

## Best Practices for Giving Feedback to Rejected Candidates

Offering feedback to rejected candidates should be part of the workflow of your hiring process. Here's why—and best practices for doing so.

“Give them a call, thank them for their time, and give some actionable feedback or at least insight into why the decision was made”

We get it: having to tell someone that you're not offering them the role they've invested both time and emotional energy into is not an enviable position. It's not easy to be on either side of bad news; but when done well, giving feedback to rejected candidates benefits everyone involved. It gives talent actionable advice that makes them even stronger candidates over the long term; and it does a world of good for your talent brand—because you've humanized the candidate experience through to the end, with empathy and compassion and goodwill.

Of course, you likely won't be able to give feedback on every application sent your way; but if a candidate has engaged in anything from a phone screen to an onsite interview to a technical test, they deserve some acknowledgement of their time and effort. A good rule of thumb is that the more time the candidate has spent in process, the more feedback you should give.

94% of candidates want to receive feedback after they've interviewed with you. They don't want to be left wondering or guessing what they did wrong—especially if they were under the impression that the interview went well. And they want to know where they can improve, so they can do better in their next interview with their next company.

It improves your candidates. Providing interview feedback allows candidates to grow professionally. We hear what you're thinking: why would you spend valuable time helping the candidates who are going to find work elsewhere improve? Because when candidates are offered constructive feedback, they're 4x more likely to consider your company for a future opportunity. So think of this current work as benefiting your future pipeline.

It improves candidate experience—and therefore, your talent brand. Offering feedback after an interview process shows that your company values the professional development not only of its future employees, but of the talent market as a whole—and of them, specifically. This fosters goodwill and enhances the candidate experience. You know the numbers: 72% of talent will shout out their bad candidate experiences; 82% of talent say they wouldn't work at a company with a bad reputation; 64% of talent say they'd be less likely to be customers of your business after a bad candidate experience. But the reverse is also true: positive experiences increase the likelihood that talent will talk you up to their networks, purchase your products, and apply for open roles.

It strengthens your hiring process. Having a structured system in place for delivering feedback means you have a detailed process for sorting out finalists. It demands clarity on what makes a good candidate, because you're forced to articulate why certain candidates don't make the cut. And the more clarity you have on what makes a good candidate, the better you are at spotting them and inviting them in. Identifying patterns in your candidate feedback can also help you observe weak spots in your hiring process.

## How to Give Feedback to Unsuccessful Candidates

### 1. Standardize Your Process

Thing one before you pick up the phone to give any candidate feedback is to ensure you have a system in place. Your interview process should be standardized so that you're asking the same set of questions of every candidate; and your interviewers should take careful notes immediately after every interview so you can stick to the facts and ensure the insights you provide each candidate align with the role's qualifications and demands.

## **2. Be Timely**

The moment you know you won't be moving a candidate to the next round, they should know too. It's nerve-wracking waiting on career news; and even bad news dissolves the anxiety of the unknown and allows candidates to move on—which may mean accepting other offers that are on the table. A best practice is to contact candidates within 48 hours after their interview. Don't put them in a position to delay or turn down other offers in the hopes of working with you; and certainly don't wait until the new hire has signed or begun working for you.

## **3. Use the Telephone**

We know: it's tempting to avoid a real-time conversation when you're delivering bad news. But there are a few reasons why a phone call is essential. The first, most obvious, is the humanity of it. The time and effort you take to deliver the news personally—as bad as it may initially feel for the candidate—will translate into professionalism and respect. It gives the candidate an opportunity to ask questions. It gives you the opportunity to ask for feedback on your own process (more on that shortly). It makes it more difficult for rejected candidates to use your words against you—which they can more easily do if the rejection is in writing. Finally, it's what candidates want.

## **4. Be Specific and Stick to the Facts**

Once you've delivered the bad news (“we’ve decided not to move forward with you for this position”), ask if they want feedback (“and I’m open to chatting for a few minutes about why—but only if you think those insights from the hiring team would be valuable to you”). You should only ever give feedback to rejected candidates who are open to it. Though if you offer it like this, most of them will. Your feedback should deliver meaningful, actionable advice that the candidate can take and apply to improve themselves for their next interview—wherever that next interview happens to be. Stick to the facts of what happened in the interview; and wherever possible, correlate your feedback with the job description tied to the position.

## **5. Be Tactful**

This means a few things. Pay attention to whether you come off as critical or condescending—and check yourself if you do. “I wasn’t fully convinced by [element X] of your presentation” sounds a lot more generous (and specific!) than “Your presentation wasn’t convincing.” Remember that it’s not just the language, but the tone, that matters. Talk to the candidate like you would a friend—candidly but gently, as if everything you say is in their best interest, with genuine concern for both their feelings and their futures. And don’t argue. The vast majority of candidates will take your feedback well; but if you get a defensive response from a candidate rather than a real desire to understand, have an exit strategy in place.

## **6. Don’t Compare Candidates**

The candidate knows they didn’t get hired because you found a stronger candidate; that’s a given. There’s no need to refer to “the stronger candidate” you found who “showed better leadership skills” than they did. Remember: the point of the feedback is to help the candidate improve. Knowing someone else has better leadership skills is too vague to be useful—and the comment can

come off as insulting, or as an “easy out” for you. Keep the feedback focused on this candidate, their performance in the interview, and their relationship to the role. How can they become a stronger candidate in the future?

## **7. Try a “Praise Sandwich”**

Feedback doesn’t just show a candidate where they need to improve; it also emphasizes what they do well so they can keep doing it. Your candidate certainly has strengths. After all, they got the interview in the first place because there was a lot about them that you felt enthusiastic about. Reminding them of these things gives them the encouragement to move forward in their search, and lets them know what to continue to highlight in themselves.

The praise sandwich begins on a positive, offers critical feedback and advice for improvement, and ends on a positive again. Thank the candidate for the opportunity to get to know them. Recognize the time they took to prepare. Point out their strengths and tell them what you value about their experience.

## **8. Speak Only to What the Candidate can Change and Offer Action Items**

In offering feedback to rejected candidates, your mantra should be: “actionable critiques only.” If your evaluation refers to something that’s out of the candidate’s hands, it’ll feel like a personal attack rather than a reflection on their experience or performance. This means personality and “cultural fit” are off the table. Skill sets can change. Attentions and awareness can change. Some behaviors can be changed. But don’t point to something essential to the candidate’s character as the reason you’re passing on them.

## **9. Ask for Feedback from Rejected Candidates**

Feedback is a two-way street. Ask rejected candidates to assess your hiring process. How was the interview for them? What did they appreciate? Was there anything they were disappointed by, or would have liked to see done differently? This is a place to gather valuable insights to pass on to your hiring manager and interview teams to iterate on, and strengthen, your process. Maybe you ask them for this feedback over the phone and record their answers. Maybe you let them know that a candidate experience survey is coming their way, you value their opinions, and you’d be grateful if they’d be candid in their answers. Candidate experience improves by 148% when candidates are asked to give feedback on their interview process.