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Hiring Remotely

Effective remote hiring

There are far-reaching implications right across the work environment from the global health crisis. Among these is the sudden increase in remote working, which has posed a severe challenge to everyday hiring practices.

You may be looking for candidates who are responsible, self-aware, empathetic and communicative. But are these the same qualities required for distributed teams and remote positions? How do you find remote-friendly employees? How do you interview and onboard new staff remotely? And how do you transform someone who has not had an intimate relationship with your organisation, into a trusted and fully invested employee, without ever meeting them in person?

"In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity"
— Albert Einstein

Clearly, remote hiring presents a number of challenging scenarios for both employers and potential new staff, so it demands a different approach. Yes, it may be preferable to meet a candidate in person before hiring them, but you can still hire and onboard great people. And while remote hiring doesn't require a complete shift in your mindset, it does involve some upfront work to make sure you're getting the right new hires and setting them up for success.

In this guide we will explore the techniques and strategies you can adopt to make virtual hiring work for your business.
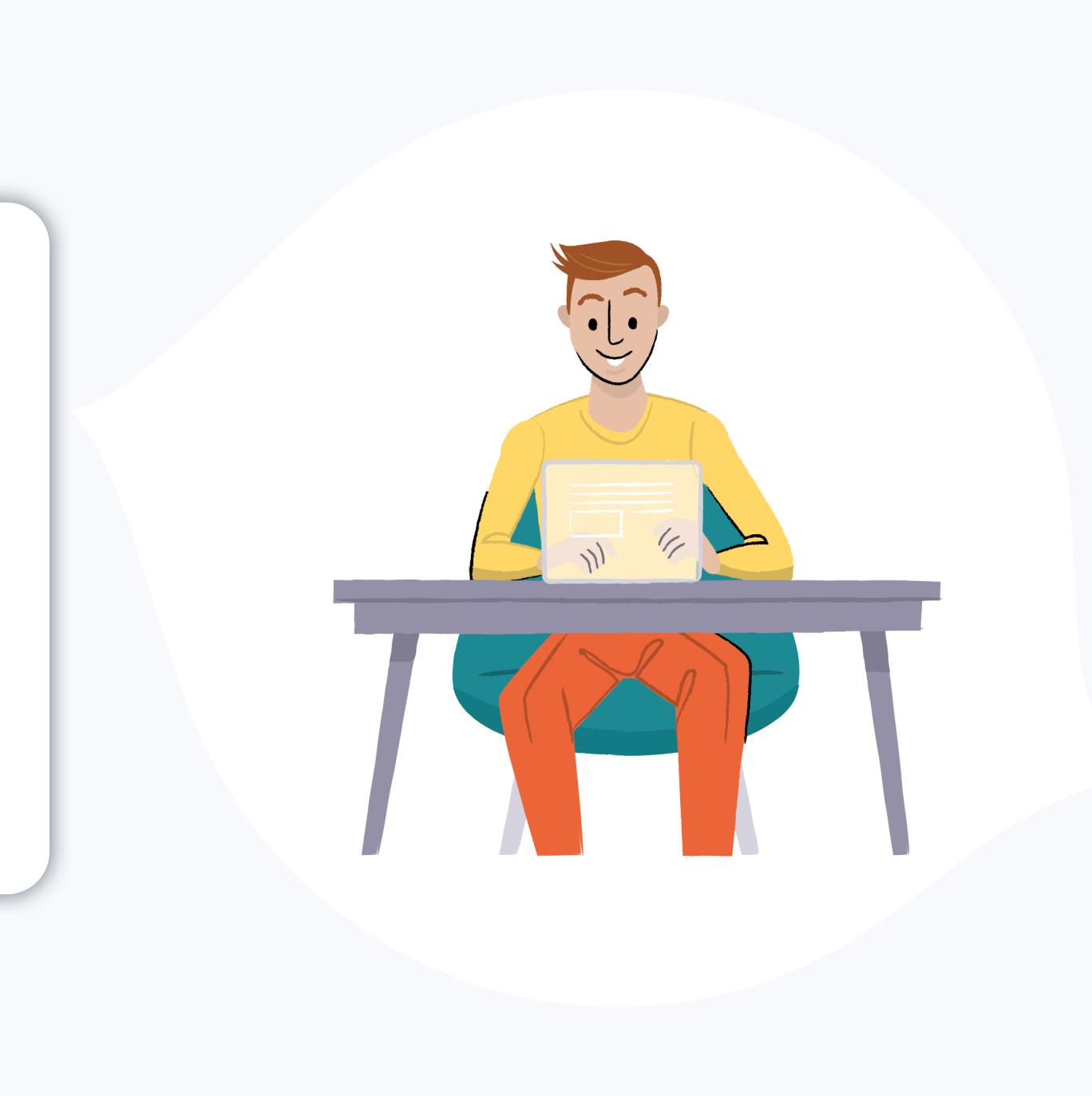
Remote working. The new norm.

