

Blueprint for Delivering an



**Exceptional
Candidate
Experience**

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What *Not* To Do



Here's a (true) story about a CIO candidate who was interviewing for his "dream" job.

Fortunately, this story isn't about a Kirby Partners client organization. Because it reads like a playbook for exactly what NOT to do.

This CIO candidate was actively pursuing a new opportunity. A prestigious, multi-billion dollar organization invited him to interview. The position was perfect in scale and scope for him. He was flown in to interview, and went into the day excited about the opportunity.

He called us the day after the interviews. We were shocked when he reported that "There is NO WAY I would ever consider working for that organization..."

What went wrong? We quickly learned the organization had committed two egregious candidate experience "sins". First, they failed to show the candidate respect. And second, they failed to serve as a gracious host.

The first red flag was that despite asking, the candidate hadn't received an agenda for the day. He knew to expect a meeting with the CEO and other key stakeholders for the position but had no other details.

When he arrived, someone ushered him into a small conference room and quickly left. He was left sitting alone. His day entailed lots of waiting and uncertainty. He had to move to different rooms several times due to meeting spaces being double booked.

Most of the interviews ended up being severely shortened without a reasonable explanation. One key executive spent just five minutes with him. He could tell the executives' focus was elsewhere.

This not only made it difficult to get a feel for the position but also made him feel the organization didn't respect him.

Several of the executives he met with multi-tasked throughout the interviews. The candidate found building connections challenging with interviewers' heads buried in their devices.

He'd carved two days out of his busy schedule to travel to their facility for the interviews. Ultimately, the organization did nothing to make him feel welcome. They failed to help him understand and feel connected to their mission and community.

Though they invited him back, he had no interest in continuing in the process. The organization left him feeling it would be a terrible place to work. Candidate experience matters.



Why Does *Candidate Experience* Matter?

“In a competitive or uncertain market, it’s critical that organizations reflect on what their employer brand is, and treat candidates in a way that’s consistent with that brand.

We stress the importance of delivering an exceptional caliber candidate experience during the interview process because it’s critical in attracting the best candidates and retaining talent over time.”

Judy Kirby,
CEO of Kirby Partners

Give candidates a great experience, and they're more likely to say "yes" when you offer them a job. (A poor candidate experience is the most cited reason for turning down a job offer.)

Candidates who have a great experience interviewing with your organization tell others. They'll be more loyal to your organization and will likely stay longer. Over time, more great people will want to work for your organization.

In contrast, poor candidate experience:

- Costs you top talent
- Harms your reputation as an employer
- Increases your cost to hire
- Increases your offer turn-down rate
- Leads to lower referral rates
- Weakens your brand
- Can cost you business

Candidate experience matters. Yet, so many organizations fail to focus on meaningful aspects of candidate experience.

What makes for a good candidate experience? Convenience. Speed. Respect. Friendliness. Connections.



Defining the Optimal Candidate



Step 1: Understand how you're perceived in the market

Before you start crafting the optimal candidate experience, understand where you are today. What is your reputation as an employer? What is the current perception of your employer brand in the market?

Resources you should use include:

- Employee surveys
- Sites like glassdoor.com which can provide valuable insights into how your organization is perceived as a whole
- In-depth interviews with past candidates to understand how well you met their expectations and where improvement opportunities lie
- Exit interviews with employees leaving your organization

Step 2: Determine how you want potential hires to perceive your brand

- What is unique about your organization?
- What perceptions about your organization need to be overcome?
- For what reasons would a candidate want to work at your organization versus your competitors?
- What is your culture like? (E.g., formal versus casual, strict versus flexible, family-friendly, etc.)
- Why do employees stay with your organization? Why do they leave?
- What does the community have to offer prospective candidates? What would entice someone to move to the area?
- How do you want job candidates to feel about the way your organization treated them throughout the hiring process?

Distill the data down from these questions into an overarching statement (i.e., your employer value proposition) that will serve as the essence of your candidate experience and messaging.

Achieving key stakeholder alignment on your messaging and value proposition is critical to success. (It should go without saying that your messaging needs to be authentic and should accurately reflect what it's like to work at your organization.)

Step 3: Map out every touch-point in the candidate journey, and brainstorm ways to deliver on your brand values and employer value proposition

- Looking at every touch-point (starting with the job posting and application process through the onboarding process), determine ways to deliver a positive experience that is consistent with your employer brand.
- What message needs to be communicated to candidates at what point?
- In what ways are you communicating your brand value?
- What does an optimal candidate experience look like at each stage?

