MCQUAIG PRESENTS

THE QUICK GUIDE TO HIRING REMOTELY

Introduction

Finding the right people to hire is never an easy task but when you have to do so while keeping your distance it can be even more challenging. While hiring and interviewing in a remote context is a little more complicated, it's not impossible. One of the key things to remember when bringing on new staff in a remote setting is that things need to be handled a little differently. You can't approach a virtual interview the same way you approach an in person one. In fact, many of your usual hiring and onboarding tactics might be less useful in a remote context. That doesn't mean there's no way forward, but it means that you might need to adjust both your thinking and your approach to talent acquisition in order to make a successful hire.

So what can you do to alter your strategy and increase the odds of finding the right person to bring onboard, even without meeting them in person? Turns out, there are a number of tips and tricks you can utilize that will help you make a stronger hiring decision. While it's always preferable to meet your candidate in real life before you hire them, you can still make great hires even when that's not possible. Throughout this eBook we'll show you how to adjust your strategy in order to hire and onboard more effectively in a virtual world.

Did you know?
Remote work has increased in popularity by 140% in the past 15 years[1]

Remote work is here to stay

There are many reasons to turn to remote hiring. Sometimes, like with our current pandemic situation, there are external factors that limit your ability to interact with others. Other times, you may need a skill set that you can't find in your city. You could also need to hire someone in an area you don't currently operate in, such as a sales rep who may need to live in a different part of the world. **Regardless of why you are looking to hire at a distance, remote colleagues can bring a unique perspective to their teams.**

Now more than ever before people are relying on working from home but even before the pandemic, remote work was a popular option. In fact, 62% of employees worked from home occasionally before the pandemic even started and it's easy to understand why.[2] Working remotely allows employees to have more flexibility in an increasingly complex world which helps working parents, elder caregivers, students, and more balance their competing responsibilities. It also provides for a quieter atmosphere which can help employees focus on projects more effectively and work at a faster pace. In fact, remote work can be such a preferable option that employees in this category sometimes work even more than their in-office counterparts with the average work day clocking in at 9.75 hours.[3] So as technology increases our ability to connect and collaborate virtually, we'll likely see remote work become more and more normalized within our culture of work.

What needs to change when hiring remotely?

If remote work is here to stay, then it stands to reason HR or hiring managers need to become more familiar with remote hiring. Hiring at a distance does not mean just doing the same old things but in front of a screen rather than a person. Instead, consider the following factors that will give your hiring process a better chance of success.

Keep interviews at a distance: Right off the bat, it's important to commit to keeping every part of the hiring process remote. With your office sitting empty, it might be tempting to try in person interviews. After all, you could sit 6 feet apart inside the office right? But keep in mind that your candidate may be reliant on public transit or may be quarantining with someone in a vulnerable population. If you can, fight the urge to meet your candidate in real life and focus on the parts of the hiring process you can control. Think about your questions in advance, touch base with anyone else who needs input on the hiring process and sort out how you'll be coordinating at a distance. While there is a learning curve to remote hiring, it can be just as effective as doing it in person.

Remember candidate experience: It can be hard to think about candidate experience when you're not even going to be in the same room with someone but it's still a necessary part of hiring.[4] Try to put yourself in the candidate's shoes. They may have recently lost their job. They might be new to the virtual interview process themselves. Or they might be facing other stressors. Keep that in mind and try to make the process as warm and inviting as possible. This could include sending them emails before hand with information about the job or videos that depict the culture. Or you could put together a document of quick facts about office life to give the candidate a sense of what normalcy might look like. And remember to use a mix of email, phone, video, or text based communications to build rapport before the big video interview.

Look the part: Think about what the candidate will see when you meet online. We've heard lots of stories lately about professionals showing up to work in less than formal attire and an interview is not the time to test out your new hoodie or pj set. Think about what your style of dress in the office is and dress appropriately for the interview to give the candidate a sense of what they can expect to see and be a part of once the pandemic is over. This also counts for the background of your video call. Try to pick a spot for your interview that shows a tidy workspace, rather than plain walls or a messy closet. You want your candidate to be focused on you, not on what's behind you. Not to mention, you also want to project a professional environment, even if you can't be together. And quick hiring tip, look at your candidate's background too to see if it shows they have a reasonable space to work from that's free from distractions.

Assess your current strategy: What can change? If you usually have a long and drawn out hiring process, spend some time seeing if there's anything that can be updated or streamlined. Maybe you don't have to post on 20 talent channels but can limit your time to a handful. Or maybe instead of 4 interview rounds you adjust the way you conduct one or two. With unemployment rates hitting an all time high, candidates are hungry for work. If you're too slow, they will move on to companies who are able to respond faster. Be aware of the current hiring climate and adjust your strategy to be quicker and better organized. If you need to have multiple people interview a candidate, try to coordinate schedules and have a collective Zoom call. The goal is to think about what you need to make an informed decision and the fastest way you can achieve that goal. Then put that plan into action.

