

Technical Interviewing for the Remote Team

The right person can make the success of your remote team – or break it. So, it matters a great deal whom you admit. Your remote service provider should ensure that candidates are vetted on the basic requirements. But, in the end, you need to take responsibility yourself for whom you will be working with.

Interviewing for a technical position, you will be looking for a mix of qualities in the candidate:

- **General skills**, such as problem-solving abilities and intelligence
- **Specific skills**, relating to the position and role: C++ coding, smoke testing, Elasticsearch etc.
- **Soft skills** in communication, listening, negotiating, keeping promises, and perhaps managing other people
- **Personality** traits as drive and commitment

If you are very experienced, you may be able to examine these qualities in a free-form conversation. The rest of us will do better with some structure. Especially if more people are involved in the interview process.

The interview process is further complicated as it may be impossible to be interviewing in person – and many cues disappear in a Skype or Google Hangout conversation.

Interview approaches

1. Asking questions:

The most straightforward interview method is asking questions. The good interviewer will drill beyond the easy answers with *how's* and *why's* and *where's* and *what's*:

WHO

- Who helped you in the situation?
- Who else was working on the project?

WHAT

- What was the situation?
- What was the outcome?
- What did you do in that situation?
- What role did you play in solving the problem?
- What did you do when the deadline was slipping?
- What did you do to remove the bottleneck?
- What was your responsibility?
- What were you trying to convince them about?

WHY

- Why was this situation different?
- Why was it important to meet the deadline?
- Why was this person difficult to work with?

HOW

- How did you prepare yourself?
- How did you help your colleagues prepare?
- How did the rest of the organization respond?
- How did you convince your colleagues of your idea?

Score	1	2	3	4	5
	Un-acceptable		Good		Great
Examples	<i>I waited for others to solve the situation</i>		<i>I worked with the technology</i>		<i>Expertise</i>
		<i>We did</i>		<i>I did</i>	

2. Scoring answers

When more people are involved in a recruitment process, it is valuable to be able to compare notes.

One way is to evaluate the quality of answers given by the candidate with a number:

3. Sample questions - soft skills

- Suppose you had an idea for a change in architecture but some members of your team were against any change. What would you do? Which factors would you consider? Why? Who else would you involve?
- What was the biggest difference of opinion you ever had with a colleague? How did you resolve it? And what was the outcome?

- Tell me about a time when you took the lead on a difficult project?
- Ask the candidate to explain something complex within their expertise
- We have about 30 minutes left. Tell me about the best project you have ever worked on.
- I am the product manager for a device that draws triangles, has a black and white screen and limited battery capacity. Ask me about requirements.

4. Testing technical skills

- Ask the candidate to complete a standard test with mix of multiple choice and open questions within the technology
- Have the candidate discuss and solve a relevant task at the whiteboard
- To test the actual and specific skills of a candidate, you may ask for a trial project to be completed. Ideally, this would recreate an actual work situation within your team and would allow you to get an idea of how the person would perform in real life. It is good to work with restrictions as it (oddly enough) actually often **inspires creativity**.
- Depending on the situation in the local labor market, using trial¹ projects and asking for extensive work at home or in the office

¹ Image Source: [How to have technical and coding interviews over Skype](#)

may be a bit risky. If a certain skill is in high demand, the **candidate may NOT find it worthwhile** to do such work if other opportunities do not require it.

- One model that can **work better** is to define a real task on the project that needs to be done. And to engage with the candidate as a consultant on hourly payment with clearly defined requirements.

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