



2025 Candidate Experience Report

Job seekers reveal what they want to see in a hiring and onboarding process



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What is the candidate experience? Is it really that important?

For many business owners, finding and hiring the right people for their team is their number one challenge. Turnover, short-staffing, and unqualified employees can cost businesses thousands in lost revenue opportunities.

Over the last few years, we've seen a wave of businesses attempting to attract higher quality candidates by improving their workplace and their offerings. Many employers have also begun to rethink their hiring process and make improvements to win over their top-choice candidates.

We define **the candidate experience** as the experience a candidate has with a **potential employer throughout the hiring process, from job posting to job offer**. And in this annual report, we dive into the candidate experience, and what it means for your ability to get the best employees to work for you.



Candidate Experience

the experience a candidate has with a potential employer throughout the hiring process, from job posting to job offer

In our research, we attempt to answer questions employers would ask job seekers if given the chance, like:

- How much does the candidate experience matter?
- What are job seekers looking for during a company's hiring process?
- What are the top reasons candidates decline job offers?
- How often does a hiring process influence a candidate's decision to accept or reject an offer?
- What do job seekers think about AI in the hiring process?
- How can employers improve their candidate experience to hire more successfully?
- And more!

What's causing employees to look for new jobs anyway?

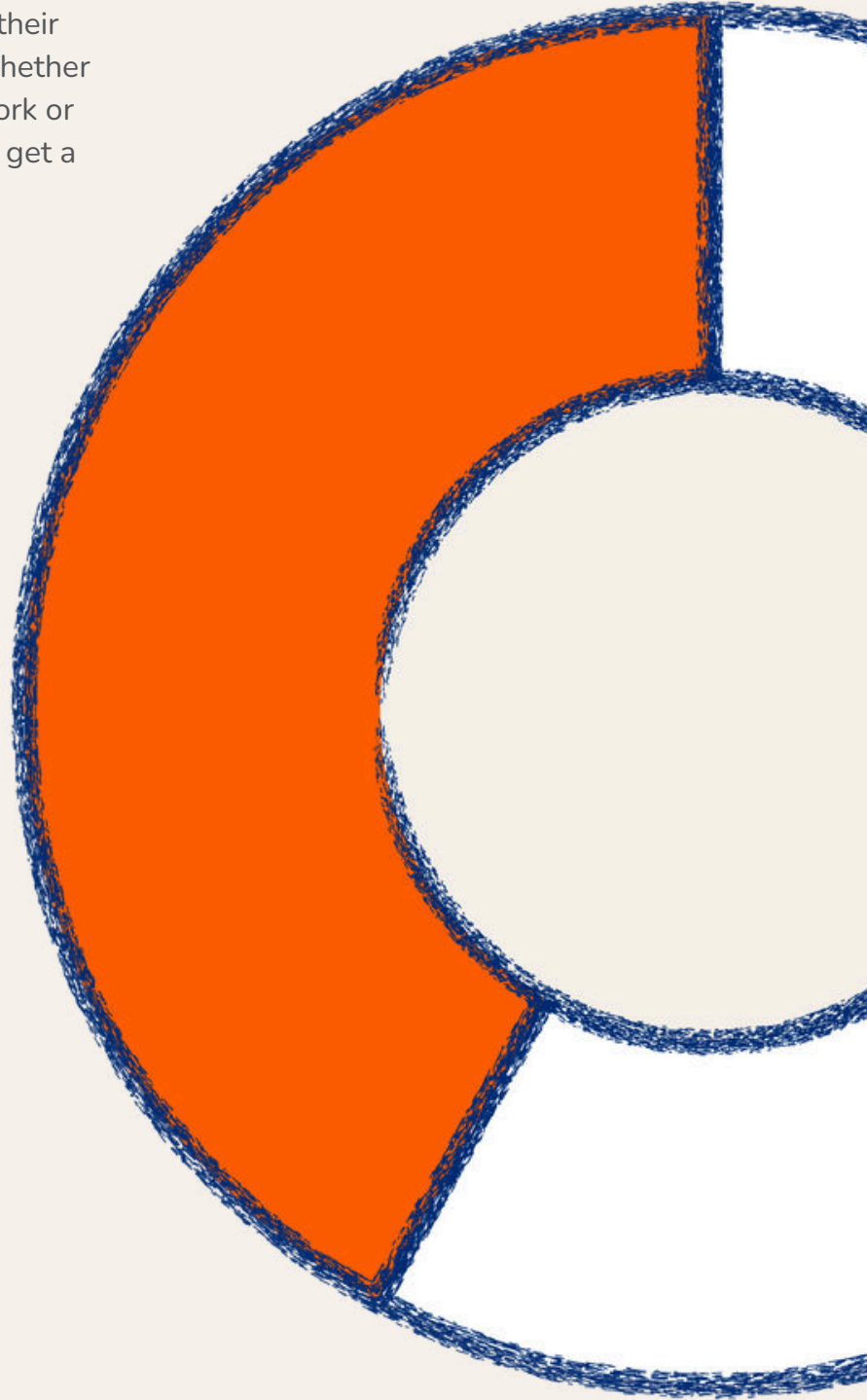
After several tumultuous years of heavy turnover, the number of people quitting their jobs has started to decline nationally. Whether this is because of more satisfaction at work or due to uncertainty around their ability to get a new job, we can't be totally sure.

