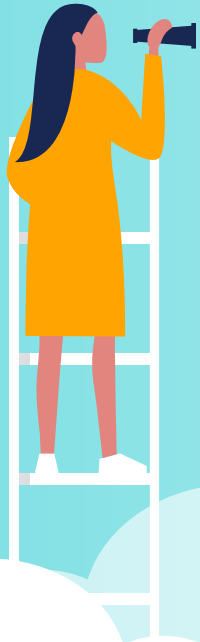


# How to Build a Positive Candidate Experience

at Every Stage of the Hiring Process





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# Introduction

*A successful hiring process no longer hinges on just finding the right person for the job. For every person you hire, there are hundreds or even thousands of people who apply, make it through various stages of the hiring process, and don't get the job. For many of these applicants, this process was the first time they interacted with your company. Was the interaction positive, or was it negative?*

*Every job applicant is a human being with thoughts, feelings, and hopes for their career. Applicants who feel positively about an application process are more likely to speak highly of the company, refer that company to their network, and even apply to future positions. Applicants who feel negatively are more likely to, well, do the opposite. The way to ensure that you're making the best impression is by creating a positive candidate experience throughout your recruitment process.*

# What is Candidate Experience?

To create a truly great candidate experience, you first have to understand what candidate experience is. Candidate experience is the way a job seeker feels about an employer after interacting with their hiring process.

It's rooted in the candidate's perception of the hiring process: does the candidate feel respected? Was their time valued? Was the hiring process fair and equitable? Did they know what was coming next? Are their concerns being heard?

If a candidate is able to confidently answer "yes" to all these questions, a company has successfully built a positive candidate experience – and will reap all the benefits of one. But as it stands, only [1 in 4 candidates](#) report having a great candidate experience. Your hiring process is often the first interaction a future employee will have with your company. Making a solid first impression is often critical to how people view their potential employer: [68% of employees](#) believe their experience as a candidate directly reflects how a company treats its people.



# Key Factors of Candidate Experience

What are the key factors that go into making a positive candidate experience?

- Setting Expectations
- Clear Communication
- Fairness
- Feedback

## Setting Expectations

Establishing what to expect from your hiring process lays a strong foundation for a positive candidate experience. By being upfront about what a candidate can expect, you build trust with applicants. [76% of job seekers](#) want to know how long your application process will take before they begin. This is especially important for the later stages of your hiring process. When recruiters simply follow up with specific post-interview steps, the number of candidates that report a positive candidate experience [increases by 52%](#).

By removing possible surprises from your hiring pipeline, you'll foster a sense of transparency with candidates that will allow them to feel in control of their time and efforts.

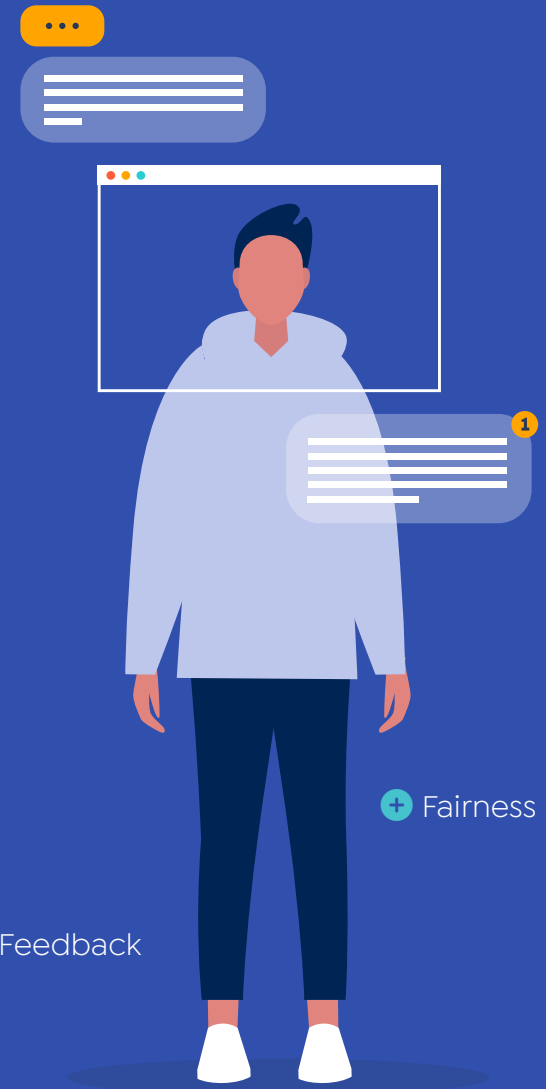
## Clear Communication

More than anything, candidates want to know where they stand. Did they make it to the next stage of your hiring process? Tell them! [75% of applicants never hear back](#) after applying to a job. Leaving your candidates in limbo isn't the way to go. [After about 2 weeks, most candidates will give up](#) and move on to other opportunities.

