

Giving good feedback during and after recruitment

Feedback Guide

Giving interview feedback to unsuccessful candidates can be difficult. No one wants to hear they didn't get the job. But rather than face a slightly uncomfortable situation, some hiring managers gloss over taking care of this responsibility.

Some hiring managers simply hope their candidates will get the hint after weeks of silence or be placated by a simple 'thanks, but no thanks' email. Not only is this unprofessional, it's also highly damaging to the employers brand. As celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain said:

"If you have a good experience in a restaurant, you tell 2 people.

If you have a bad experience, you tell 10 people"

The same goes for job interviews. If candidates get radio silence after an interview, they'll be pretty unhappy. And you can guarantee they'll tell their peers about it. While it may save you some hassle initially, over time, consistently failing to give constructive interview feedback to candidates will make it difficult to attract and hire strong technical talent. Your reputation will be working against you.

When giving interview feedback to unsuccessful candidates follow the steps below to demonstrate your hiring process is organised, considered, and tactful.

Why give feedback?

Failing to contact an interviewee at all after an interview is just unacceptable. However, most companies at least manage to let unsuccessful candidates know they haven't been hired. The problem is they don't give the candidate any *useful* information.

If a candidate is unsuccessful, they'll want to know *why*. If you take the time to clearly outline why you didn't hire them, the candidate will likely be impressed that you've taken the time to give them a fair and honest appraisal. This will dramatically reduce the potential of your organisation developing a bad reputation in technical circles.

Hiring managers who don't provide feedback within 7 days are on the edge of inflicting negative employer brand damage. Never providing feedback has serious repercussions as it effectively poisons the candidate pool.

So seeing how important getting feedback is, how should you respond to unsuccessful candidates?

1. Use your interview notes

Human memory at the best of times. That's why if you're going to be serious about giving useful interview feedback to unsuccessful candidates, it's essential you keep your notes from the interview itself.

How useful those notes are depends a lot on your interview style. If you run unstructured conversational interviews that lack a clear sense of direction, your notes probably won't be very helpful. There's clear evidence that hiring managers make better hiring decisions when interviews are structured (i.e. all candidates face the same set of predetermined questions).

Using a structured interview format means your notes will indicate where and how the unsuccessful candidate performed poorly.

2. Honesty is the best policy

There's no point giving interview feedback to unsuccessful candidates if you aren't going to be honest. That said, you don't have to let the candidate know *everything* you think about them. Getting too personal will likely result in hurt feelings. For example, you should avoid the temptation to comment on their laid-back appearance or weak eye contact.

It's advisable to keep your feedback closely related to the job description and the required skills and experience. Let the candidate know why they were lacking in terms of the outlined requirements. But rather than just tell them where they fell short, try to phrase your feedback as areas they can develop and work on.

For example, if you interviewed an accounting/finance candidate, but they were lacking broad experience with automation platforms specific to the accounting industry, you might advise:

“Staying up to date with popular accounting software and integrations to make your work more efficient, and the quality of output better, we recommend exploring the possibilities offered by tools such as Xero or Receipt Bank.”

3. Tell them something useful

Candidates need at least a couple of examples so they can act on the feedback you provide. If you were concerned the candidate didn't have enough experience in a particular area, let the candidate know so they can focus on getting more practice.

4. Stay balanced

You don't want your candidates to get your feedback and feel it's all doom and gloom. To avoid this, aim to give a balance of negative and positive comments. Writing in Harvard Business Review about how Adobe give feedback to their staff, David Burkus suggests a simple approach:

“Feedback conversations should provide answers to two questions:

- 1) What does this person do well that makes them effective?*
- 2) What is the one thing, looking forward, they could change or do more of that would make them more effective?”*

On some occasions it may be quite difficult to find positives, but try to find at least one comment. For example you could note their research into your company, their impressive

successes in previous jobs, or the interesting examples they gave during the interview. That will help balance your negative comments, reducing the risk that candidates will walk away feeling despondent.

5. Don't Run With Comparisons

Candidates know they didn't get hired because you thought someone else was better.

There's no need to tell them, especially if they went through a group interview. They're not interested in knowing that someone else has more advanced degrees or showed better leadership skills. It doesn't help them improve and some candidates might consider such comparisons rude. Others might not even believe they're true since they don't know anything about the other candidates you interviewed.

Remember step 4 and stay balanced with your feedback.

6. Say thank you

Ultimately, your aim should be to make sure every person who interacts with your business has a positive experience, candidates included. The rise of review sites like Glassdoor means that negative experiences can quickly damage your reputation. So giving interview feedback to unsuccessful candidates is now more important than ever.

Interviews are a big deal for candidates. Keep in mind that they had to study, practice, take-time off work, and possibly travel to interview with you. The least you can do is thank them for their time and interest in your company.