Don't forget about job descriptions: Yes, you may love your job description from five years ago that encapsulates everything you want in a new hire but is now really the time to trot it out? Think instead about what your current needs are in an employee. Maybe some of those buzzwords like looking for a candidate who's creative, has great problem-solving abilities, or thinks outside of the box are less important right now than newer critical skills like comfort with technology or the ability to self-manage. Does the candidate know how to use Zoom or Slack? Have they ever worked in a remote capacity before? Are they comfortable with daily video calls? Those are better areas to probe that are probably not on your old job description. So think about what you need from a candidate both in terms of when life is back to normal and right now in the immediate future and build your job description from there.

Use tools to assess skills or behaviour: If you don't use assessments or task-based tests to help identify the potential of your candidates, now's a great time to try them out. Assessments can help uncover a deeper level of information about a candidate including their personality and approach to work, their long term potential, and their range of skills or abilities. Adding an assessment component to your hiring strategy is easy to do remotely as most modern tests are now managed through online portals and reports are generated instantaneously with the click of a button. Information gathered from assessments can also inform better interview questions to help you get the most out of your virtual calls with a candidate.

Remember company culture: Your remote hire needs to feel like part of the team, even if the team is remote itself. One way to do this is to remember that culture needs to extend outside the office.[5] Company culture is all about creating a shared community of workers and it sets the tone for how open and trustworthy an office will be. During the interview process, you'll want to paint a picture for the candidate about what life is like during normal operations. Or, if the job will remain remote forever, what the office life is like and how that translates into the remote world. You want your new hire to understand what they are getting into so they don't feel disillusioned later. The clearer you can paint a picture of what the company culture looks like and how the candidate can expect to be included if hired, the better prepared your potential hire will feel.

Be compassionate: It bears repeating that candidates may be facing unusual challenges these days and a great interviewer should be cognizant of those types of realities. If a pet or toddler interrupts the interview, take it in stride. Everyone is doing the best they can and it's not fair to toss out great candidates just because they might be trapped in a house with a larger number of people than they normally would be. Interviews might have to be rescheduled to accommodate grocery shopping or changes in health. They might even have to be held at odd hours after the kids are asleep or before the work day gets started. Also be prepared for technological glitches along the way like dropped calls or screen freezes. Be flexible where you can and work with your candidate to schedule an interview that will allow both of you to collect the information you need.
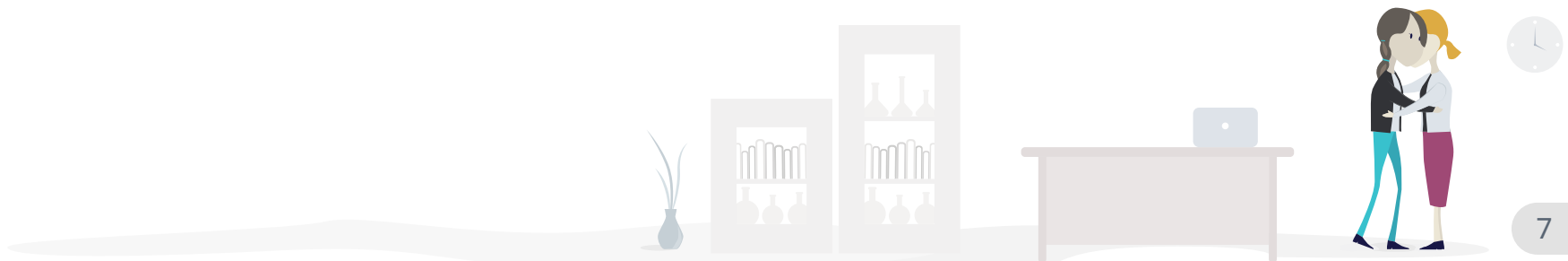
Potential questions to ask in a remote interview

Many of the questions you'd normally ask in an interview will still work in a remote context. In all situations, using a structured interview approach will help keep the interview process fair between candidates and increase your chances of learning real insights about your candidate and their potential. But when interviewing remotely, consider adding in a few additional questions to help get a sense of how your potential hire will work when left to their own devices. Here's a list of some questions to consider that can help you identify how effective your employee would be at home.

1. What time of day are your most productive?

2. How comfortable are you with using technology and video conferencing software?

3. How do you keep yourself on-track while at home?

4. Have you had any experience working in a remote capacity before?

5. What is your opinion on how team work changes in a remote context?

6. Are there any problems or areas of concern you have about working at a distance?

7. Would you be interested in working in the office, or in splitting your time, if that was a possibility?

8. What communication skills have you learned that will be useful on a remote team?

9. Tell me about your routine on a typical work-from-home day.

10. What do you do to switch work off at the end of the day when you're already at home?

What about onboarding?