Even simple communication – like an automated confirmation email that their application was received– is critical to creating a positive candidate experience. Stay engaged with your candidates by making a habit of consistent communication that starts from the day they apply until the day you make your decision.

+ Setting Expectations

+ Clear Communication



+ Fairness

+ Feedback

## Fairness

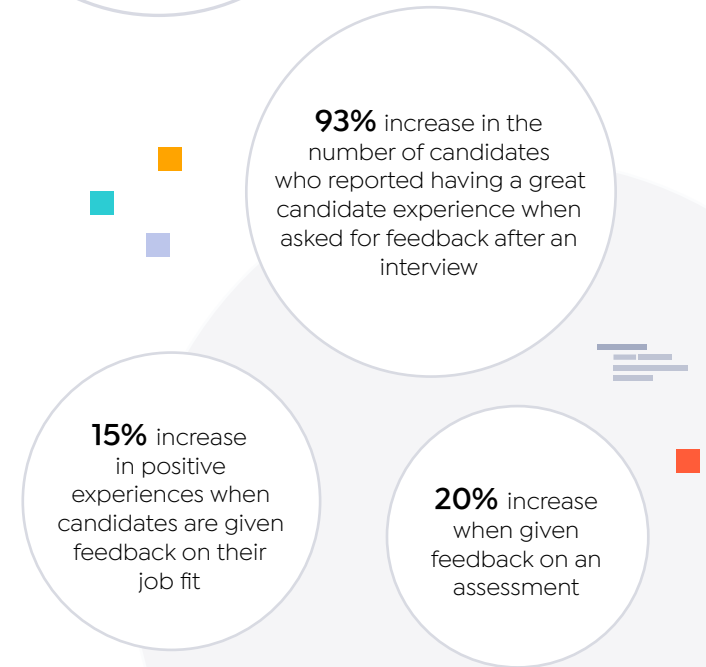
It's a natural fact of hiring that the overwhelming majority of applicants won't get the job. As we work towards a more inclusive and equitable hiring landscape, it's important that every candidate – especially those you don't hire – feels that your hiring process was fair. The perceived fairness of your hiring metrics matters most to candidates when they reflect on their experience, not whether they are hired or not.

To accomplish this, candidates need to feel that they had the ability to present their skills for fair evaluation. Unbiased hiring practices, like pre-employment assessments and structured interviews, offer a degree of objectivity when screening candidates. There is an [83% increase](#) in positive candidate experience when candidates are given the ability to communicate their goals, meet potential team members, and ask questions during the hiring process.

## Feedback

To foster a positive candidate experience, it's important that feedback is given in both directions: from employer to candidate *and* candidate to employer. Giving candidates a chance to let you know about their experience with your hiring process is invaluable. First, you'll get a clear idea about what parts of your recruitment process need fine-tuning (or even overhaul). Taking this feedback to heart will help to continuously improve your candidate experience. On top of that, giving candidates a chance to be heard – especially if they had a more negative experience – allows them to air any grievances with you directly, instead of posting a review on a public site like Glassdoor. In fact, when candidates were asked for their feedback after an interview, there was [a 93% increase in the number of candidates who reported having a great candidate experience](#) and it boosted a candidate's willingness to build a professional relationship with a potential employer.

The number of candidates reporting a positive experience [increased by 15%](#) when candidates are given specific feedback on their job fit and [20% when given feedback on an assessment](#) they were asked to take. Direct feedback improves the perception of fairness and promotes honest communication throughout the stages of your hiring process.



# Benefits of a Great Candidate Experience

A great candidate experience will yield high returns for your business. Once you have cultivated a positive hiring process, you'll have created a cycle of advantageous outcomes.

When it comes to getting your favorite candidate to join your company, a positive candidate experience makes candidates **38% more likely** to accept a job offer. And if you want more great candidates, you're in luck: **90% of candidates** would refer others to a company's openings based on a positive experience, whether they got hired or not. And remember that every applicant is a potential customer and possible brand advocate. **For 95% of people**, the job application is their first experience with your company. A positive candidate experience boosts your employer brand and your brand recognition in general.

There's also clear evidence that creating a positive candidate experience improves productivity on the job. The Aberdeen Group found that a positive hiring process has a cumulative effect, resulting in a happier, more satisfied workforce. Organizations with happy and engaged **employees are 40% more productive** than comparable companies, leading to higher profits in the long term.

**90%** of people would refer others to a job opening after a positive experience

For **95%** of people, a job application is their first experience with a company

A positive candidate experience makes candidates **38%** more likely to accept a job

Happy and engaged employees are **40%** more productive



# Consequences of a Negative Candidate Experience

There are two sides to the candidate experience coin. On one side, creating a positive candidate experience yields numerous benefits for everything from candidate retention to your company's image. On the other, a poor candidate experience can have negative consequences for your company, for both your recruitment efforts and your brand. And a negative candidate experience is more common than you might think: [60% of candidates](#) have had a bad candidate experience when they've applied to jobs.

