZ_HtkoR-XwKMuOOMczFDqnojnaHM/edit
https://docs.google.com/document/d/18dUL3t4PGKwpS11nAvcqrGfH_P9PZ2PsswOJkrm0uEI/edit

[5] https://open.buffer.com/culture-fit/

Phone Interviews

A phone interview is about 1) weeding out obviously unqualified candidates and 2) making sure they understand the role at Yieldmo. Complex questions are not a good fit for a phone interview.

In-person Interviews

The interview is as much about selling the candidate on the role and team as anything else. Always treat candidates with respect and demonstrate that you are easy to work with.[6] Avoid giving negative feedback during the interview, and talk through problems rather than letting the candidate stare silently for more than a few minutes. Leave at least 5 minutes at the end of each round for the candidate's questions.

Stick to the schedule. If someone is taking more than their allotted time, the next interviewer should knock on the door to let them know their time is up. If the candidate arrives early, use that time to give the candidate a tour of the office and get them settled in the interview room. If they arrive late, adjust the schedule to end later.

A day of onsite interviews ends with HR or the hiring manager selling the role and informing the candidate about next steps. This is not one of the interview rounds, and should not affect the hiring decision unless there is a major red flag.

Other Rounds

Other rounds might include a take-home exercise or an informal coffee with the candidate. As with all other interviews — the goals, interviewer, and evaluation must be consistent.

In all rounds, it is never appropriate to ask about a candidate's age, ethnicity, or personal life.[7] In addition, asking a candidate about their salary history is illegal in NYC.[8] It is fine to ask a candidate what pronouns they prefer.

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[6] Some common interview mistakes: https://getlighthouse.com/blog/interview-mistakes/

[7] https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/

[8] https://www1.nyc.gov/site/cchr/media/salary-history.page

Feedback Writing

Each interviewer writes their evaluation of the candidate, highlighting specific examples to support the evaluation.[9] This evaluation rates the candidate a "strong yes," "weak yes," "weak no," or "strong no." Intentionally, there is no neutral rating. This evaluation should not be shared with any other member of the interview team until the feedback meeting. Sharing feedback early can cause people to consciously or unconsciously change their opinion of the candidate.

Feedback Meeting

Read out the feedback from each interviewer and discuss the candidate. If the team is mostly positive on the candidate (eg. all "yes," "strong yes," or "weak no" without major red flags), we should extend an offer. The feedback meeting should happen as soon as possible after the interview, so we can get back to the candidate as quickly as possible. The recruiter or referrer for the candidate should attend the feedback meeting.

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[9] Example evaluation: *"Weak no.*
He was competent technically, but somewhat hand-wavy about his solutions. He was good at thinking things through from a server-side perspective, but weaker on Javascript concepts and web development. For example, when asked about debugging problems with a/b testing he did not mention anything about how he might debug the frontend code. He clearly had deep experience with C# and server-side development, and so some of his answers on specific parts of the question were impressive, but performance was inconsistent. He was able to solve the main question, but we had to skip past/simplify a few of the pieces of the problem. He asked good questions about how the team works and how we build things."