evolution
recruitment solutions

Improving
the Interview Experience

Introduction

As part of improving our processes at Evolution Recruitment Solutions, we consistently send out feedback surveys to our candidates and clients, as well as the standard NPS surveys to rate their experiences. This system includes sending Evolution's own bespoke post-interview survey to all candidates, in order to gather their feedback on the interview itself, as well as the company they had interviewed with and how they felt about the overall process.

In this instance, we analysed over 500 candidates' responses from their feedback on interviews at a wide variety of businesses all over the world. In the recruitment sector, a candidate's feedback on a company they are interviewing with is often overlooked; it is the client's feedback on the candidate which is the focus of the outcome.

Evolution has analysed candidate feedback and made note of some significant trends, which will not only be useful for businesses hiring IT and tech staff during their recruitment process, but also for candidates and recruiters alike.

“I didn’t receive any interview feedback.”

A noticeably frequent response in our client surveys is the lack of interview feedback. As a recruitment company, everyone who works at Evolution understands the sheer volume of CVs sent to clients and interviews arranged for a huge variety of roles on a weekly basis. For some businesses, it may seem like an arduous task providing interview feedback for each and every candidate they have interviewed, particularly if there have been a large number of candidates, or more than one role they are recruiting for.

However, the value of providing interview feedback for every candidate you meet is immeasurable. First of all, there is the moral issue; candidates take time off work, prepare for the interview and make the effort to travel there, whether it is by car or public transport. If they are unsuccessful, it is extremely beneficial for them to be provided with some constructive feedback, even if it is brief. Highlighting their strengths and weaknesses in the interview process will help them gain some clarity on why they weren’t right for the role, and can also give them confidence in future interviews.

Aside from the moral factors, there are also a number of reasons why providing interview feedback is advantageous in terms of the impact it can have on your brand. For example, given the growth of social media and the influence it can have on a company’s reputation if someone has had a negative experience, it is more than advisable to provide feedback in case a candidate posts a review of the interview online. Reviews of interviews and businesses in general on Glassdoor and LinkedIn are increasingly common.

“I insist that you obtain an appropriate response as to why I was turned down for the job. A simple “there was someone else with more experience” is not good enough.” – Software Developer

“I didn’t like the office.”

“The office was depressing.” - .NET Developer

Another stand out factor for candidates who had been for interviews were the number of people who had a negative impression of the business based on the office environment. As we are all aware, a clean, tidy and attractive working environment is not only beneficial for the mind whilst working, but it also gives a better impression of your company overall. If the office is taken care of, surely the employees are too!

It is surprisingly common for businesses to prioritise their day-to-day tasks without factoring in the appearance of the workplace as one of these responsibilities. If you are unsure as a business owner if your working environment is suitable, ask your current employees – this will be the most reliable source when assessing if candidates who are interviewing with you will be comfortable, or even impressed, by your workspace. If the feedback is quite neutral (or negative, of course) it may be beneficial for you to take a look into how it could be improved.

“The interview was cancelled.”

From a candidate’s perspective, having an interview cancelled can be frustrating. If the client has given plenty of notice for cancelling an interview, the candidate may be frustrated but also appreciative of the notice given. However, if an interview is cancelled last minute, this can be somewhat irritating for the candidate. (Unfortunately, some circumstances our candidates have experienced include businesses cancelling interviews when the candidate is on their way there…)

As mentioned previously, occasionally cancelling or rearranging and interview is the only option if, for example, someone is ill and unable to attend the interview, or another meeting has been rearranged and must take priority. Another reason may be that due to unforeseen circumstances, the availability or requirement for the role that was advertised may no longer be available or necessary. Some situations cannot be avoided, and if it transpires that an interview must be cancelled or rearranged, this is something that everyone involved – the client, candidate and recruiter(s) – must accept and manage appropriately.

However, given that candidates will take a lot of time and effort to prepare for and attend an interview, it is advisable for businesses to understand this in the run-up to their appointment. If the interview needs to be rearranged or cancelled – no matter the reason – try and give as much notice as possible.

“My interview was unexpectedly cancelled at the 11th hour, with no rational reason, having gone through two technical telephone interviews. Very unprofessional.” – Test Analyst

“I spent an hour and a half going to the interview, but they spent 10 minutes with me and said ‘you can go now’.” – Software Developer

“The interview was too short!”