Consumers are more conscientious than ever before. They can be incredibly discerning about where and with whom they spend their money. Many candidates are also downstream potential consumers of products and services. A negative experience when applying can lead them to avoid companies in the future, believing that their experience was indicative of how a company operates. This can cause long-term damage to your client base and bottom line. [Candidate resentment has increased 40%](#) in the last 5 years due to poor candidate experience. Frustrated candidates can sever ties with the companies who burned them, and as a result they change their purchasing habits and take their business relationships elsewhere.

On top of this is the concept of employer brand – how your company is perceived as a workplace with regards to how they treat their employees. Operate as though your application is the start of your employee onboarding process. When this early experience is subpar, candidates leave feeling as though it is representative of how current employees are treated (whether that is accurate or not). On average, only [1 in 250 candidates will actually get hired](#), meaning that a negative experience with your hiring process could effect 249 potential customers and brand loyalists, damaging your employer brand.

Most significantly, you'll also drain your future applicant pool. [27% of candidates who had a bad experience](#) would actively discourage others from applying to a company's jobs, making it harder to attract candidates and get high-quality referrals overtime. [72% of candidates go on to share their bad experience](#) on sites like Glassdoor, on social media, or directly with a colleague or friend.

Fortunately, it is easy to course-correct and create a great experience for interested applicants. Each stage of the hiring process has opportunities to ensure a positive experience for candidates every step of the way.

**40%** increase in candidate resentment in the last 5 years

**60%** of candidates have had a bad candidate experience

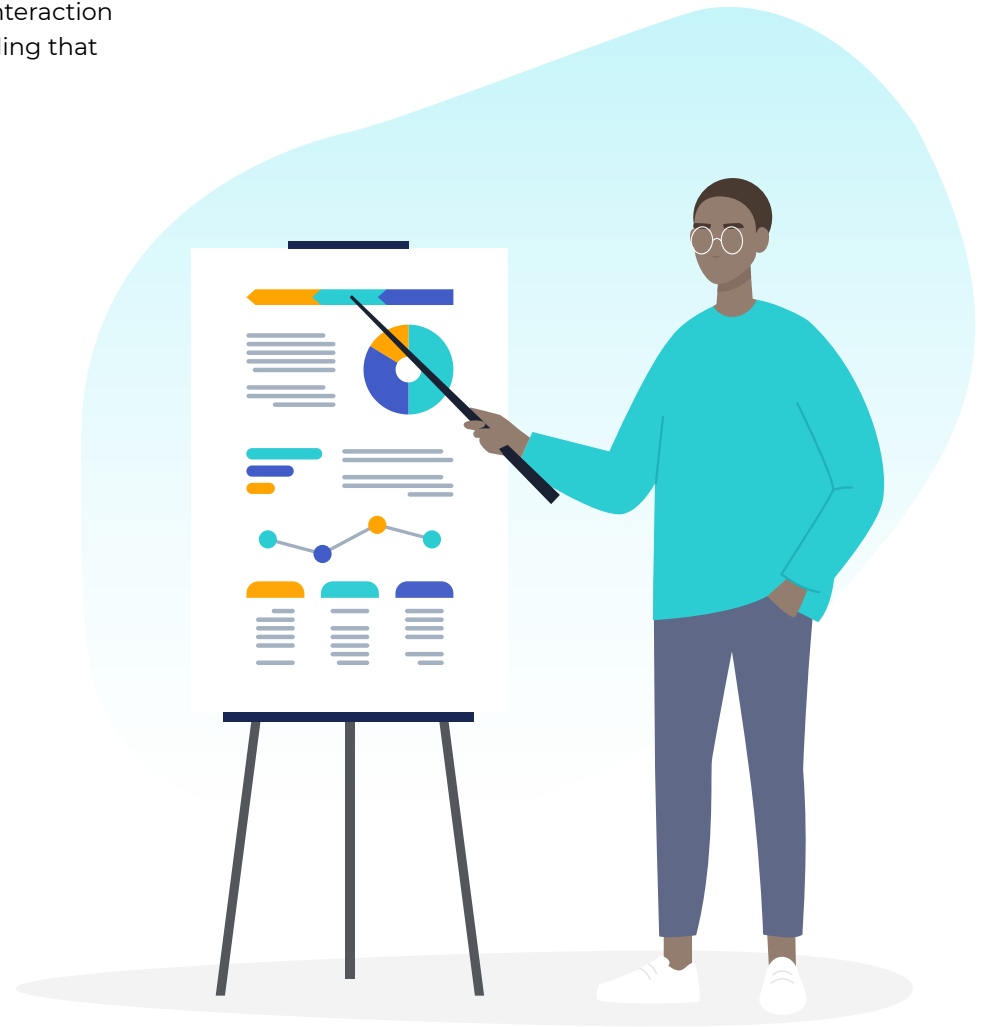
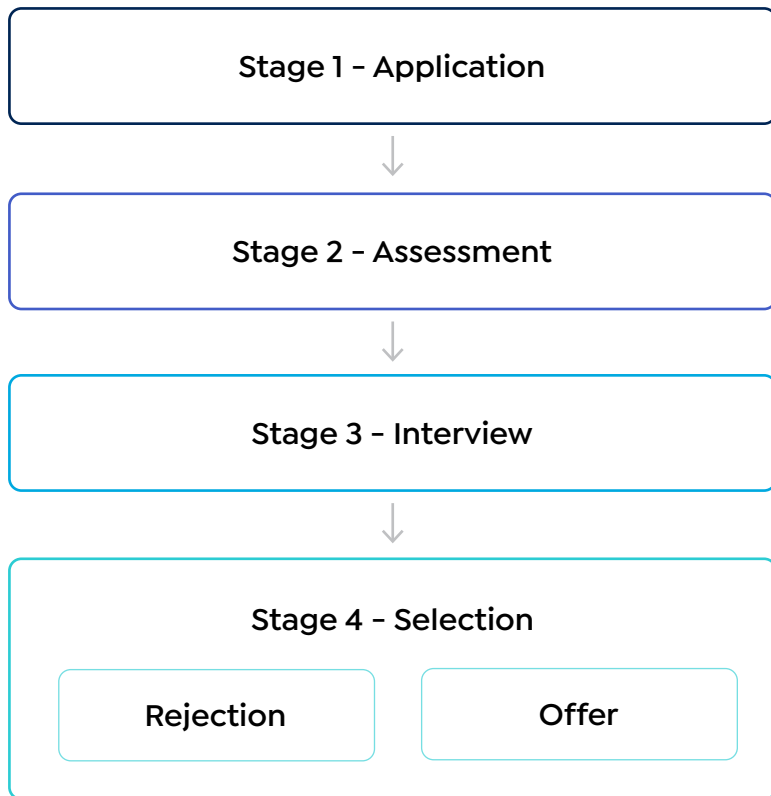
**72%** of candidates go on to share their bad candidate experiences