The global pandemic may have focused our attention on remote hiring, but it isn't the only reason you should consider using it. What if you need a skillset that you can't find in your own catchment area? Or maybe you're expanding into a new country or continent and need to find local talent with market-specific experience? Nor is remote working an entirely new concept. Even before the pandemic, some 62% of employees worked from home from time to time.

Indeed, many people love the flexibility, autonomy and the better work-life balance that comes with remote working[1].

Remote work offers considerable benefits to your business. As well as access to better talents and a cut on costs, there is clear evidence for improved productivity. Case studies show how remote teams that stick to a schedule are more productive than in-house teams. In fact, the average remote work day comes in at 9.75 hours[2]. All the indications suggest that remote working is going to become widely accepted and increasingly common as technology enables communication, collaboration and workload management across widely dispersed teams.

Adapting to the remote hire process

Remote work is here to stay and hiring managers need to know how to hire employees remotely. But you are no longer just looking for the right job skills. You also have to assess their suitability for a remote working environment.

So if you are looking at remote hiring, here are some tips to equip you for making great remote hires.

Remote means remote.

It is important to commit fully to the process. This means keeping every part of the hiring process remote and not giving in to the temptation to run any face-to-face interviews. There are two reasons for this: (a) it would be unfair to run some but not all in-person interviews; (b) by making the candidate travel to your office you may be exposing them to unnecessary health risks or forcing them to breach quarantine restrictions.

Instead, concentrate on those elements of the interview process that you can control. Make sure you are familiar with the technology so that the interview will run smoothly. Give thought to the questions you will ask and if other stakeholders are taking part in the interview, decide who will ask which questions.

Create a positive experience for the candidate

It's vital that you make it a priority to deliver a positive remote candidate experience. This speaks volumes about who you are as a potential employer and prospective employees will evaluate your company based on their experience of your hiring process. So make sure your careers page is easy to navigate and that the application process is seamless. Invest in the proper video interview tools and thoroughly train your hiring managers on how to use the software. And give your candidates advance notice so they can test out and become familiar with the software themselves. This will help them go into the interview with confidence. You can also create virtual opportunities for candidates to get to know your organisational culture and how it ticks.

Doing things differently, remotely

Set the scene

Like it or not, we all make unconscious, appearance-based snap assessments of candidates, within milliseconds of meeting them. And like it or not, they do the same of us. So give serious thought to what the candidate will see when they meet you online, both in terms of how you are dressed – formal business suit, or smart casual – and what is going on behind you, i.e in the background to your video call. You want the candidate to focus on you, so avoid having a cluttered backdrop with many distractions.

Keep every element of your presentation professional and check out the candidate's attire and their backdrop to see if it shows a reasonable working environment.

Streamline your strategy

Keep things simple. Try to rationalise your hiring processes by reducing the number of platforms on which you promote the post and cutting down on the number of interview rounds. If a number of stakeholders are involved in the selection process, then organise a collective online video call. The objective is to move quickly and seize the best talent in the fastest way possible, before they move on to a more responsive organisation.

