

Virtual Interviews in 2020: Tips for Hiring Leaders and Candidates

In this “new normal,” how can hiring managers replicate the in-person ability to assess personality and capture those essential non-verbal cues? And how do candidates stand apart and showcase their soft skills and unique personal attributes?

While virtual interviewing has been around as long as webcams – and phone interviews have been conducted as long as most of us can remember – our current “virtual-only” world has made the in-person interview almost passé.

A real-life example of the complexity and nuance of virtual interviewing is a client who interviewed two candidates, both equally qualified with near identical interactions throughout the video calls. After, the interviewers noted feeling a stronger “connection” or “chemistry” with one candidate. In discussing this feeling, it was realized that the difference was the “better connected” candidate was using a separate camera which focused closely on her face and she was looking into the camera, resulting in better eye contact.

So how can you ensure you’re positioned for virtual interviewing success? We asked a few recruiting experts at DHR International, Jobplex and Elevate Partners for actionable “virtual interviewing 2.0” tips to help both hiring leaders and candidates seeking jobs.

Tips for Hiring Leaders

- **Start with a moment of humanity**
Recognize that all of us are grappling with something different during this time of uncertainty – whether it be with illness, childcare, anxiety over wellness or finances, or just general concerns about what’s coming next. A simple opening question of “How are you?” takes on new meaning. Build connection by starting from a place of empathy and humanity. One tactic to break the ice is to share the story of a work or personal item from your home office – maybe it’s an award or that “best boss” mug from your team – and ask the candidate to do the same.
- **Craft compelling questions tied to company values**
During in-person interviews, you’re always assessing team and cultural fit. One best practice – irrespective of interview setting – is to use consistent, values-based, behavioral interview questions to assess candidate fit. An example of a values-based line of questioning around the value of collaboration might be, “Tell me about a time when your team failed to meet your expectations. If you could go back and do it again, what would you do differently?”
- **Provide a strong vision of leadership and strategy**
During stressful economic times, candidates will think twice before making a move from a stable company. Compound that with not being able to see your company in person, and it makes for a tough judgment call. Help candidates get a good sense for your company’s vision, mission, and strategy – as well as your corporate “personality” – across in creative ways. If you’re in an industry where your plant is up and running, take them on a virtual tour. If your organization is working remotely, set up a Zoom meeting with the leadership team and make it a casual “get to know us” happy hour or coffee.

More Tips for Hiring Leaders

- **Use references to dig deeper**
Take references to a new level by asking more in-depth questions about the candidate's behaviors and personality. Prepare compelling lines of questioning like, "Can you give me an example of a time when you saw Jill under stress? What was her reaction in this situation? What is something you thought she could have done better?" If you feel like you need additional data points to decide, consider leadership-focused assessments such as one of the Hogan Assessments or DHR's LEAP assessment tool.
- **Keep momentum from offer to start**
When an offer is made, it's unlikely that the leader will physically be present in the office for several weeks or months. Develop a clear strategy to keep the leader engaged and excited about the opportunity ahead. Now is the time to build a virtual onboarding program with video calls and training sessions.

Tips for Candidates

- **Was that helpful?**
When you're not face-to-face, you might miss the subtle cues that someone didn't fully understand your answer to a crucial question. Check in after your response by asking, "Was that helpful? Did I answer your question?" This no-pressure approach allows your listener to reply and let you know if they want you to elaborate on any key points.
- **Be aware of how you "connect"**
It's easy to get caught up in watching your image while you talk – but when you do that, you miss out on really connecting with the other person, just like in our earlier example. To ensure you're coming across well, conduct a practice session with a trusted friend and ask for feedback. Then, during the interview, watch the other person and make sure you're looking into the camera and "connecting" with them. Minimize your own image, if you can, and make the other person's image large so you can connect more authentically.
- **Find creative ways to drive in-depth conversation**
When virtual is the only way to go, how can you stand apart and really dig in on the details? Consider creative ways to engage, like sending materials in advance to review together or sketching out ideas "live" on paper and sharing them via webcam or email.

One last tip for everyone using virtual meeting technology is to remember to smile. It's simple, but often forgotten in the complexity of trying to manage the technology and logistics.

For more tips or to talk with a partner about your job search, reach out to marketing@dhrinternational.com and we will connect you to a resource to support you.