# Best Practices for Building a Positive Candidate Experience

Every part of the hiring process presents an opportunity to provide a positive candidate experience that leaves candidates feeling good about the interaction - whether they get the job or not. We will cover best practices for building that positive experience across each major stage of the hiring process.



# Application

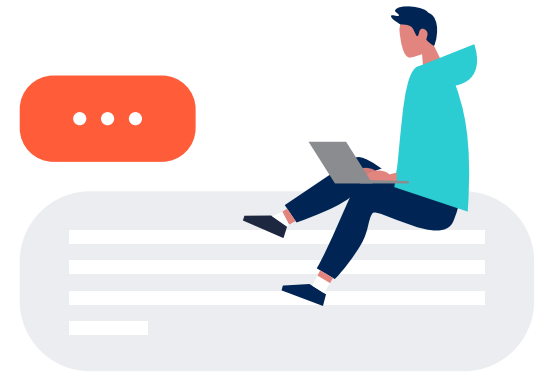
Your application process is often a candidate's first interaction with your company and brand. It sets the tone for the rest of the hiring process. By volume, more candidates will interact with your application process than with any other part of your recruitment pipeline.

Starting off on the right foot is easier than you think! Improving the application experience will reduce candidate drop-off rates significantly.

**Make your application mobile-friendly.** With [just 10% of job applications](#) optimized for mobile, your company will stand out for having a simple and clean mobile application. Additionally, studies show that up to 40% of applicants are likely to abandon an application that doesn't work well on their phones. Keep your application mobile-friendly by limiting the number of required fields, reducing repetitive entries, and having an easy way for applicants to upload their resume and other documents without hassle.

**Be transparent about the time it takes to apply.** Candidates appreciate knowing how much time they need to set aside in order to complete their application. [76% of job seekers](#) want to know how long it will take to fill out an application before they begin the apply process. Clear recognition of time requirements is a great way to set and meet a candidate's expectations. This can be as simple as a statement saying *"This application will take approximately 25 minutes to complete,"* or even a progress bar that fills as a candidate enters required fields. And if you're worried that being upfront about a lengthy time commitment will deter candidates, you're probably right. Consider this an opportunity to tighten up that initial application process so that you get all the information you need without wasting your candidates' time.