However, according to our data, many workers still have considered seeking new opportunities in the last year.

We found that 42% of job seekers have considered leaving their job in the last 12 months – of that number, 71% have applied to 1 or 2 more jobs.

42%

of job seekers have
considered leaving their job
in the last 12 months



What's causing employees to look for new jobs anyway?



Job seekers are in search of higher pay

So why are the job seekers we surveyed considering leaving their jobs? Turns out, many of them are in search of **higher compensation**.

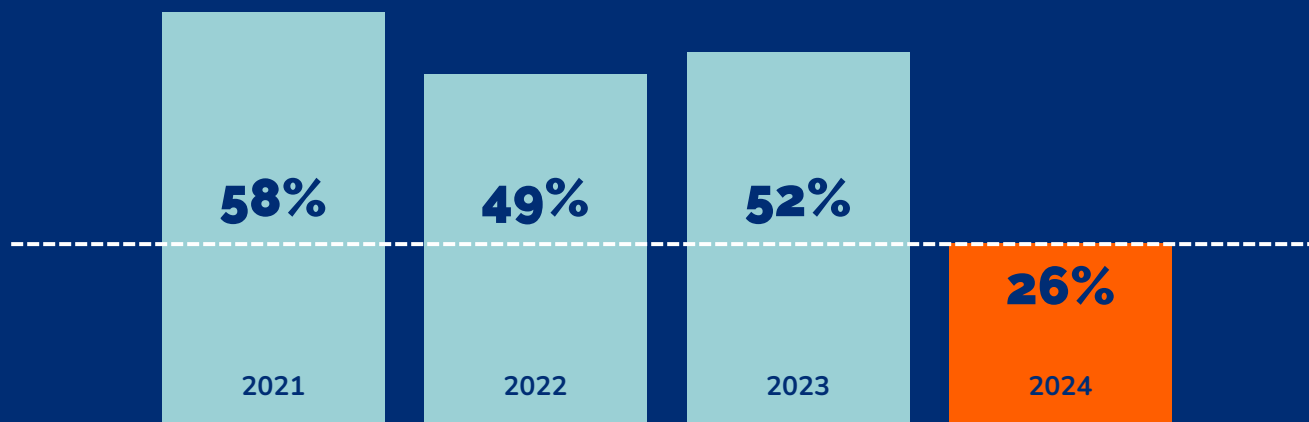
Dissatisfaction with current pay is the **#1 reason** employees have considered leaving their job in the last year.



Layoffs are impacting many

For those that actually left their job in the last 12 months, the majority (33%) said it was because their position was eliminated or they were let go. They're not alone – **in the tech industry, over 100,000 workers have been laid off this year**. Other large companies like GM, Mercury Marine, and Boeing have announced major layoffs recently as well, with plans to cut thousands of jobs.

% job seekers that have declined an offer because of a poor candidate experience over the last 4 years.



