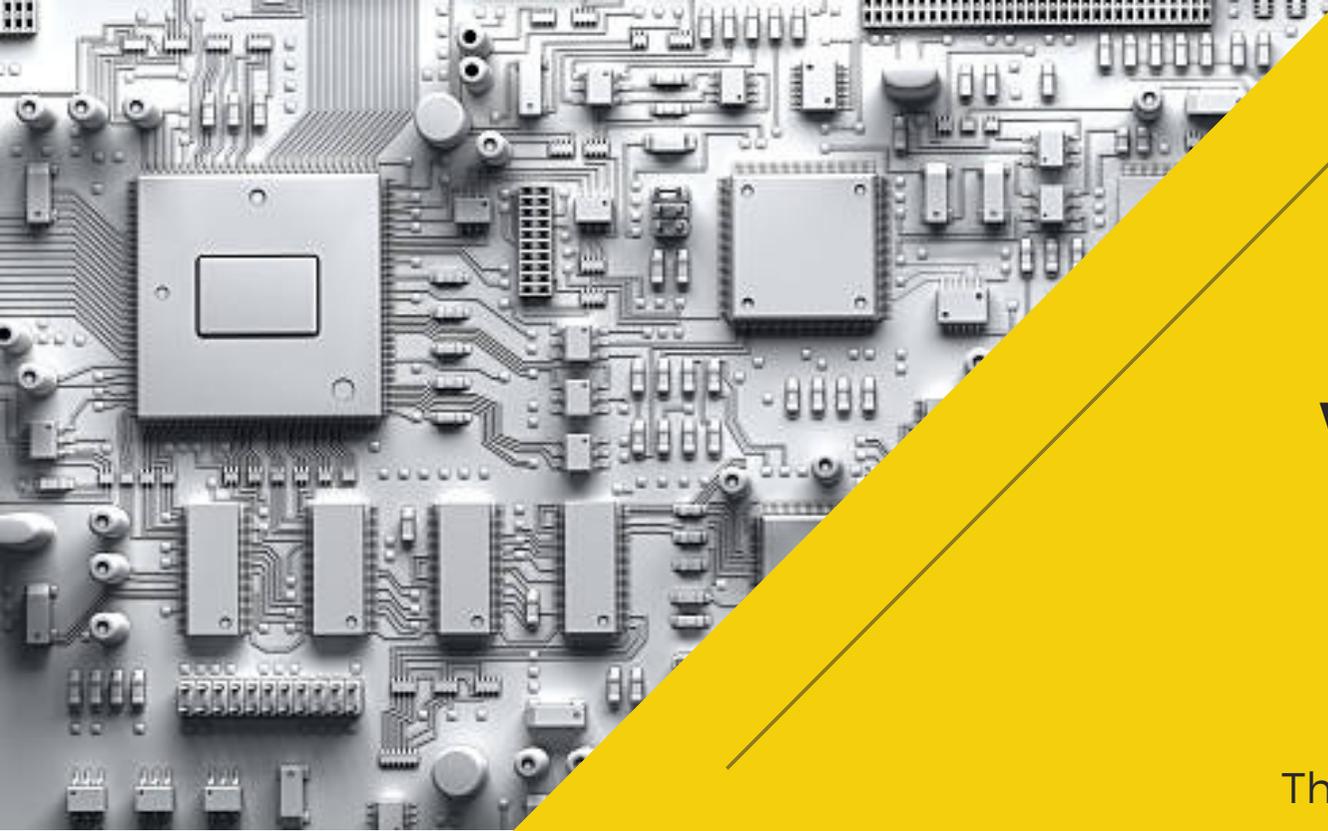# XO RECRUITMENT

INTERVIEW PREPARATION PACK FOR MANAGERS

Give your prospective employees a fantastic candidate experience!

Who is this for?

This guide is designed for hiring managers who are involved in selecting and interviewing talent. It is real life, practical advice that you can implement immediately to ensure the best results and candidate experience.

BEFORE YOU EVEN LOOK AT APPLICATIONS

Ask yourself:

- **What problem does this role solve?**
- **What does success look like at 3/6/12 months?**
- **What skills are essential vs trainable?**
- **What behaviours will make someone successful in this team?**

TIP: MAKE SURE YOU ARE ALIGNED INTERNALLY WITH HR/DECISION MAKERS ON TIMEFRAMES FOR HIRE, HOW MANY INTERVIEW STEPS, BUDGET FOR THE ROLE ETC ...