Hiring and onboarding go hand in hand so once you make your great remote hire, what happens next? In the office, you'd probably structure their first week and do some formal training with the employee. But what about when you need to onboard someone you're not beside? Here are a few factors to keep in mind to ensure your virtual onboarding goes as well as your in-house training would.

Think about equipment: Before their first day, think about the equipment and technology your remote worker will need. Make a list of what equipment needs to be sent to the employee's home and try to get their technology to them before day one.[6] That can include sending a laptop, monitor, keyboard, mouse, headset, etc., but also think about anything else a new hire might need such as an employee handbook or training materials. Yes, those can be sent as a PDF but if you're getting a delivery together anyways, this is a nice chance to throwing something extra in the welcome box for your hire. A branded coffee mug or company magnet is never a bad idea either.

Schedule training carefully: Another factor of good onboarding is to create a schedule that won't overwhelm a new employee on their first day (or week). Being careful of people's time is even more important for virtual onboarding.[7] In person, it's easier to pick up on visual or body language cues that someone has hit their limit and needs a break. Through a screen, it's harder to read when employees zone out and a new hire might not feel comfortable enough to ask for a repeat. Think of virtual training in smaller, easier to digest segments.[8] That may drag training out longer, but smaller video meetings are easier for the new hire to follow and help them learn more efficiently.

What about onboarding?

Company and values: Discussing the company's values and culture needs to be explicit in virtual onboarding. Usually all new employees will get a generic spiel about who the company is and what mission they are trying to achieve. But much of the culture and daily life rhythm of working in an office is innately learned just by virtue of being a part of it. That can't happen in a remote setting, or at least not as easily, which means managers need to explain what the company values and what they are doing to keep their culture alive even at home. You want to give your new hire a sense of what life is like both right now and once things return to normal so they're invested to work through any bumps that they might meet working from home.

Gamification and making learning fun: If you have the ability, try to increase the engagement of your learning modules during virtual onboarding. Gamifying onboarding is a great way to keep employees on track as they are invested in moving through the learning levels. Even if you can't gamify your process, you can schedule fun breaks or interesting meetings to help your hire get introduced to the company. If your CEO or senior team have time, think about setting up virtual meet and greets.[9] Or consider setting up hiring "buddies" that can help advise the new hire on how to work remotely and tackle any lower level questions they may have.[10] Plus using the buddy system also helps combat the loneliness and isolation many remote employees might be struggling with.

What about onboarding?

Set up meetings: You might not be able to meet face to face anymore but that doesn't mean you should ease off meetings. Instead, you should touch base more often as your new hire might be feeling isolated or adrift. Set up introductory video meetings with every member of the team and try to stagger them over the course of the first week so new staff have something to do to break up their remote learning modules. This gives the team a chance to meet their new teammate and helps give everyone a sense of community and belonging.[11] Once introductions are over, make sure you're checking in every day to answer questions and help the employee find their footing.

Think long term: This is true of both in person and virtual onboarding but where possible, you should take a longer view approach to training. The odds of anyone learning all they need to know in a few days are slim. The odds of that happening right now in a remote setting where stressors outside of work are high are even smaller. Successful onboarding is usually counted in months, not days, and in a remote setting this is even more important. Don't throw everything at a new hire and then leave them to their own devices. Give them the information they'll need immediately in the first week and then schedule follow-up training over the next 1 to 3 months. Some of the best onboarding takes up to a year so don't rush the process and keep in touch with your new hire as much as you can.

Conclusion

It may not feel as comfortable to work from a distance but it's entirely possible to make great hires without meeting someone in person. Technology provides unique solutions on how to schedule people, sort through resumes, set up virtual interviews, debrief assessments, and onboard a new employee. The trick is making the most of the tools currently available and using them to create a talent acquisition process you're comfortable with. And remember to check for all the same factors you would in an in person interview including culture fit and personal motivation. You want to find a candidate who is just as effective at home as they are in the office.

Once you've made your choice, prioritize onboarding even if it has to happen virtually. It might feel strange to train someone without being right there with them but using call, chat, and video tools can help bridge that distance. **The most important factor to remember when hiring and onboarding in a remote context is to have empathy and compassion.** If the video call drops or someone's login doesn't work or some email failed to send, just take a step back and take a breath. Acknowledging the strangeness of the process can be a good way to break the ice and gain a better understanding of how your candidate is feeling about everything.

Don't fear remote hiring when you have open roles to fill. You never know when you'll find a great new employee, even if you can only meet them through a screen.

Notes

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