Changing of the tides

In years past, we reported that the majority of job seekers can and have turned down jobs because of a poor candidate experience. But in the latest job market, full of uncertainty and layoffs, it seems this has potentially changed.

32% of job seekers said they had a poor candidate experience in the last year.
26% said they have declined an offer due to a poor candidate experience.

Because of the stark differences in the survey this year, we can make a couple of hypotheses:

Job seekers have lower expectations because of a tougher economic situation.

Employers have taken steps to improve their hiring processes and candidate experiences.

However, the data does still show that job seekers care about the hiring process and it does influence their decision to join a company. Let's dig a little deeper to see what job seekers are looking for when seeking new employment and how the hiring and onboarding process impacts their decision making.

Do job seekers really care about the hiring process?

Aside from a job seeker's motivations to find new employment, what else are they thinking about when going through the steps of finding a job and vetting companies? Is the opportunity itself the only thing that matters – or does the hiring process actually impact a job seeker's final decision?

What attracts job seekers to apply to jobs?

Since the majority of job seekers have considered leaving or have left their job due to dissatisfaction with compensation, it's no surprise that "the job posting stated the compensation I desired" has the biggest influence on their decision to apply to a company. Job seekers are also interested in flexible work schedules and the benefits and perks a company offers.

Job seekers are also looking for a flexible schedule. This might look like the ability to easily swap shifts or to pick the days that they work. Additionally, a good benefits package is also attractive to employees. Health insurance and retirement options can often be just as enticing as a high salary – all of which employers should put in their job posting.

How much do job seekers care about the hiring process?

When asked about the company they currently work for (or most recently worked for), 91% of employees rated the candidate experience in the hiring process as positive. And 66% of candidates said that a positive experience influenced their decision to accept an offer. **91% of candidates said a positive candidate experience influenced their decision to accept an offer.**



91%

How one CareerPlug client creates a better candidate experience:

William Bocast owns a Culligan franchise and uses CareerPlug and his own best practices to provide all candidates with a great experience and positive impression of his company. Let's go over some of his best strategies.

Keep candidates informed

Communication is key during a hiring process, and it's important to keep all candidates informed. William personally calls everyone he interviews to give them feedback and let them know why he isn't moving them forward. If this level of time commitment isn't feasible for you, you can automate communication with CareerPlug and send polite rejection emails to candidates you don't want to hire.

Be honest about job expectations

Finding out that the role and responsibilities are different than they expected is one of the number one reasons candidates turn down a job offer. It can also lead to turnover down the road for those you do hire.

It's important to write thorough job descriptions that accurately reflect the role. Be sure to spend some time during interviews to explain the role in more detail. William shares, "It's a job. Don't sugar coat anything. People appreciate being told what the job is going to be like and what the culture of the company is. Tell candidates what it feels like to work for your company."

Have empathy for candidates

We all know job hunting can be tough! It's good to put yourself in the candidate's shoes and make them feel at ease. William shares that he often prefaces interviews by saying, "It's ok to be nervous. Nervousness is good; it means this is something important to you! Let's just have a conversation."



Why are job seekers declining job offers?

Even though employers seem to be improving the candidate experience, there will always be job seekers that turn down offers. As an employer, it can be helpful to understand why candidates are choosing other opportunities over yours. **Our data shows:**

36%

of job seekers said they have declined an offer because of a negative experience

70%

of job seekers prefer in-person interviews, making them the number one preferred interview format over virtual and phone interviews.

33%

of job seekers have stopped filling out an application because it required a one-way video interview.

“A negative experience with people in the interview process” and “compensation and benefits not meeting expectations” are the top reasons that candidates decline job offers.