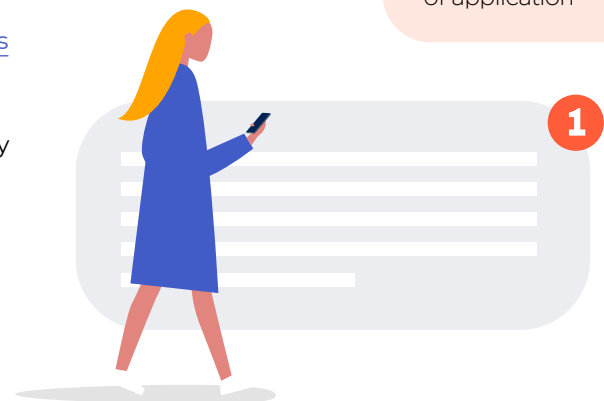
**Confirm that their application was submitted.** As easy as setting up an automated email is, it's still not as common as it should be. [70% of companies fail to acknowledge applications](#) with an email confirmation of receipt, resulting in a candidate population that feels left in the dark about their application status. A quick win for candidate experience, sending a simple confirmation email after the job seeker has submitted their application is a great way to provide reassurance. It gives candidates the sense that your company strives for good communication. This email is also a great way to give them an idea of what the next steps are in your hiring process and when they may expect to hear back. The resume black hole is a real experience for many job seekers, and by taking steps to keep candidates in the loop, you'll create a solid first impression with your candidates.



**40%** of applicants are likely to abandon an application that doesn't work well on their phones

**76%** of job seekers want to know how long it will take to fill out their application before they apply

**70%** of companies fail to confirm receipt of application



## Assessment

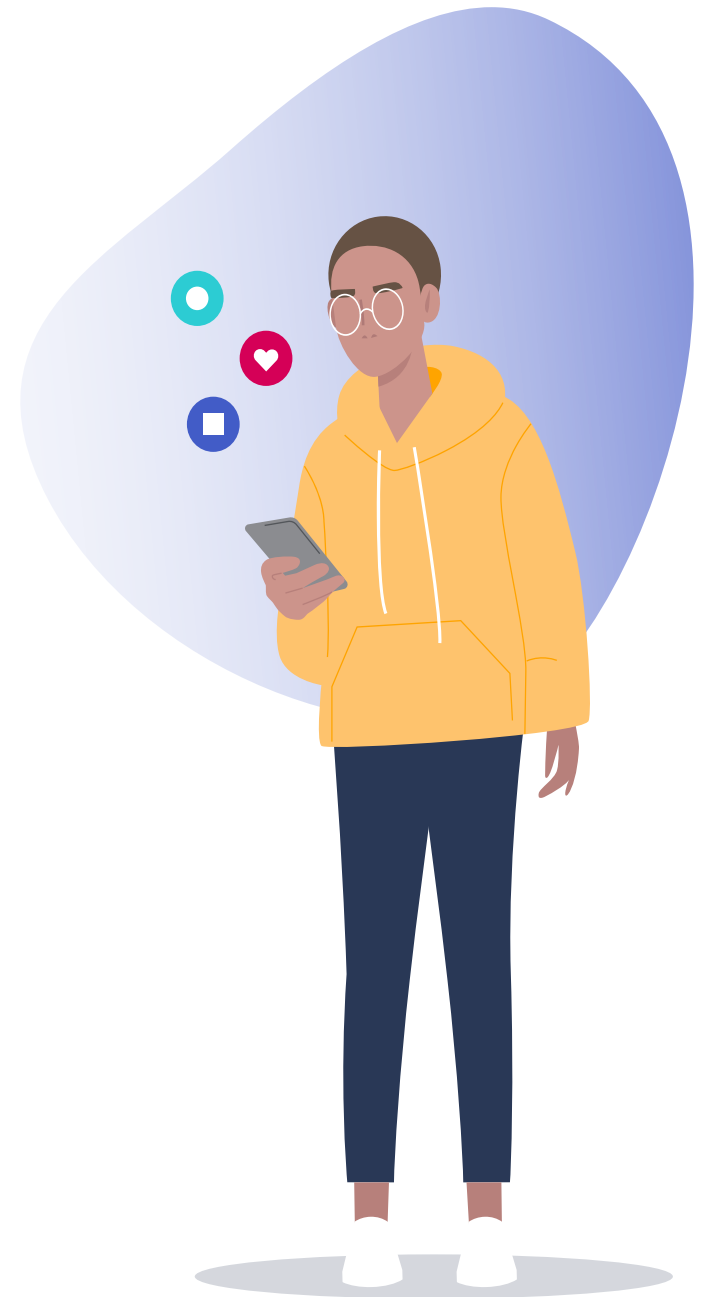
Candidates gain a lot of insight about how you operate your business just by applying for your openings. Today's focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion in hiring is a vital part of making hiring more fair overall. When candidates perceive your hiring process as impartial, they feel like they have been given a fair shot to demonstrate their value to you. Objective assessments are an excellent way to increase the fairness of your hiring process while reducing the inherent biases that exist in recruiting.