IF YOU ARE REVIEWING CVs

Look beyond the CV

- CVs show: past opportunities, exposure, career choices
- CVs don't show: learning ability, coachability, motivation, cultural contribution
- Watch out for: overvaluing brand names, penalising career breaks, assuming job-hopping = poor performance
- Use a consistent lens: review every application against the same criteria.

First contact with candidates

- Speed matters: long delays create drop-offs and signal disorganisation. Aim to acknowledge applications quickly, book interviews promptly, and communicate timelines quickly
- Remember it's a 2-way street: candidates are asking if you will respect their time, if you are prepared, and if they would trust you to manage them.
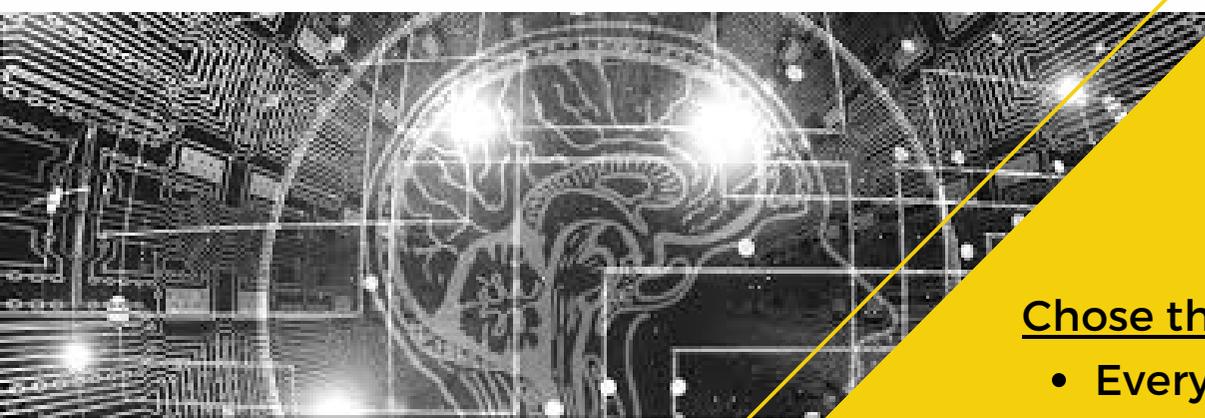
Design an effective interview process

Chose the right number of stages
- Every stage should have a clear purpose
- More than 2 or 3 interviews is overkill

PREPARE (this is non negotiable):
- Read the CV properly ahead of time
- Review notes from previous stages if not the first stage
- Prepare structured questions
- DON'T WING IT: it leads to biaised and inconsistent decisions

Running a great interview (1/3)

Ask structured, behavioural questions
- Focus on behaviours, not hypotheticals
- Use the STAR method: Situation, Task, Action, Result (Example: "Tell me a time when ...)

Start by setting the tone:
- Break the ice & Introduce yourself
- Explain the structure of the interview - have a guideline to come back to should things get out of tracks
- Outline timing
- Let the candidate know there will be time for questions

Probe for depth
- Good answers include: context, decision-making rationale, Impact, and Reflection
- If answers stay high-level, ask for clarification and follow-up questions

Running a great interview (2/3)

Here is a simple interview structure you can follow. It is simple, repeatable, and has a set of core questions that can be used for most roles

- **Welcome & Context (5mn)**
  - Introduce yourself and your role
  - Explain the structure of the interview
  - Reassure the candidate there will be time for questions

- **Career Overview (5/10mn)**
  - Understand the candidate's background and reason for looking for a role

- **Behavioural and skills questions (30/35mn)**
  - Deep dive into examples relevant to the role

- **Candidate questions (10mn)**
  - Give space for the candidate to assess you and the organisation

- **Close & next steps (5mn)**
  - Explain what happens next and timelines

Running a great interview (3/3)

Career & Motivation
- Can you walk me through your career and what led you to this point?
- What attracted you to this role and our organisation?
- What are you looking for in your next manager or team?

Role-relevant experience
- Tell me about your current role and what you're responsible for day to day
- What does success look like in your role today?
- Which skills do you use most often, and which are you still developing?

Performance & problem-solving
- Tell me about a time where you were proud of the work you delivered
- Describe a challenging project you had to solve recently
- Can you give an example of when things didn't go to plan and how you handled it?

Feedback, learning & resilience
- Tell me about a time you received constructive / difficult feedback.
- What's a mistake you've made a work, and what did you learn from it?
- How do you typically respond when priorities or expectations change?