So what parts of the candidate experience have the most impact on a candidate's final decision to accept an offer? Here's what we found:

Interview experience

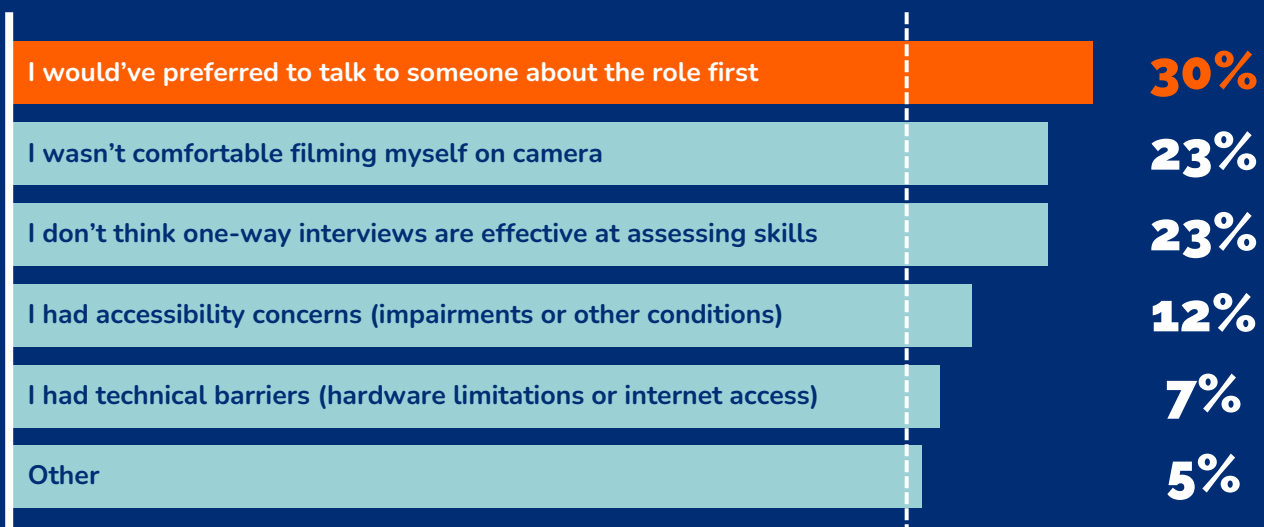
Interviews are not only a time for employers to get to know candidates better and determine if they'd like to move them forward – they are also a crucial time to get candidates excited about working for your company.



One-way video interviews

To save time during the hiring process, some employers have started incorporating one-way video interviews into early stages of the hiring process. These videos are typically asynchronous, meaning candidates record their responses to predetermined questions or upload a video of themselves vs having a two-way conversation with an interviewer.

We found that **33% of job seekers have stopped filling out an application because it required a one-way video interview**. We then asked those job seekers why they didn't want to complete the one-way video interview:



How do job seekers feel about AI in the hiring process?

AI is everywhere these days, so it's no surprise that many people are taking advantage of it to streamline hiring. AI can be used to write job descriptions, parse resumes, rank applicants, and even communicate with candidates. But the real question is how do job seekers feel about this?

It seems that there are mixed feelings around AI – which makes sense, since many of us are still wrapping our heads around it. **About 23% of job seekers ranked their comfort level of AI in the hiring process as neutral.**

A large orange percentage '37%' is displayed on the left side of a vertical blue line. Below it, text indicates that 37% of job seekers are comfortable with AI in the hiring process.

of job seekers are **comfortable** with AI in the hiring process

A large orange percentage '40%' is displayed on the right side of a vertical blue line. Below it, text indicates that 40% of job seekers are uncomfortable with AI in the hiring process.

of job seekers are **uncomfortable** with AI in the hiring process

But when it comes to the candidate experience, we might argue that there are some things that you *shouldn't* rely on AI for.

47% of job seekers think that AI chatbots make the recruitment process more impersonal.

We also know that 60% of job seekers will quit in the middle of filling out applications if they're too long or complex. By requiring the candidate to interact with a chatbot to apply, you've added more time and complexity to their candidate experience – which could potentially backfire for your employer brand.