Assessments allow you to get a clearer picture of your candidates' abilities and their potential to succeed in the workplace, regardless of their background or work history. Pre-employment testing levels the playing field so you can find the best-qualified people in your applicant pool more easily.

**Consider using game-based assessments.** By adding reliable assessments, you're not just improving the candidate experience by making it more fair – certain types of assessments can actually make the application process more enjoyable. Game-based assessments gather the same reliable data as traditional testing formats but in fun and innovative ways. Game-based assessments also tend to be shorter than standard assessments, reducing candidate drop-off.

For example, Criteria's GAME (General Aptitude Mobile Evaluation) is a mobile-first assessment that evaluates critical thinking, problem solving, attention to detail, and ability to process new information. It has got three mini-games that candidates can take on any device and complete in under 6 minutes. The results give insight into your candidates' overall cognitive aptitude, which is one of the strongest predictors of future job success. Gamified assessments reduce candidate test-taking anxiety and create a positive experience that reflects well on your employer brand. The GAME is perfect for entry-level roles, from sales associates to customer service.

But what if you're hiring for mid- to high-level roles? Consider incorporating the Cognify game-based assessment into your hiring process. It effectively measures critical thinking, problem solving, verbal knowledge, and information processing. Cognify is an award-winning assessment that marries innovative game design with robust cognitive assessment methods to create a first-class candidate experience.



Game-based assessments allow you to gain valuable insight about your candidates without negatively impacting candidate experience. These game-based assessments actually improve candidate experience by engaging with candidates in a fun way, reducing bias in the hiring process, and cutting down on testing time. It's a true win-win-win!

But if traditional testing feels like a better fit for your hiring process, there are still ways to improve candidate experience. Providing feedback to candidates is a large component of creating a brand-positive experience.

**Give candidates something in exchange for their time.**

One powerful way to thank candidates for taking an assessment is to provide them feedback on their results. For example, Criteria has created a score report for candidates called Workplace Insights that can be sent to a candidate after they complete the Employee Personality Profile (EPP). This is a great way to integrate feedback into your hiring process to make a positive impression with all of your candidates. Workplace Insights gives candidates valuable information to help them understand their strengths in the workplace and even identifies areas where they can grow and develop. This added incentive encourages candidates to complete the assessment and further reduces candidate drop-off.

Whether you choose to inject some fun into your hiring process with game-based assessments or provide tangible feedback to candidates with personalized reports, there are plenty of ways to level up your candidate experience during the assessment stage.



# Interview

The interview stage is ripe with opportunities to improve candidate experience, particularly when it comes to clear communication, fairness, and feedback. At this stage, many candidates become more deeply invested in joining your company, especially as they do their research and interview prep. Interviews are the make-or-break point where you choose which of the candidates will fill the opening. Here are some steps you can take to drastically improve candidate experience when interviewing.

**Give plenty of notice.** Lots of candidates are currently employed, making it hard to take time off of work during business hours to come in for an interview. Once you've decided to bring a candidate in, try to give them time in advance to sort out their schedule if they need it. Workplace flexibility is a high priority for candidates, and providing multiple options for time slots can go a long way in improving the candidate experience.

**Find ways to reduce candidates stress.** The interview day is a big day for job seekers, and that can cause anxiety to bubble up. Soothe some of their pre-interview jitters and send an email to each interviewee the day before their interview. Provide directions on how to reach your office (especially if you are in a larger multi-company building), the phone number for your front desk, the parking situation, or other known sticking points. You'll also be opening up a line of communication where candidates can ask any other questions they may have pertaining to the interview.

**Grade candidates with the same rubric.** Using structured interviews is an easy way to make sure that each candidate is given the same opportunity to prove themselves. With structured interviews, you ask each candidate the same pre-defined standardized questions that are directly relevant to the job. By sticking to the same format from one interview to another, you'll reduce some of the bias present in interviewing. Plus, you'll improve the overall quality of your interviews: structured interviews predict job performance two times better than unstructured interviews. Candidates will appreciate being evaluated for job-relevant skills, and your interviews will yield more strongly-vetted hires.



**Consider going virtual.** Virtual or video interviewing is a great way to increase the flexibility of your hiring process. Video interviews make it easy to increase the number of candidates you can connect with by widening your geographic net. One-way video interviews allow for candidates to interview at a time that fits their schedule instead of fighting it. Plus, this asynchronous interviewing model makes it easy to create a tightly structured interview where every candidate gets asked the same questions and is given the same amount of time to answer. This type of interviewing is simultaneously more fair and gives candidates more freedom, creating a positive candidate experience.