Collaboration & Communication
- Describe a time you had to work with someone with a very different style to yours.
- How do you handle conflict or disagreement at work?
- Can you give an example of influencing someone without authority?

Values & ways of working
- What type of work environment helps you do your best work?
- What behaviours do you value most in teammates?
- What would people you've worked with say about your working style?

ASSESSING SKILLS WITHOUT BIAS

Beware of comming interview biases:

- Halo Effect: where 1 single positive trait or first impression influences your entire perception of a candidate, often unconsciously. For example, they went to a reputable university.
- Similar-to-me bias
- Confidence = Competence assumption.
- First-Impression bias: the first impression may be great, but don't let that distract you from the answers to your questions

Combat bias by:

- Taking notes
- Scoring against criteria
- Separating "likeability" from "capability"
- Sleep on it or run the interview by someone else

USE PRACTICAL ASSESSMENTS WHERE RELEVANT

Tailor your assessments to the requirements of the role:
If the role requires writing, review writing.
If the role requires problem-solving, work through a real-life scenario.
If the role requires communication, get them to present.
Use a real-life technical test for technical abilities.

Assessments should be:
- Job-Relevant
- Time-reasonable
- Clearly-explained
- Followed a feedback session

Don't get a potential candidate to fix a bug in your coding then never get back to them. You want to assess skills not use free labour.

CANDIDATE QUESTIONS: WHAT THEY REALLY MEAN AND HOW TO ANSWER WELL

Interviews are a 2-way street: candidates will ask questions to gather data . They are asking "is this a place where I can succeed, grow, and be treated fairly?

Your job is not to sell a perfect story, but to give an accurate, human one.

Guidelines for answering candidate questions well:
- Answer honestly, not perfectly
- Use concrete examples over statements
- Avoid corporate cliches
- Acknowledge challenges and explain actions
- Remember you are being assessed as a leader

If you don't know the answer, say so, and commit to finding out.

EXAMPLES OF COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS BY JOB SEEKERS IN AN INTERVIEW AND HOW TO ANSWER THEM WELL

- **Why is this role available? =** "Is this growth or churn? Did someone burn out or fail? Is there a story I should be worried about?"
- **How to answer well**: Be transparent without oversharing, and distinguish between growth, change and performance issues

- **What does success look like? =** "Are expectations realistic? Will success be clearly defined or constantly shifting? How will I be measured?
- **How to answer well:** Be specific, separate learning phase from performance phase, and avoid vague answers like "hit the ground running"

- **How would you describe your management style? =** "Will I be supported or micro managed? Is feedback safe here? Do you adapt to different people?
- **How to answer well:** Use real examples and acknowledge that no style fits everyone

- **What are the biggest challenges the team is facing right now? =** "Is the environment chaotic or stable? Are problems acknowledged or ignored? Will I be set up to fail?"
- **How to answer well:** Name the challenge, explain what's being done about it, and avoir pretending everything is perfect

- **How do you support development and progression? =** "Will I stagnate? Is growth intentional or accidental? Do you invest in people?"
- **How to answer well:** Give concrete examples of people who have progressed internally, and avoid generic promises

- **What is the team culture like? =** "Is this a safe environment? How do people treat each other under pressure? Do values show up in day-to-day behaviour?"
- **How to answer well:** Describe behaviours, not slogans. Share both strengths and quirks.

- **How is feedback handled here? =** "Will issues be addressed early or avoided? Is feedback punitive or developmental?"
- **How to answer well:** Explain cadence and approach, normalise feedback

- **What does work-life balance look like in practice? =** "Will boundaries be respected? Is burnout normalised?"
- **How to answer well:** Be honest about peak periods, and avoid defensive answers.

TAKING NOTES

Good hiring decisions are rarely made during the interview itself. They are made after, using the evidence you captured during it.

Why note-taking matters

- Relying on memory can lead to overweighting first impression, forgetting nuances between candidates and making decisions too much on "gut feel".
- Taking structured notes allows you to compare candidates fairly, justify decisions to stakeholders, reduce unconscious bias and provide meaningful feedback

How to take effective interview notes

- Write what was said, not how it felt. Focus on evidence, not impressions.
- Anchor notes to competencies, use clear headings ("Communication" or "Problem-Solving") and prevent random observations if not relevant
- Capture specifics, not summaries. Write down situations, actions, outcomes, and learnings. If you can't explain why you rated someone highly, your notes aren't detailed enough.
- Don't over-write: be factual and concise.
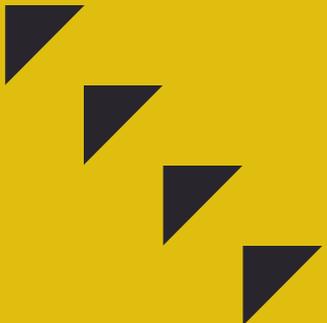
SCORING

Scoring creates a common language between interviewers. HOWEVER, it must be objective and used to structure judgement, not replace it. It must be the same for all candidates, used the same way by all interviewers and across the whole business.