Executive Candidates Have Elevated Expectations

C-level and director-level candidates have higher expectations for how they're going to be treated during their candidacy, so consider creating a customized plan for these high caliber positions.

The organizations that are most effective in hiring and have the best retention rates, treat candidate interviews similar to planning for an important special event—they carefully coordinate the visit from beginning to end and orchestrate small details that will “wow” the candidate.



Nine Essential *Candidate Experience* Strategies

Some of the strategies covered in this section should probably go without saying, but we've seen organizations neglect them enough to know that they're worth mentioning.

When we work with our executive search clients, we employ these strategies (and more) on behalf of the organization to help them reach and attract exceptional candidates.

1. **Make it easy to apply:** Keep the application as simple as possible and ensure you're using all the information collected. If you're not using it, don't ask for it.

Application best practices:

- Let candidates know upfront what information they'll need to complete your application
- Ensure your application is mobile friendly
- Use LinkedIn or resume parsing to reduce the amount of information the candidate has to manually enter
- Send a confirmation email confirming receipt of the application

2. **Streamline your process:** We've seen countless organizations lose top candidates because they've taken too long to make a decision and the candidate gets hired elsewhere. Extending the time between interview phases due to lack of search committee alignment or scheduling challenges frustrates candidates. The ideal process is well-orchestrated and efficient with minimal time in between interview phases. Candidates resent when their time is wasted and are unlikely to apply again or accept an offer with an organization they feel wasn't respectful.

3. **Compel candidates to join your organization:** Clearly communicate why the work you're doing is important throughout the hiring process.

4. **Give a realistic portrayal of the position:** Identify the need you're hiring to fill and craft a clear, easy-to-read job description. Be honest and upfront about your expectations for the role and challenges the new hire will face.





Small things like having an employee take them to lunch or giving them a facility tour can make a huge difference in the candidate's level of engagement and enthusiasm. Understand what motivates them, what's important to them, and to the extent possible treat candidates as valued individuals rather than employing a one size fits all approach to engaging them.

Respond to candidate thank you and follow-up notes, and when you're ready to extend an offer, have the candidates' prospective manager contact the candidate to extend the offer or immediately following the offer. (In our experience this leads to faster acceptance.)

For the candidate who accepts the position, their first few weeks at work are comparable to the honeymoon phase of a marriage, so consider ways to make their initial days special. Some organizations are currently offering paid subscriptions to a wellness app or a complimentary delivered meal as a nice gesture to welcome someone to the team. Virtual "meet and greets" are also a nice touch.

- 5. Determine how you'll "sell" the position:** Generate a list of three or four "sizzle" points that will be used to market the position and organization to prospective candidates. For example, is the position a great opportunity to build a team from the ground up? Develop strategy for an innovative project? Improve customer satisfaction? Understand what will appeal to candidates and make sure you're highlighting what is great about the position throughout the process.
- 6. Make candidates feel welcome and accepted:** Ensure you have a plan in place to get to know candidates and make them feel valued.

7. **Treat candidates respectfully and accommodate their needs:** It's critical that candidates feel that their time is respected and that their schedules are accommodated to the extent possible. Leading organizations are willing to work with candidates to find interview times that will have minimal impact on their current responsibilities.
8. **Provide candidates the information needed to evaluate the opportunity:** Deciding to accept a job offer is a big decision. Leading organizations do everything they can to ensure candidates have the information they need to make an informed decision. From making sure the candidate is provided resources to learn as much as possible about the area when potentially relocating, to ensuring the candidate has the opportunity to spend adequate time with their new boss and key team members, consider ways to make sure candidates have their questions answered.



9. **Update candidates frequently:** Not surprisingly to anyone who has ever conducted a job search, the biggest opportunity area for most organizations is better and more frequent communication during and after the application process.

Create and share a communications plan detailing how and when candidates will receive updates—if you need to deviate from the plan, let candidates know. Even if your update is that “there is no update,” candidates appreciate being kept in the loop.

As the interview process draws to a close, set clear expectations about your timeline for filling the open position and next steps in the process. Notify candidates of the hiring decision as soon as possible. For candidates that don't receive an offer, consider providing feedback or coaching to the extent possible.