**Provide feedback after the interview.** [56% of candidates](#) do not receive any feedback post-interview, making it difficult for them to know what to expect next. Within a day of their interview, send interviewees an email with any post-interview steps, the expected timeline for your decision, and thank them for coming in to meet with you. By giving candidates clear expectations, you create transparency and build trust with them, while also improving your chances of potential offer acceptance. If a candidate gets another offer and knows that yours may be coming soon, they may wait for your answer before committing to another company.

**Send a follow-up survey.** The only way to know if you're truly creating a positive candidate experience is to ask people directly! Following the interview, send a link to a simple survey that asks candidates to rate their experience. Did they feel like lines of communication were open? How would they rate their candidate experience so far from 1 to 10? You can even include open-ended questions and ask candidates what they liked, what they didn't, and any suggestions they might have.



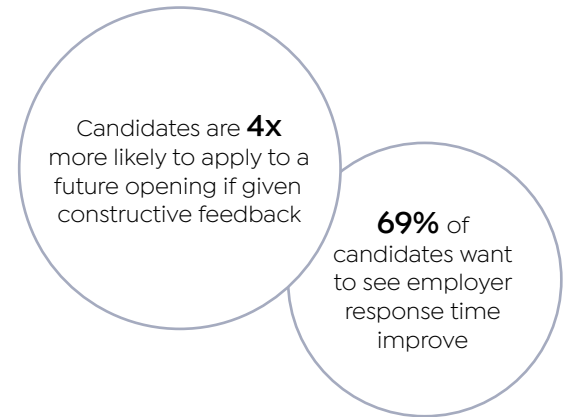
## Rejection

Even the candidates you don't choose to hire deserve a little bit of TLC. Considering that less than 1% of applicants get hired, that leaves 99% that won't receive the answer they're looking for. However, by providing a good experience even to candidates you reject, you'll improve the likelihood of them applying to future openings and leave them feeling good about the interaction they had with your company.

**Don't ghost the candidates you reject.** Instead of leaving candidates in the dark about your decision, let them know within a day or two if they are out of the running via email. [69% of candidates](#) want to see employer response time improve following an application. Being transparent about their standing demonstrates that you respect your candidates' time enough to not leave them hanging. This honest communication helps candidates move forward and find other opportunities that they are better suited for, which ultimately creates a better experience – even if it's not the outcome they were hoping for.

**Give hiring managers a template for sending feedback.** A candidate is 4 times more likely to apply to future openings if given constructive feedback, but some sticky legal issues can arise if precise reasoning for hiring decisions are shared. Give hiring managers a series of templated responses they can pull from if a job seeker reaches out asking for feedback. Candidates greatly appreciate feedback, as it can help them improve for future opportunities, but it can be a risky area to dive into for legal reasons. Providing clear guidelines for hiring managers to send out can satisfy candidate needs while keeping your company out of legal jeopardy.

Allow rejected candidates to give you feedback through a survey on your hiring process. Similar to the post-interview survey, consider sending a survey to all candidates that you decide to pass on. Not only will you learn a lot from these surveys, you also give candidates an outlet to share their feelings directly with you. This is especially helpful if candidates had a more negative experience – if you give candidates the avenue to share feedback with you directly, they are less likely to vent to the entire World Wide Web about their experience. Surveys help candidates feel heard and you get actionable feedback so you can continuously improve your candidate experience over time.



## Offer

Once you find a great person to fill your position, it's time to make your offer. If candidates have had a positive experience throughout your hiring process, they are [38% more likely to accept your job offer](#). But there are still important ways you can boost their candidate experience to really seal the deal.