Doing things differently, remotely

Make sure job descriptions are current

The strengths and characteristics you are currently looking for in a candidate are probably very different from those you wanted five years ago. So make sure your job descriptions reflect this. Nowadays, the ability to self-manage may be paramount, as may critical technology skills, such as experience with Zoom and Microsoft Teams. Have they the mindset to work on their own, remotely, yet communicate, cooperate and innovate as part of a successful, integrated team? The job description should accurately reflect what you need from a candidate now; explain that they will most likely be working remotely now and in the near future, and indicate when business life may return to normal.

Make science-based assessments of skills and/or behaviour

Research shows that an unstructured interview will only uncover only 14% of a candidate's abilities [3]. Wouldn't you like to know what the other 86% are? An online science-based personality assessment will reveal deep insights to a candidate's inner qualities, such as their creativity, adaptability, drive, leadership, teamwork and organisation skills. This opens the way to an insightful and impartial understanding of your candidate, helping shape pertinent interview questions, mould their onboarding and influence their future career development.

If you are new to personality assessments, make sure they are completed during the initial stage of the recruiting process. This means that any strengths or weakness identified can be probed later at final interview, enabling you to make the best possible recruitment decision.

Doing things differently, remotely

Company culture counts

You want your remote hire to integrate seamlessly into your team, even if its members are spread far and wide. You can do this by making sure that the company culture extends beyond the office[4]. Always remember that it is important to foster a strong sense of teamwork in people who may be working together remotely or temporarily. Also, it is important to help them communicate, cooperate and innovate in an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust.

So paint an honest picture of what office life is like under normal conditions and how that manifests in a remote role. Give them a clear insight to your company culture so that, if hired, they can adjust to it more easily.

Be kind

Call it what you will – kindness, compassion, caring –– but the fact is that being kind is a recipe for success in business and you can bring it to bear in your remote interviews. Today's candidates face unparalleled challenges during online interviews, with unreliable connectivity, unexpected interruptions and untried technology, so bear with them should the unusual happen and go with the flow.

Lockdown may mean having to accommodate an interview at an unusual time, so again, a little bit of understanding may go a long way towards finding your dream candidate.

Questions for a remote interview

In any interview, it is important to use a structured approach in order to keep the interview process fair and equitable between candidates. This type of interview will also reveal most about the candidate and their potential. However, remote job interviews are a bit unusual, both for the interviewer and the interviewee.

It is vital to get a sense of how the candidate will work when left on their own, so some common interview questions require completely different answers for a virtual role. And there are several questions that need to be answered that you would never ask in a traditional interview.

Some examples of these include:

1. When are you at your most productive?
2. How adept are you with technology and video conferencing software?
3. What techniques do you use to keep work-focused while at home?
4. Outline your previous remote working experience, if any.
5. In your opinion, what impact does remote work have on team work?
6. What concerns do you have about working at a distance?
7. How does office work appeal to you? Would you be interested in combining office and remote working, if that were possible?
8. What communication skills have you learned that will be useful on a remote team?
9. Take me through your daily routine on a typical work-from-home day.
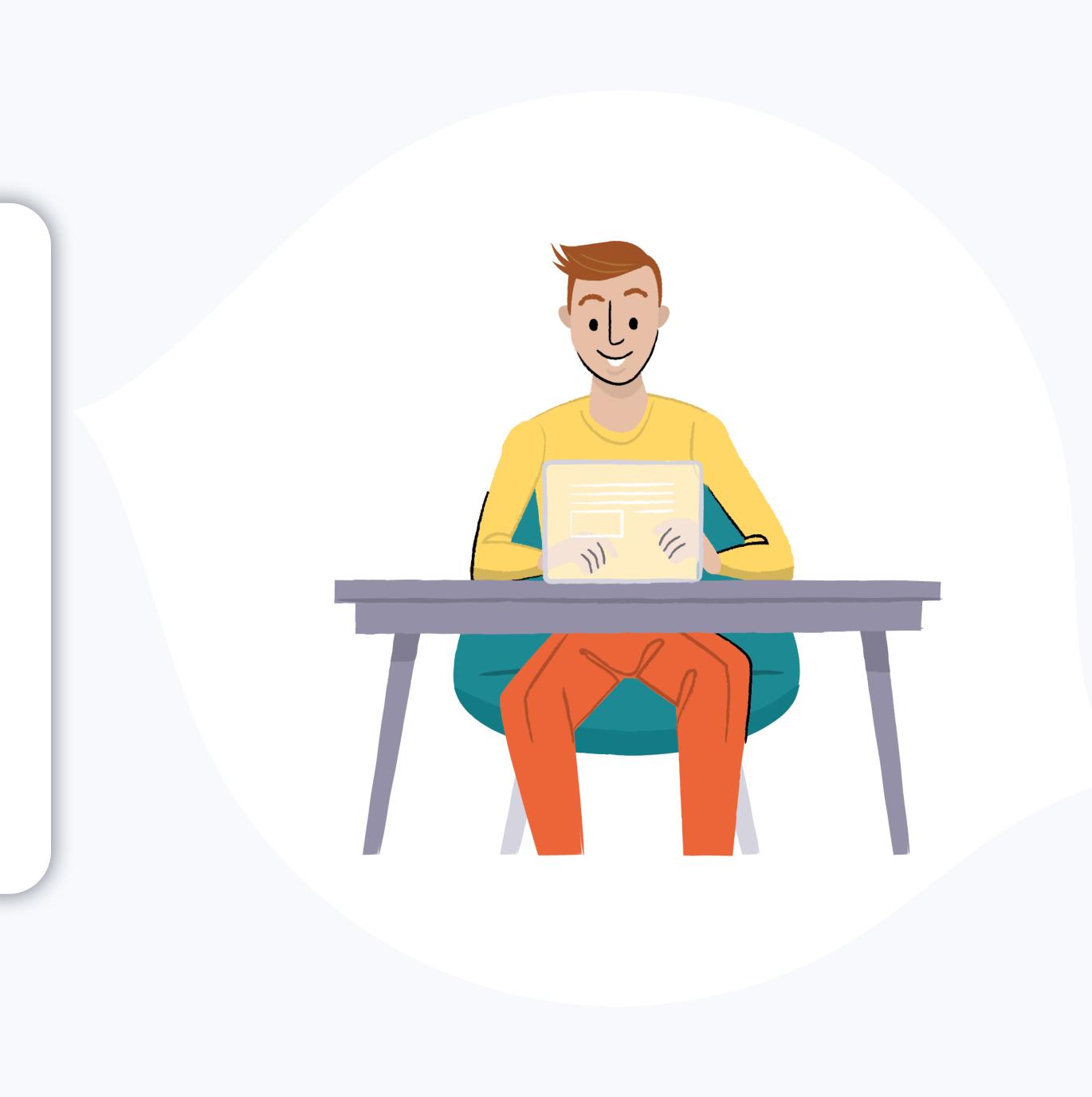10. How do you switch off from work off at the end of the day when you're working from home?

Welcome onboard

Introducing a new hire to the workings of your company is more difficult when you're not physically in the same space. There are no hard and fast rules, but allow for more time to connect so that your new team member has the support they need, rather than have them feel overwhelmed or isolated.

Communication is very important - your new employee needs to be honest about how they're spending their time and you need to understand their strengths and weaknesses.

The tools for the job

Make sure that your new employee is set up to work remotely, so before their first day, provide them with a work laptop, mouse, internet connection and phone or any other technology that they will need[5]. As well as hand books and training material, try to give them access to a team or an individual who can give them dedicated support during the early part of the onboarding process. These 'digital mentors' can give the new hire practical advice on how to work remotely and address any basic questions they may have[6].