Video Interview *Checklist*

Manage the Logistics

- Send a calendar invite to minimize the chance of time-zone confusion or accidental missed appointments
- Provide an agenda and communicate:
 - Interview time
 - Interview format
 - Interviewer names and bios
 - How interviewers will join the meetings (i.e., video, conference call)
- If the candidate will be having multiple interviews, allow for some breaks in the interview schedule to allow the candidate to have a little downtime to refresh
- Send a reminder message the day before confirming any logistics details and conveying the team is looking forward to meeting them
- Provide candidates with a benefits summary
- Coordinate questions among interviewers—it can be tedious for a candidate to answer the same questions repeatedly so make sure you're asking the right questions for the right reasons

Optimize Your Camera set-up

- Select a quiet location where the interviews won't be interrupted
 - Choose a location in front of a blank wall or bookcase so your background is clean and free of clutter or distractions
 - Do not sit in front of a window as this will cast a shadow on your face
 - Place your laptop or camera at least an arm's length away and positioned so the camera is slightly higher than your head (use can use a stack of books if needed)
- Your camera should be at the height of the top of your head and pointed down into your eyes



Video Interview *Checklist*

Continued

Facilitate Successfully

- ❑ Start with some rapport building questions:
 - “I see on your resume you worked at [name of last company]. What was your favorite part about your role?”
 - “It says you lived in [name of city]. What brought you there, and how did you like it?”
 - “You attended [university/college]. What did you study there and what was it like attending school there?”
- ❑ Make sure the candidate ends the interviews knowing:
 - Why they would want to work at your organization
 - What the culture and people are like
 - The perks and benefits offered for the position
 - The level of work-life balance offered
 - What the position entails (i.e., what the day to day looks like, and what challenges and opportunities exist)
 - What the rest of the process will be
 - Timeline for the decision
- ❑ Leave time at the end for candidate questions and some “open discussion”

Follow-up

- ❑ For final candidates, consider scheduling brief meet and greets with key executives who aren't position stakeholders and haven't been introduced during the process to make the candidates feel welcome and valued

Embrace the disruptions

It probably goes without saying, but unlike a face-to-face interview, video conferencing has the potential for multiple interruptions. You may experience a lag in response time due to the wireless network. One of you may have noise in the background that you're unable to drown out.

After you've had a chance to greet the candidate, alert them that you may experience technical difficulties during the interview. Reassure them that it's okay and that you can reconnect if needed.

Courting Out of Area Candidates

- ❑ Communicate your expense reimbursement process and travel policies (if applicable) upfront
- ❑ Try to schedule interviews on Mondays or Fridays to minimize candidate's time away from current position
- ❑ Discover what's important to the candidate and what their interests and hobbies are so you can better "sell" them on the area. For example, if you know the candidate is an avid bicyclist, share information about local trails and team members who bike commute
- ❑ Arrange for candidates flying in to be met at the airport and driven to the interview location
- ❑ Provide a list of the best local restaurants or appealing areas of town they should visit
- ❑ If the candidate is staying overnight in a hotel, leave a welcome basket in their room with snacks or local products
- ❑ Have the candidate's potential boss and other key executives take the candidate out for meals while they're in town
- ❑ Provide materials about the area along with a real estate agent recommendation and school information (if relevant)
- ❑ If the candidate's partner is traveling with them, arrange for a town tour or a meal with an employee to make them feel welcome and special



Kirby Partners helps you

“Hire for Impact”

Your executive hires need to be the best candidates available, not the best candidates responding to your job postings. When you post an open executive position, you'll likely find yourself inundated with unqualified candidates. The best candidates often aren't actively searching for a new position and probably won't learn about your opening unless sought out.

We understand the struggle to avoid a bad hire while feeling pressured to fill an open position. It's hard to find the time and resources to hire an executive, yet you know it has to be done right. Kirby Partners has helped hundreds of healthcare organizations and companies solve this exact problem.

We use a proven framework that we've refined during the last 33 years to find you exceptional executives.

- Clients that recommend us: 98%
- Average tenure of placed leaders: 8 years
- Fill rate for C-suite positions: 100% (99% overall)
- Candidate offer acceptance: 98%
- Slates with diverse candidates: 95%
- Named one of Forbes' "America's Best Executive Recruiting Firms"

Find Out More

We'd be delighted to share more candidate experience best practices and discuss ways we can partner with you to attract the highest caliber talent to your organization. Contact jkirby@kirbypartners.com for more information.