Designing Your Candidate Experience: A Checklist for Recruiters

How would you describe the candidate experience at your company? Better yet, how would your candidates describe it?

Despite being a top priority for employers, research shows great candidate experiences are rare, and they're likely going to get worse.

Following years of volatility in the labor market, businesses have lowered their expectations for their recruiting and hiring processes. But candidates haven't — in fact, their expectations continue to increase. As a result, candidate resentment is rising, which means more people are reporting poor candidate experiences that turn them off from engaging with a brand altogether.

So, what makes the candidate experience so important? It's often the difference between winning top talent and losing out. 75% of employees say their positive candidate experience influenced their decision to take the job.

Luckily, we know exactly what sets a great candidate experience apart.

Companies with top scores in the annual Candidate Experience (CandE) Benchmark Research Reports share a few key differentiating factors:

- Timely, consistent communication throughout the recruiting process

- Set expectations at each stage of recruitment

- Timely, consistent engagement and follow-through from the employers

- Give feedback to candidates who weren't hired and ask for their feedback about the hiring process

- More transparency and accountability during the recruiting process

Your candidate experience can be good with just a few simple tweaks. But pay attention to the details to make it great, and you'll stand head and shoulders above the competition.

We're making it easy to dig into the details and provide the best possible experience with our **Candidate Experience Checklist.**

Our Checklist walks you through how to prep your internal team and provide a smooth experience for future employees. Use the Checklist to ensure recruiters, interviewers, and hiring managers do their part to give candidates what they need at every stage of the hiring process.

The Application Process

Your application process is the first part of the candidate experience. It can determine whether job seekers apply at all. Build a solid foundation for the candidate experience by making it easy for candidates to find your company's open roles and apply.

Optimize Your Career Site, Job Posts, and Job Applications

- [ ] Your career site is easy to find in your website's navigation menus.

- [ ] Your career site shows off your employer brand creatively, including your company values and employee testimonials, using images, video, and other media.

- [ ] Job descriptions are concise, including only the most relevant information (e.g., accurate job title and responsibilities, candidate requirements, and pay information where required).

- [ ] Job descriptions are consistent, using the same "voice," reflecting company culture, and avoiding gendered and jargon-heavy language.

- [ ] Open jobs are posted to large job boards (e.g., Indeed) and industry- or role-specific job boards.

- [ ] Open jobs are posted to your career site, which showcases your employer brand.

- [ ] Job applications are accessible on mobile devices.

- [ ] Job applications are available in multiple languages.

- [ ] Job applications are short, reducing applicant dropoff.

- [ ] Applicants can apply via text message (for relevant roles).

Establish Candidate Communication

- [ ] Notify candidates that their application was received, including details about next steps, like when they should expect a status update.

- [ ] Send rejection notices to candidates who are not selected for a screening. If possible, personalize your emails.

- [ ] If they expressed interest in being contacted about other roles, sort candidates into talent pools so you can engage them in the future.

The Screening Process

In a candidate screening, both recruiters and applicants are evaluating each other. It's also an opportunity to gauge whether the candidate would be a good fit for any other open roles at your company. A great screening experience leaves a positive impression, making candidates far more likely to apply again.

- [ ] Prepare your list of standard screening questions.

- [ ] Send an email with an automatic scheduling link to candidates chosen for a screening.

- [ ] Before ending the conversation, let candidates know when they should expect to hear from you about the next steps.

- [ ] Contact candidates who are not selected for an interview as soon as possible. Send a personalized email or make a phone call to let them know.

- [ ] If candidates expressed interest in being contacted about other roles, send them any relevant information or sort candidates into talent pools so you can engage them in the future.

- [ ] Contact candidates selected for an interview ASAP. Include an automatic interview scheduling link in your emails to eliminate scheduling back-and-forth and speed up the hiring process.