Deciding on the length of an interview can depend on a number of factors. Businesses need to take into account the length of time that is acceptable for a candidate to take off work to attend an interview, whilst also considering how long it will take for questions, tests or presentations. It is often the case that successful interviews can go on for quite a long time, given that both the interview and potential employee are enjoying the discussion.

However, it is often perceived by many that if an interview lasts less time than they had anticipated, that this is negative. This isn’t necessarily true; if a candidate has particularly impressed an interviewer and all the required questions have been answered to a high standard, the interview may take less time than expected.

The main issue with the length of interview is generally that candidates are unsure where they stand; they will be considering how much time to take off work, and the times of buses and trains, amongst remembering everything they’ve research in the lead up to the interview! It’s worthwhile giving an estimate of the length of the interview when the date and time is confirmed, this way the candidate will know what to expect.

“The interviewers were late.”

When an interview has been organised for a specific time, date and place, it can be somewhat discouraging for an interviewer (and doesn’t give the most professional impression!) when they are waiting for a candidate to arrive. Similarly, if a candidate has arrived for an interview and the interviewers aren’t on time, this can be a little frustrating for the candidate. Not only does being on time demonstrate your respect for others, but it gives a demonstrable example of your operational attitude to work; for example, being on time for an interview will give the impression you would also be on time for meetings if you were to work together.

Furthermore, the moral factor comes into play again; if a candidate has taken a specific amount of time out of their working day to attend an interview, sticking to the timeframe that has been previously confirmed is expected. Candidates are always encouraged to arrive for their interviews few minutes early, to ensure that they aren’t late, and are also advised to contact their recruiter or the business they are interviewing with as soon as possible if they are running late. Occasionally, interviewers may find themselves caught up in a meeting or on a phone call which simply cannot be avoided, meaning they are slightly late for an arranged interview time. However, generally speaking, we encourage all parties to make a conscious effort to be on time for interviews.

“In short; late, hostile and ignorant.” – **Software Architect**

“I didn’t get a good impression of the company.”

“Some panellists were mocking my lack of knowledge in a certain technical aspect of C++. This is rude and gives a very bad impression of the company.” – C++ Developer

Ultimately, a “good impression” of a company is subjective – what may be impressive, interesting or motivating to one candidate, may be discouraging or unpromising for another. The solution to this issue is simple; if a business is honest and gives sufficient clarity of the company values, this is how a candidate will conjure up their own personal “impression” of a company, along with their view of the interviewers and how they come across throughout the interview process. Whether or not it is a positive impression is out of the business’ hands, as long as the hiring managers or business owners have ensured they have presented their company in a way they are content with.

Encouraging businesses to provide their candidates with meaningful feedback post-interview is imperative within the recruitment sector, although encouraging candidates to do the same in regards to the company they have interviewed with is not as common. It may be that some companies aren’t as interested in feedback as candidates are, however, many do value the feedback they receive. Understanding how people from outside of your business perceive the company overall can be beneficial for a number of reasons, but mainly to analyse if your efforts as an employer are coming across as well as you intend.

Evolution provides post-interview questionnaires not only for clients and candidates to provide feedback on our services, but also to provide feedback in as many areas as they wish to discuss.

“I liked the interviewers a lot!”

During the interview process, it is particularly important for the candidates to feel as though they connected well with their interviewers for a number of reasons. Firstly, they will potentially be working with you in some capacity; either on the same team, in the same department or at the very least, in the same office. Feeling as though there is a good personality fit with a couple of people a candidate will be working alongside (if they are successful) is unparalleled during the interview process, as feeling happy and comfortable at work is, for most, as important as the job itself.

Secondly, the right company culture is often high on the list of what IT professionals want when looking for a new job. Fitting into a new workplace is, for obvious reasons, quite prominent on most people’s agendas and involves a number of aspects, such as management structures, a company’s ethos and the importance of the health and wellbeing of employees.

These factors, amongst others, will all contribute to how a candidate feels post-interview about their connection with the interviewers and if they represented the company in a way which made the job even more desirable. First impressions are everything!

“I was impressed. They seem extremely competent and have a defined path to the future. I don’t have anything bad to say about the work, the strategy or the people. Definitely seems like a good organisation.”

– Senior Software Developer

“I enjoyed the office tour.”

For candidates, being able to picture themselves working within your business is more valuable than business owners or hiring managers may realise. Therefore, a tour of the office is advisable in order to give candidates an idea of your workplace and what it might feel like to work there on a day-to-day basis. Factors such as the office layout, if there are any break-out areas, tea and coffee facilities and so on, are all worth showing to candidates during the interview process – it gives an honest and open idea about their potential future workspace, and if it is right for them.