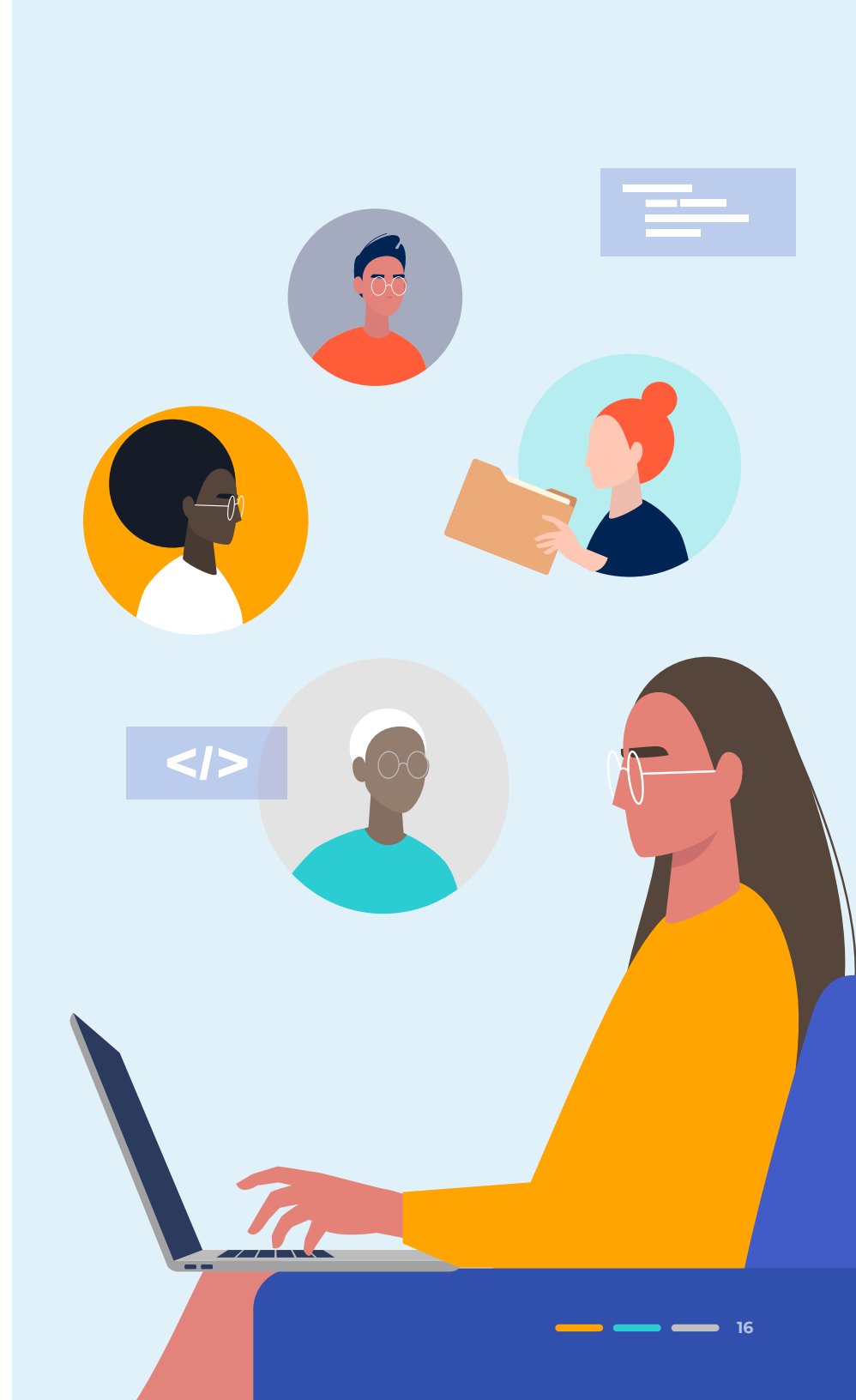
### **Reach out to candidates as soon as you've made your decision.**

Once you know you want to extend an offer, call or email candidates to let them know. You don't want someone else to snap them up while you wait to send over your offer! Strong candidates are a hot commodity, and you don't want to miss out because you waited too long to contact them.

**Create a competitive offer.** When you've got a great candidate that you want to join your company, it's not the time to low-ball their salary. Be open to negotiations for pay, benefits, and other perks, like remote work and PTO. It's likely that you're not the only one interested in your top choice, and competitive offers make candidates feel valued from the get-go.

**Allow flexible start dates.** If you're able to, be willing to allow candidates some leeway for when they will start. If they are currently employed, they may need or want to give two-weeks' notice to their old job. It's possible they may need time to relocate, or even just take a short break between jobs. This flexibility can give them the time they need to get their house in order for when they start work in their new role. Recognizing the humanity of your new hires sets a precedent for mutual respect and creates a solid foundation for strong employer brand.

**Be upfront about details regarding onboarding.** Let candidates know exactly what to expect. Inform them on how training works, how their first day will go, who they will report to, and what to do when they arrive on their first day.





# Conclusion

Creating a positive candidate experience does much more than benefit your candidates. Ensuring that your hiring process is optimized for a great candidate experience will also give you the best chance to land top talent, elevate your employer brand, and improve your company's reputation. To maximize your candidate experience, take a close look at each step in your hiring process, from the application to your ultimate decision.

At Criteria, we believe that candidates should be treated as equal stakeholders in the talent acquisition process. A positive candidate experience is more than a fad – it's necessary for your company's growth and employer brand. Happy candidates become happy employees, and we all know that great workers are the backbone of any company's success.





Criteria is an assessment company dedicated to helping organizations make better talent decisions using objective, multidimensional data. By combining leading-edge data science with rigorous validation backed by I/O psychologists, we provide the most precise assessments available. Our suite of assessments is the most comprehensive on the market, covering aptitude, personality, emotional intelligence, and more to provide the most robust picture of talent. Since launching in 2006, our assessments have been administered more than 25 million times through our user-friendly platform.

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