Before Interviews

Setting expectations is one of the most important things you can do to help your candidate experience stand out. Prior to beginning interviews, let candidates know what to expect and prepare the interview team.

Prepare the Interviewee

- [ ] After candidates have scheduled their interview, send an email confirmation that includes the time and location of the interview (whether that's the address of your office or a Zoom link). You might include interview tips, company information, and a contact person who can answer any questions they have.

- [ ] Send an interview brief with the confirmation email or separately. The brief should include details about the role, introductions to the interviewer(s), a list of materials the candidate should bring, and any other relevant information.

Prepare the Interviewer

- [ ] Train interviewing teams on how to conduct fair, respectful job interviews, maintain professionalism, and avoid bias.

- [ ] Ensure interviewers can access the candidate information they need, including resumes and LinkedIn profiles.

- [ ] Share Interview Guides and Scorecards with the interviewers to ensure candidates are asked the same questions and evaluated on the same criteria.

- [ ] Gather data from top performers at your organization in the same or similar role to give interviewers added insight into what to ask about and look for in top candidates.

During Interviews

Interviews are nerve-wracking for everyone, but you can take steps to put your candidates at ease and show them why your company is such a great place to work. There are many ways to make candidates feel welcome, whether your interviews take place in person or via video call.

Welcome Candidates

- [ ] Send candidates a personalized reminder email a day or two before the interview. You can include the same interview brief, especially if it's been a week or more since it was first sent.

- [ ] For video interviews, have recruiters join — even for a few minutes — to introduce the candidate and interviewer(s). Let them know how long the interview will last and stick to the schedule.

- [ ] For in-person interviews, ensure candidates know who to ask for or where to go when they arrive. Prepare the interview space before their arrival, and include an agenda, refreshments, and branded swag (like pens or water bottles), especially if the interview is long or there will be multiple interviews.

Set Expectations

- [ ] Let candidates know how many interviews to expect, as well as who will be conducting the interviews.

- [ ] Give candidates a quick overview of what to expect in each interview.

- [ ] Tell candidates your projected timeline for when a hiring decision will be made. Send updates as often as possible, preferably weekly, to keep them in the loop.

Make It Personal

- [ ] Find a balance between maintaining fairness and compliance and tailoring questions to the candidate's experience level and skill set to show your interest.

- [ ] Don't just run down the list of questions — listen to candidates' answers and ask thoughtful follow-up questions.

- [ ] Give candidates the chance to shine. Before wrapping up the interview, ask if they have any questions for you or if there's anything else they want to share about themselves.

After Interviews

Most positions require more than one interview, so after the first one, candidates are anxiously waiting to hear what happens next. If you don't get in touch promptly, they'll likely lose interest in your company. Unfortunately, two-thirds of candidates say an employer has ghosted them. Don't be a ghost — update candidates regularly post-interview to give them the best experience possible.

Follow Up

- [ ] Send a follow-up email a day or two after the interview to let the candidate know when to expect to hear if they're moving on. If the hiring team has already decided to move forward with them, include another automatic scheduling link in your email to keep the process moving forward.

- [ ] Contact candidates who aren't moving on promptly. Include information about other opportunities that may be a good fit if they expressed interest.

- [ ] After candidates are out of the running or have been selected for the role, send a candidate experience survey. This information is the key to improving your candidate experience. Be sure to differentiate between candidates who weren't selected and those who were hired for context when you're reviewing the results.

Keep In Touch

- [ ] Many job seekers will be interested in other roles at your organization if they have a great candidate experience. Build talent pools and engage with them regularly to grow a reliable candidate source.

Design and execute an engaging experience that leaves a positive impression on every candidate with the ClearCompany Applicant Tracking System (ATS). Thanks to our artificial intelligence (AI) and automation tools, you can personalize your career site, set-and-forget candidate communications, and easily keep hiring teams and candidates in the loop.

Discover why ClearCompany is the top choice for an excellent candidate experience.

Explore Candidate Experience Features