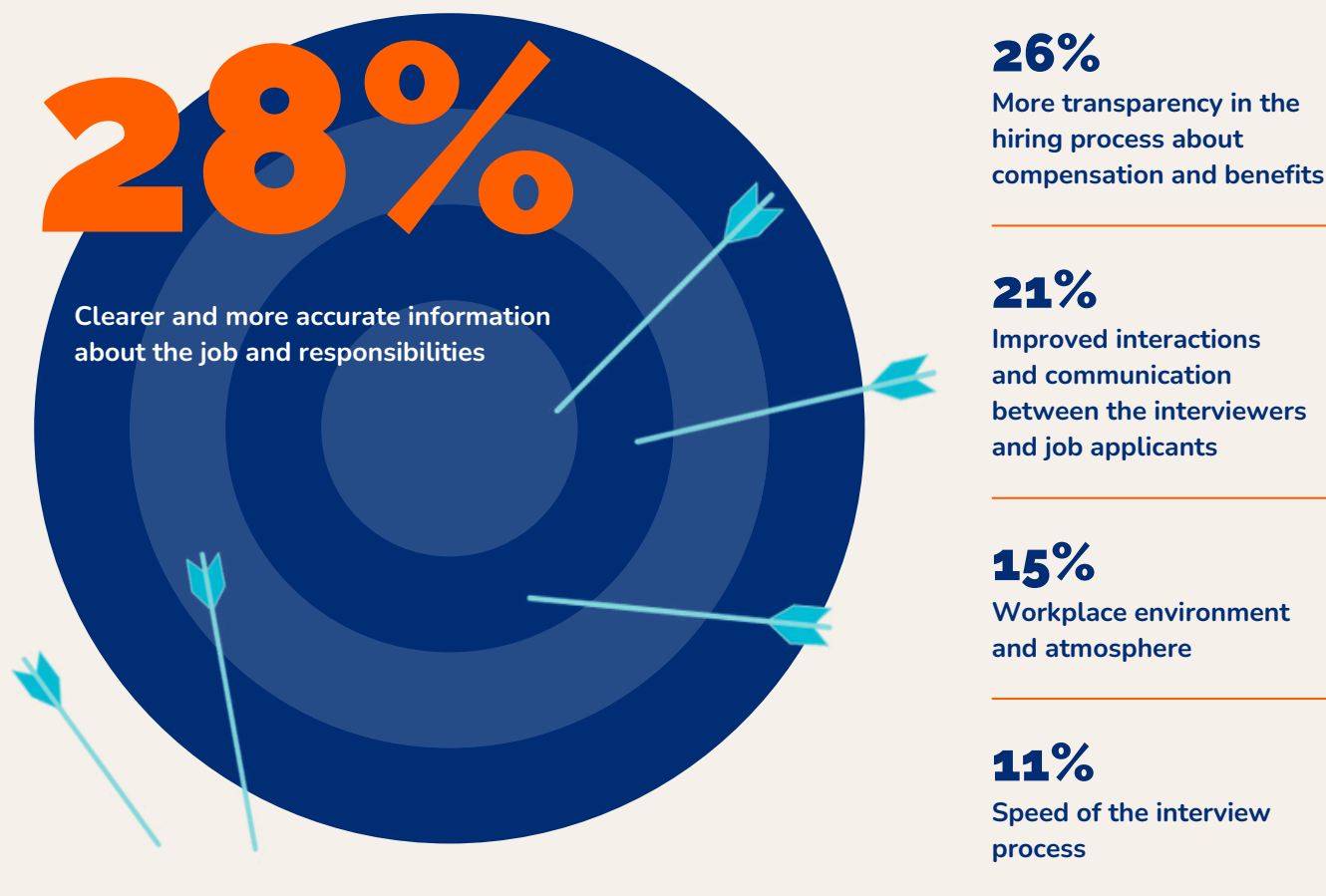
Our advice: Be sure to do your due diligence and try out these AI hiring software solutions that promise too much before you commit to using one. **Try it out from the candidate's perspective. You might find that it's hurting more than it's helping.**

How can employers improve the hiring process?

A strong hiring process helps you make the right hires, while creating positive experiences for all candidates. So when trying to improve your process, which things should you focus on?

Clearer and more accurate information about the job and responsibilities is the **#1** thing employers should focus on to improve the hiring process.

We asked job seekers what they would like to see employers prioritize:



How can employers improve the hiring process?

The top two recommendations from job seekers have been the same for 3 years in a row:

1.

Provide clearer and more accurate information about the job and responsibilities.

2.

