



The COVID-19 Hiring Hangover



Prior to March 13, 2020, none of the clients of either Babich or East 57th Street Partners ever mentioned the possibility of using a Zoom or Teams video as a preliminary interview or candidate screening option. That all changed quickly with the shutdown of the country and the widespread fear of COVID.

Post-COVID, companies either temporarily or permanently changed the core principles of when, where, and how they hire people. In many cases, it also changed when, where, and how the people you hire work. We believe the pendulum will eventually swing back toward the old norms, but in the interim, there are certain practices we all need to adjust to.

Post-COVID preliminary interviews will often include video interviews in place of face-to-face meetings. Video interviews are here to stay.

While convenient, video interviews require enhanced planning, superior interviewing skills, and improved discernment on the part of the hiring manager. Video interviewers are distracted by books on the candidate's shelves, their furniture, the dog barking, the child crying or the sound and visual quality of the video. We miss the intuitive readings of body language, energy, in person poise, and disposition. Video interviews also do not leave much room for spontaneous introductions or tours.

If you are committed to video interviews, you should consider the following:

1) Never schedule a video interview for less than an hour.

They simply take longer to gather the information you need to make an informed decision. Adjusting video picture and volume eats time. Technical glitches can throw off the interview rhythm and eat up valuable time.



- 2) Plan more than usual
 - a. What key pieces of information do you want to garner from the candidate?
 - b. What are the top three questions or topics must be covered?
 - c. What information do you need to determine next steps?
 - d. How will you measure the candidate's energy and suitability for moving forward?

- 3) Do a face-to-face before you make a final offer
 - a. Many hiring managers are tempted to forgo this. That is a big mistake.
 - i. We know of at least one instance where the candidate was being coached 'off camera' by another person who was feeding the candidate answers to technical questions.
 - ii. Executive level people should always be required to have at least one face to face interview. The hiring cost of an executive is high. When you make a big investment, such as buying a house or a car you usually check things out in person before making such a significant investment. Hiring a senior member of your management team often costs at least as much and deserves the same level of attention

Finally, I am reminded of what my World War II era dad often said. "You should never buy a cat in a bag. Open the bag and see what you are getting first." A live face-to-face meeting will help both parties know what they are getting.

Where Will Your New Hire Work?

These days, the opportunity to work remotely, most often from home is at the very least the equivalent to a sign on bonus. It is



highly sought-after perk. Of course, certain jobs simply cannot be done remotely. Yet, many candidates are turning down even high-paying opportunities that do not offer at least a hybrid work situation (one or more days per week working from home). We believe even in a post-pandemic environment this trend is here to stay. There are some good things and bad things about the trend.

The good...

When hiring, you can cast a much larger net. You no longer are restricted to sourcing candidates who live within a reasonable commute from your place of business. We are reminded of one hiring manager who gave us a particularly challenging set of requirements for a three-person assignment he needed filled. When we shared that we did not know of anyone in the Dallas/Fort Worth area that would meet those requirements, he quickly replied, "I don't care if they live on Mars, none of us are working from the office anyway." We filled the assignment with candidates from New York, California, and Ohio.

There are more obvious benefits such as lower office costs, the ability to attract people who have family or disability issues requiring them to work from home and providing a no cost perk (the option of working from home) that your competition for that candidate may not be willing or able to offer.

The bad...

A new employee often needs training and development. Doing that remotely is challenging. Monitoring a new employees work habits, and progress remotely is also a challenge. Most companies want to assimilate our employees into the business, which includes the company culture, operating rhythm, team morale, team camaraderie, etc.



Doing this mostly via Teams or Zoom calls is difficult.

Finally, most of us learn a lot from overhearing the co-worker in the next cubicle managing a difficult customer or fielding a challenging question. We also build relationships from serendipitous meetings in the break room or joining a co-worker for lunch or happy hour after work. How do these important employee and team development items occur when people are working remotely? They don't.

A survey of 3,500 managers done by GoodHire, a software company specializing in background checks, sheds a bit of light on this debate. According to the survey slightly more than one in four office managers told GoodHire that remote work “worsened” employee productivity and engagement while 73% said they either improved or remained stable. Just 23% of managers disagreed that hiring from more locations due to remote offerings would allow them to attract better talent.

Nearly seven in 10 managers — 68% — said they have modified their hiring processes to reflect workers' preference for hybrid or remote arrangements.

When asked whether they agreed that companies will mandate a full-time return-to-office policy, 60% of managers agreed, 24% disagreed and 16% were unsure.

“Clearly, managers are struggling,” Max Wesman, GoodHire's chief operating officer, told Fortune.

Of course, there are other surveys that imply just the opposite of the findings of GoodHire. Consequently, the debate is likely to be ongoing- whether to continue remote and hybrid models of working or require employees to work from the company office.



In conclusion, even Fortune 500 companies are struggling to sort through the issues and nuances around the balance of in-office and remote work. There is and will continue to be push back from many candidates on positions that require 100% on-site in office work, especially as companies impose return to the office policies. As labor markets change, the push back will be dependent on the economy, the supply and demand of labor, and to some extent the ever-evolving changes in work culture. For now, hiring-managers must decide if and how they can accommodate this post-pandemic issue while advancing the top people, cultural and production priorities of their organizations.