Also, company security is paramount, so make sure the new hire is au fait with the IT policies and that they log on through a secured VPN network.

Use training time appropriately

When onboarding a new hire remotely, it is important to strike a balance between regular training and communication on the one hand, and making them feel like they are being micro-managed on the other[7]. Online, it is difficult to pick up the subtle cues that indicate someone is tired, overwhelmed or bored, so training is best delivered in smaller, digestible bite-sized chunks[8]. Aim for a training schedule that comprises short video sessions, spread over a longer period of time.

Welcome onboard

Corporate value and culture

Companies tend to live their values and culture, but because your new remote worker cannot experience the interpersonal coming and goings of an office environment, they will not be able to grasp and absorb your values and culture in this way. This makes an explicit discussion of your company's values and culture all the more important.

You should clearly articulate the company culture to every new hire right from day one and be clear about expectations, how performance is measured, how you assess employees for corporate fit, what corporate life is like now and how it will change when things return to normal. In order to grow a positive company culture with a remote worker, to sustain them through challenging times, you must be explicit about your culture and values.

Using gamification effectively

Many hiring and onboarding programmes now embrace gamification as a means to assess candidates cognitive and other abilities, as well as convey complex information to their digitally-savvy workforce. Gamification takes elements from video games to create hands-on interactive assessment and learning experiences. This approach is having a positive impact on successful hiring, retention, productivity and engagement.

Of course, not all aspects of hiring and employee engagement can be gamified, so why not look for ways to introduce intriguing new fun element to the schedule? Do not be afraid to make things fun and energetic, as the more entertaining and interesting the materials are, the higher the chance your newest team member will stay involved. And why not set up a virtual meet'n'greet with your CEO or senior management team[9]. It can go a long way towards making a new start feel valued and help to overcome any sense of isolation they may be experiencing.

Welcome onboard

Regular meetings

Once your new hire is brought on board, the goal is to ensure they become productive as soon as possible. So, make a habit of scheduling regular meetings throughout their first month and continue these meetings until they're fully settled in - this is an integral part of an effective onboarding process and helps resolve any feelings of isolation they may have. Also make sure to introduce the wider team to their new teammate as this helps create a sense of community and belonging[10].

Plan ahead

Training isn't a quick fix. It should be a steady and cumulative long term process, especially in a remote context, one that will bring long term results. A new hire's onboarding experience will set the tone for their career within your business, so plan ahead and think in terms of months, not weeks or days. You should view this time as an opportunity to instil confidence and set your new employee on a path toward success. So be sure to ask your new team member what can be improved and implement their feedback. Perhaps they would appreciate fewer meetings over time, or more one-to-ones with individual team members and stakeholders to talk over specific issues?

Remote onboarding certainly brings unique challenges, but by planning their development long term, you can ensure your newest team members find cohesion within their new teams and grow within your business.

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The last word

It may be a harsh reality check to discover the costs of a bad hire, but you can avoid them and improve your bottom line by following the advice given. And while making the occasional bad hire is an occupational hazard in business, at least you now have the tools to make sure it won't happen to you.

During this uncertain time, many businesses are showing their ability to adapt to change by managing their hiring and onboarding processes remotely. Technology now makes it possible to access and leverage digital profiles, screen candidates remotely using gamified assessments, view digital interviews, discuss assessments and onboard new employees remotely. It may feel strange, but it works.

Science-based personality assessments can augment these processes and remove the subjectivity from the selection process to give valid, accurate insights to character traits and long term success.

But you still need to check for all the same factors you would in a face-to-face interview including culture fit and personal motivation. Once you have made your choice, the next step is to onboard the person effectively so that despite working remotely, your new team member feels they have all the support they need and are neither overwhelmed nor isolated. Communication is very important and call, chat and video tools can help bridge the distance between you and your remote colleague.

There is nothing to fear from remote hiring and all the indications are that it will be with us for the foreseeable future. Better instead to view it as a new tool with which to find the great employees you need to drive your business forward.

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