Create more transparency in the hiring process about compensation and benefits.

It's clear – job seekers want employers that are up front about what they're offering, provide clear details around the hiring process, and list honest information about the role.

Take the time to ensure that your job posting is thorough and accurately reflects the responsibilities of the role. **Candidates look to your job posting as their guidepost when envisioning themselves working for your company.** If they find out later that it's not accurate, they'll feel like you wasted their time. Leave time for candidates to ask their own questions about the role and your company. Lead with transparency and answer their questions honestly.

How can employers improve the hiring process?

47%

of job seekers expect to learn about compensation in the job post.

40%

of job seekers expect to learn about benefits in the job post.

When do job seekers expect to learn the following during the hiring process:

Key:

Compensation

Company Culture

Benefits

Next Steps In Hiring Process

| Before Applying/ In Job Post | After Applying/ Before Interview | During Initial Interview | In Later Interview Stages | At The Offer Stage |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 47% | 11% | 31% | 6% | 5% |
| 40% | 16% | 31% | 8% | 4% |
| 23% | 15% | 51% | 8% | 3% |
| 12% | 26% | 47% | 11% | 4% |

In some places, pay transparency isn't just a good look – it's the law!

By summer of 2025, at least 14 states will have pay transparency laws in place. Some of these policies require employers to disclose salary and benefits information upon the applicant's request. But in some of these states – including New York, Minnesota, and Colorado – employers are required to disclose salary in the job posting. **And major job boards like Indeed, have actually started removing job descriptions that don't comply!**

“Compensation and benefits are rarely, if ever, mentioned until the applicant has been put through a grueling and inconvenient interview process. **Employers need to be upfront about what matters most to the applicant ... salary, benefits, and work conditions, including upward mobility.” - Job Seeker**

Automate tedious tasks and keep the human touch

Considering that the people you hire on your staff are the lifeblood of your business, it's not exactly an appealing proposition to remove real-life human decision-making from the process entirely.

That's why we advise business owners to be cautious of any hiring software that claims to use AI for most (or all) of the hiring process and instead invest in a solution that's more strategic about which parts of the hiring process should be automated by technology and which ones shouldn't.

One example of a task that should be automated is interview scheduling. Typically, once you've selected the applicants you'd like to interview, you usually have to spend time emailing back and forth or playing phone tag and waiting on them to return your call. Plus, it can take multiple touchpoints to coordinate an interview time that works for everyone, slowing down your hiring efforts.

What influences job seekers to join your company?

Workplace culture and a connection to the company is the most important factor

We have long advocated for infusing your culture into your hiring process to help you find the right people for your team. And as it turns out, job seekers do pay attention to a company's culture during the hiring process. And connecting the job seeker feels to the culture and the team can impact their decision to join your company.

What is the most important factor during the hiring process?



25%

The workplace culture and how connected I feel to the company and team

23%

Responsiveness throughout the hiring process (e.g. how quickly you receive an email after applying)

10%

Interviewer Experience (e.g. personality)

19%

Hiring process transparency (e.g. being told the number of steps, types of interviews, etc.)

24%

Growth opportunities offered by the employees (e.g. development plans, mentorship programs, etc.)

What influences job seekers to join your company?

Here are some tips for letting your culture shine through during hiring:

- **Post open jobs on your [company careers page](#)**, and keep it up to date with photos, videos, and testimonials of current employees.
- **Train interviewers to create great first impressions** and ask interview questions that relate to your culture and values.

Be up front about what you value. **If possible, tie the responsibilities of the role you're hiring for back to your company's mission.** Help job seekers understand how they could fit into the big picture.

Job seekers want to work for a company that offers growth opportunities

Candidates say that growth opportunities offered by the employer play a big role in their decision to join a company. If you offer continued education, tuition reimbursement, and other development initiatives, **make sure that you're upfront about that in your job posting.**

Other ways to [support employee development](#)?

