



Interview Best Practices

Thank you for agreeing to be a part of the recruitment process for your returnship program. By participating, you are helping open a door for returning talent to contribute their talent and energy to your organization. Below are a few best practices to help you feel confident during the recruitment process.

Remember the Basics

This program is open to those who have past professional experience and a career gap for caregiving. The most common examples of caregiving include child care, elder care, and care for an ill family member, but can also include self-care. Don't worry about "proving" a gap for caregiving. Ultimately, this program is meant to be inclusive and caregiving is defined broadly. You can reiterate criteria and ask applicants if they meet that criteria. Most will likely tell you a bit about their circumstances, but if they just answer "yes" to the criteria, that can be enough.

Reflect the diversity you're looking to see

Form an interview panel that allows applicants to see people in the company who look like them or have similar experiences. This will not only help the candidate feel at ease during the interview, it will also give them a peek into the culture of our organization and help them determine whether they could see themselves here.

Keep biases in check

We all have biases. Instead of pretending or wishing that we don't, practice fully acknowledging that we do. Take a moment to think about what you might assume about someone who took a break from their career for caregiving. To mitigate the effect of any biases you may hold, commit to approaching your assessment of each applicant without bringing any of those preconceived ideas to the table.

Look beyond culture "fit"

We are running this program to tap into a diverse talent pool with the ultimate goal of creating a more inclusive workplace. While finding individuals who share your organization's values is important, remember that the objective is to find talented people who bring different thoughts, perspectives and ideas to the table. Look beyond just "fit" and instead shift your mindset to focus on how an individual can add to the culture.

Ease anxiety by setting clear expectations

Candidates are probably going to be nervous. Their gap has likely been a barrier to their return to work. Even though the program is advertised as requiring a gap, they may still feel self-conscious or worry that they are being judged for it. You can help combat this anxiety by expressing enthusiasm for the program and the applicants individually. Let them know that not only is their gap not a barrier, you want to hear about their volunteer work, consulting gigs, freelance work, caregiving experiences, etc. Let the applicants know exactly what to expect from each step of the process, including general timelines. If there are any resources you can suggest to them to practice or prepare, please do so.



Interview Best Practices

Evaluate candidates holistically

For this program, it's particularly important that you scratch beneath the surface to evaluate an applicant's potential. You can consider many different factors, including previous career experiences, reskilling efforts done formally or informally, volunteer work and other life experiences. While each of these carry different weight, with previous career experiences being the most important, for the returnship program, we encourage you to look for the value in the other informal experiences and consider what competencies they may reflect.

Ask yourself:

- What makes a good (Role) in general? Is it that they've had the job title in the past or is it about possessing certain skills? What are those skills?
- What makes a good (Role) and employee at our company?
- Do you think, with the right amount of coaching, support and ramp-up time, this person could be poised for longer-term success at our organization? We're not looking for perfection here. Instead, we're looking for candidates with a strong foundation of experience who you think could ramp up over the course of the program and provide value to our organization.
- What do you need to know in the initial interview phase to feel confident extending an offer and what skills can you see develop over the course of the program?
- Consider how non-paid and other life experiences may translate into business needs.

Running a volunteer project

- Ability to persuade using influence vs. authority
- Ability to collaborate with different personalities, manage competing agendas
- Focus on goals and accomplishments
- Ability and willingness to lead

Participating in a volunteer project

- Maintain commitments to a cause despite ambiguity of role/responsibility
- Ability to collaborate with different personalities, manage competing agendas
- Manage own performance to accomplish team's goals
- Demonstrate passion and drive

Manage a child's special needs case

- Navigate complex bureaucracies and rules
- Adhere to deadlines and schedules
- Process complex information
- Make high-stakes decisions with limited information

Coordinate an international move

- Navigate complex bureaucracies and rules
- Adhere to deadlines and schedules
- Adapt to differing cultures and supporting family through their adaptation
- Learn a foreign language

Remember that the evaluation is two-sided

In the recruitment process, it's important to remember that while our organization is evaluating the applicants, the applicants are also evaluating you. Your interactions with them will give them a glimpse into the company culture and help them decide whether your company is the place they want to work.



Interview Best Practices

Consider screening in vs screening out

Especially in the earlier stages of the recruitment process, if you're not sure if someone is strong enough to be advanced to the next round of interviews, consider moving them forward. If they are not qualified, that will become apparent in the panel interview. Or, it may turn out that their earlier performance was due to a case of nerves and they go on to impress in subsequent rounds. Either way, you are providing the individual the opportunity of further interview practice and feedback which can benefit them in the future.

Best Practices for Technical Assessments for Returnships

There are some additional tips and best practices when assessing returners for technical roles.

- Consider modifying the level of the technical assessment: Even highly experienced returners may not know the latest coding language/technologies. With this in mind, consider using our intern level technical assessment for this program, or, in the case of those who use online technical tests, adjust your scoring rubric to screen more candidates into the next stage of the process.
- Be flexible with coding languages: Unless the role is dependent upon an individual's proficiency in a specific coding language, consider allowing candidates to interview with whichever language they are most comfortable in.
- Reduce the number of steps and interviewers: Given that long interview cycles can be overwhelming for a returner and that you have the program length to further assess the returner on the job, consider places where you can streamline your interview process as below.
- Focus on candidates' thought processes: When evaluating candidates, it's helpful to be focused on candidate thought process, problem-solving skills, and whether the solution makes sense versus focusing on specific code syntax and whether someone writes error-free code.