- <u>Easiest way to score: 5-point scale</u>
  - 5 = Strong Evidence (exceeds requirements, multiple clear examples, low support required)
  - 4 = Solid Evidence (meets role requirements, relevant examples, some coaching needed)
  - 3 = Partial Evidence (some capability shown, gaps or limited examples, development required)
  - 2 = Weak Evidence (minimal or unclear examples, significant gaps)
  - 1 = No Evidence (Unable to demonstrate capability)

- Score by competency, not overall (technical capability / problem-solving / communication...) to prevent one strong area from inflating all scores
- Score immediately after the interview, before discussing with others, and using your notes, not your memory.
- Scores should highlight strenghts and risks, support discussion (not end it), and be weighed against role priorities (a candidate with a 3 in a trainable skill may be a better hire than a 5 in a non-critical one)
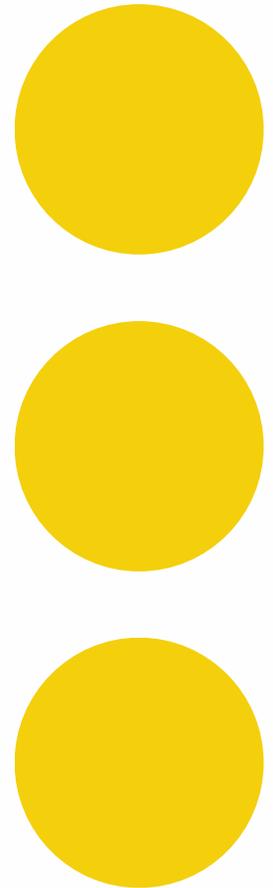
MAKE A DECISION

Avoid the "perfect candidate trap". No one will EVER tick every box.
Prioritise core capability, learning mindset, and values alignment.

Ask yourself:

- Can this person do the job?
- Can they grow into the role?
- Can they be trained in what they lack?
- Will they add to the team dynamic?

REFERENCES AND DUE DILIGENCE

Use references to validate patters, understand management style, identify support needs

Do NOT use references to look for reasons to disqualify, or ask illegal/relevant questions "off the record"

EXTENDING AN OFFER

- Move quickly: top candidates have options. Delays kill acceptance rates.
- Be clear and human: explain why you chose them, walk through the offer, and allow space for questions.
- The offer stage sets the tone for onboarding
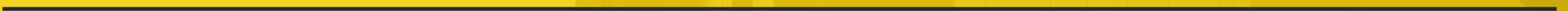
CLOSING THE LOOP ON UNSUCCESSFUL CANDIDATES

- Give unsuccessful candidates feedback on their application and why they were unsuccessful.
- Well-handled rejection protects your brand as an employer, encourages future applications, and shows professionalism
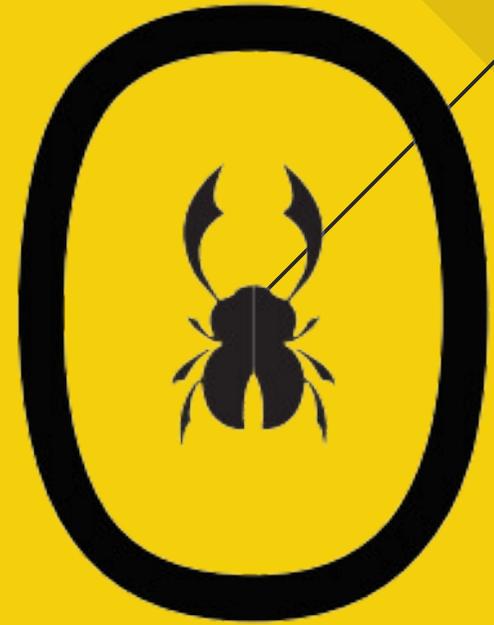
FINAL THOUGHTS

Great managers / interviewers are not born. They are trained. Interview is a skill.

When done well, it becomes one of the strongest levers you have to:
- Build high performing teams
- Improve retention
- Strengthen your culture

BEST OF LUCK!