- **Up-skill and re-skill:** Up-skilling refers to supporting employees as they hone their skills and get really good at what they do, and re-skilling involves giving your employees the chance to learn new skills and take on new responsibilities. We recently had a great example of this at CareerPlug, where a longtime member of the sales team was encouraged by his manager to take coding classes. After gaining some coding skills, he made the switch to our product team in a new role as a software developer!
- **Growth plans:** Using a growth plan, employees can take a little time to think about the skills they have and the ones they'd like to develop. They can think about both personal and professional dreams that they have and find more clarity on how they can reach them.

What influences job seekers to join your company?

Responsiveness is also important – 23% of job seekers said that responsiveness throughout the hiring process influenced their decision to join a company. In another survey, we found that 45% of job seekers want to hear back after applying within 24 hours.

23%

of job seekers said that responsiveness influenced their decision to join a company.

97%

Text messages have a 97% read rate within 15 minutes of delivery. The average response time for a text is 90 seconds.

84%

of job seekers of job seekers said their experience with text recruiting was positive.

Improve responsiveness throughout the process with [text recruiting](#), which allows you to communicate with candidates instantly using their preferred method of contact.

From offer to onboarding: What new employees expect during the first 90 days

With employee retention at the top of everyone's minds, it's not enough to just look at the experience a candidate has until the offer stage. Since nearly a third of new employees quit within the first 90 days of a job, **what happens right after the hire is made is important too.**

75% of people agree that the onboarding experience is important.

This isn't surprising, as onboarding is a crucial time, where new hires are introduced not only to their role, but to your company and their teammates. **Onboarding is much more than the new hire paperwork – it's about setting up your team for success with goal setting, introductions, and an actionable plan.** We asked job seekers to rank the top two most important improvements employers could make to their onboarding process. Establishing clear goals and expectations and creating a more structured plan and explaining the steps beforehand were the top answers.

What do you believe employers should focus on most to improve the onboarding process for new hires?



What You Can Do Now!

Invest in your hiring process

Creating a [high-quality hiring process](#) will not only improve candidate experience but will also improve your ability to hire quality people for your team. Consider using an [applicant tracking system \(ATS\)](#) to help you attract the right applicants for your roles with compelling job postings and communicate quickly and easily with candidates throughout the hiring process via email or text. An ATS like [CareerPlug](#) can automate these crucial hiring process steps, allowing you to hire the right people faster.

Create a candidate experience checklist

- ☐ Write [effective job descriptions](#) that include core responsibilities and requirements, as well as information about your company and culture.
- ☐ Include compensation and benefits information in the job description.
- ☐ Communicate the hiring process steps and timeline upfront, either during initial phone screens, in the job postings, or on your careers page.
- ☐ Respond to all applicants quickly whether you want to hire them or not. (Use [automated text messaging](#) to make candidate communication easier.)
- ☐ To create a more convenient experience for candidates, let them self-schedule their own interviews with an [automated interview scheduling tool](#), like CareerPlug's Autopilot.
- ☐ Include context in interview invites about who candidates will be interviewing with and the format of the interviews — the goal is to let candidates know what to expect.
- ☐ Provide training and hold interviewers accountable for conducting great interviews — from questions to ask to proper etiquette (e.g. being on time, avoiding distractions, etc).
- ☐ Get feedback from current team members:
 - ☐ Ask current employees what their experience was like during the hiring process and why they said yes to the offer.
 - ☐ Ask current employees what they like about working for your company and gather ideas about how you can incorporate that culture into your hiring process.
- ☐ Prepare for “Day Zero”: compile all new hire paperwork, prepare managers, and create a personalized 30-60-90 day onboarding plan for new hires



About CareerPlug

CareerPlug was founded in 2007 in the heart of Austin, Texas by Clint Smith. He had a simple vision to make hiring easier for busy business leaders. Today we are the preferred partner to over 400 hundred franchise brands and member-based organizations, as well as over 60,000 business owners. Together, we are achieving our purpose of empowering teams to grow by making it easier for managers to hire and retain the right people.

Our software is easy-to-use and built for busy owners and managers who are not HR professionals but still need to hire and retain their teams. CareerPlug has a proven playbook that has helped our clients build a winning culture, hire faster, and retain great people. In addition to innovative tools that streamline and automate time-consuming HR tasks, we offer exceptional client support to help you hire, grow, and retain your team.