In addition to this, most people, no matter what level they are at in their career, will experience first-day nerves if they are successful in their interview and offered the job. If the candidate has been offered the role and is already able to picture where they are going on their first day, this will help to combat any anxious feelings in regards to the unknown! It may seem like quite a small gesture, but offering an office tour to candidates will be accepted by the majority of candidates. Plus, if there’s anything particularly unique or exciting about your office, this is your chance to impress!

“Very friendly staff, good tour of office with informative answers to my questions about the company.” – Software Engineer

“I was given a clear description of the role responsibilities.”

Surprisingly, not all companies clarify the specific role responsibilities of the job they are hiring for during an interview. Of course, recruiters will explain the role in great detail to candidates, and discuss their experience in order to determine whether or not they would be the right fit for the job and the company. However, as a part of the interview process, candidates will benefit from hearing the role responsibilities again, from their potential employer, given that the interviewer may be able to give a more in-depth description of the job. Furthermore, from a technical perspective, discussing the specifics may give more insight when delivered directly from the hiring manager, which will ultimately give the candidate the most genuine idea of what the role will entail.

Along with the specific role responsibilities, candidates also noted their desire to discuss the opportunity for progression during interviews in their feedback, given that development is an achievable option within the majority of IT and tech roles. Along with day to day tasks, tech stacks and additional responsibilities discusses during interview stage, it is also advisable to discuss career progression, if this is a viable option in the future. If, for example, the candidate was offered two very similar jobs with different companies, but one role had the opportunity for progression and the other did not, it is highly likely that they will choose the job in which they will be able to learn and progress further in their career.

“The interviewer was very professional and friendly, and explained the role and responsibilities in detail. The overall atmosphere was very friendly and the position is in line with my experience and aspirations.” – **Iteration Manager**

“Public transport connectivity to the office location was great.” - .NET Developer

“There are good links to public transport.”

For drivers, it may be a factor about the recruitment process that isn’t given a second thought – if you can drive and have access to a car, the commute often isn’t at the top of your list of priorities when looking for a new role. However, if you do not drive or have access to a car, and rely on public transport for commuting, it becomes increasingly important where businesses are based in relation to nearby bus, train or tram stops are for candidates. According to the 2017 Great Britain Transport Statistics report, 32% of people either walk, cycle, or use public transport to get to and from work.

This will be demonstrated to the candidates during interview stage, as attending the interview itself will be a practice-run for their potential future commute. If the candidate has to take a bus, train and another bus in order to attend the interview, it may have a slightly negative impact on their perception of what it could be like to travel to work, if they were to get the job.

Of course, if your business does not have good links to public transport, there is no quick fix for this; however, the commute and the ease for candidates to travel to and from work can then be proactively discussed during interviews.

“The role suited my experience, as well as the company being a good personality fit!”

The majority of candidates want the best fit all-round, based not just on the job itself and their potential role responsibilities, but also their feelings towards the business as a whole and the people they met during the interview process. Essentially, accepting a new job is about more than just the role – it’s about what they’re looking for overall, and similarly if they are what the company is looking for, also.

If a hiring manager interviews a candidate who, on paper, is perfect for the job but doesn’t feel like the ideal personality fit, this could be a deciding factor in the interview process. Similarly, if a candidate felt positively about a job but was unsure about whether the culture was right for them, this could lead to them accepting an offer elsewhere.

As a result, it is advisable for businesses to be as open and honest as possible during the interview process; although interviews can sometimes be quite formal, giving candidates a good impression of what you’re like on a personal level could be the potential deciding factor if they have more than one job offer.

“The interviewer was interviewee friendly from start to finish and wasn’t afraid to show his personality. Some interviewers have a business face on throughout, which is something I don’t like!” – Business Analyst

Conclusion

Overall, there were some noticeable trends throughout the analysis of our candidate feedback data. Generally speaking, candidates would benefit from receiving interview feedback, a tour of the office, clarity on the role, punctuality, and a positive overall impression of the interviewers and business as a whole. In essence, the candidates expect the same from an interview that the interviewers do. Streamlining the interview process and ensuring that all parties are happy with the outcome, whether a candidate has been successful or not, will benefit the entire recruitment sector as a whole from both a hiring and applying perspective.

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