

2021 Candidate Experience Report

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

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How Important is the Candidate Experience in 2021?

In recent years, we've seen a positive trend emerging in recruitment strategies — a focus on **candidate experience**, which can be defined as:



CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE

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

Now, as [small business owners](#) face a post-pandemic shortage of applicants to their open roles, it will be more important than ever for them to focus on creating a great candidate experience to attract talent.

It's no secret that the [labor market](#) is undergoing a massive shift in 2021, and job seeker sentiment is driving it. Jobs that were once easily filled (for example, service sector jobs like restaurants, retail, hospitality, etc.) now face an applicant population reluctant to return to work in those jobs, opting for work-from-home roles, or changing careers altogether.

That said, regardless of the state of the job market, **the best candidates will always have the ability to be picky about where they want to work**. If you understand what candidates want out of a hiring process, you can put your business at a significant advantage in any job market.

We surveyed 500 people who've applied for jobs within the past 12 months and analyzed their answers about their experience during the hiring process. We wanted to find answers to some of the questions that have been confounding employers, such as:

- 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?
- How can employers **improve their candidate experience** to hire more successfully?

Read our full report to learn the answers to these questions and more.

What Job Seekers Are Saying

58% of job seekers have declined an offer because of a poor candidate experience.

We found that:



67% of job seekers have had at least one negative experience in the hiring process in the past 12 months.

58% of job seekers said they've declined a job offer because of a poor experience with a potential employer during the hiring process. This is up from 50% in 2020.

First, consider all the hours your business spends on hiring and recruiting. Then consider that when an offer is made, if you've created a negative candidate experience, over half of your offers will be declined. Because of this, employers must often settle for their second or third choice for a role. **This results in the number one challenge facing businesses today: [making the right hires.](#)**



Industry Insight:



Home & Commercial Services

78% of job seekers who work in **Home and Commercial Services** said they declined a job offer because of a poor experience in the hiring process, making this the most impacted industry in our study.



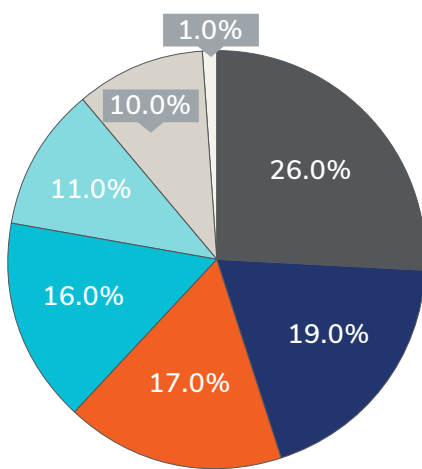
Healthcare & Retail

Job seekers in the **Healthcare** industry and the **Retail** industry reported the lowest rates of poor candidate experiences. **56%** of Healthcare candidates and **60%** of Retail candidates said they have **not** declined an offer due to a negative experience with a potential employer in the past year.

Having a negative experience with people in the interview process is the #1 reason candidates decline job offers.

When we looked at the reasons job seekers classified their candidate experience as being poor, here's what we found:

Reasons Job Seekers Declined an Offer:



- I had a negative experience with people in the interview process
- The compensation & benefits didn't meet my expectations
- The role & responsibilities were different from what I expected
- I was worried about the company's COVID safety measures
- I disliked the workplace environment
- The interview process was slow & disorganized
- Other



Industry Insight:

Personal Care

35% of candidates who declined offers in the **Personal Care** industry reported that their reason for declining was “concern over the company's COVID safety measures” – a rate far higher than any other industry in this study. This makes sense as these businesses (e.g. hair and nail salons and massage spas) often require employees and customers to be in close physical proximity for extended periods of time. Employers in Personal Care businesses should ensure that they take proper COVID health and safety precautions (and share those precautions in their job descriptions) or risk putting themselves at a disadvantage when recruiting.



Job seekers want a clear, honest, and respectful hiring process.

As an employer, you likely devote hours, days, or even weeks to running a hiring process to find the right person for any given role. So it can be frustrating when you make an offer to your top candidate only to have them decline. At that point, you have to settle for your second or third choice, or go back to square one and begin your search all over again.

However, when we look at the data, we know that you can make corrections to the earlier stages of your hiring process to reduce the likelihood that your candidates decline in the offer stage. Here are some ways to address the top reasons candidates decline offers.

- **“I had a negative experience with people in the interview process.”** These respondents mentioned interviewers who were rude or distracted during the interview. These experiences gave each candidate a negative impression of the company as a whole. Train hiring managers and hold interviewers accountable for conducting great interviews — asking appropriate questions, creating a welcoming environment, and being respectful in their interactions with all candidates.



Further Reading: Read our [Hiring Manager's Guide to Interviews](#) for more advice on how to interview like a pro.

- **“The compensation and benefits didn't meet my expectations.”** We recommend [disclosing a salary range](#) in the job posting. This sets salary expectations immediately and helps ensure that you receive applicants you can afford. It's a hard truth for many employers to accept, but it's a waste of everyone's time if you're tens of thousands of dollars off from a candidate's expectations. There's little to be gained from employers waiting until late in the hiring process to negotiate salary, especially when our data shows that **19% of candidates** who turned down job offers did so because of this outdated practice.

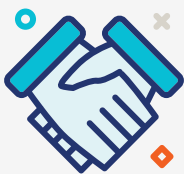
- **“The role and responsibilities were different than I expected.”** Take the time to ensure that your [job posting](#) is thorough and accurately reflects the responsibilities of the role. Candidates look to your job posting as their guidepost when envisioning themselves working for your company. If they find out later that it’s not accurate, they’ll feel like you wasted their time.



Further Reading: Read our guide, [How to Write a Job Description](#) to create a job posting that attracts the right applicants for your role.

Positive candidate experiences lead to more hires.

Our candidate experience data isn’t *all* doom and gloom. The upside: The majority of people surveyed are currently working at companies where they had a **positive candidate experience** during the hiring process, with **80%** reporting that their experience influenced their decision to accept the offer.



80% of candidates said a positive candidate experience influenced their decision to accept an offer.



When asked about the company they currently work for (or most recently worked for), **93%** of employees rated the candidate experience in the hiring process as “**excellent**” or “**slightly positive.**”

Your Candidate Experience Can Affect Your Employer Brand

The impact of a poor candidate experience extends beyond the disappointment of a rejected job offer — it has serious implications for your employer brand, or your business's reputation as a place to work.

In 2021, it's standard for job seekers to spend significant time researching a company's reputation on employer review sites like Glassdoor and Indeed. These reviews serve as social proof, signaling to candidates what they can expect from your hiring process and work environment. This means it's crucial to maintain a positive candidate experience for all applicants — **whether you hire them or not.**



37% of candidates said they've left a **negative** review online after having a negative experience.

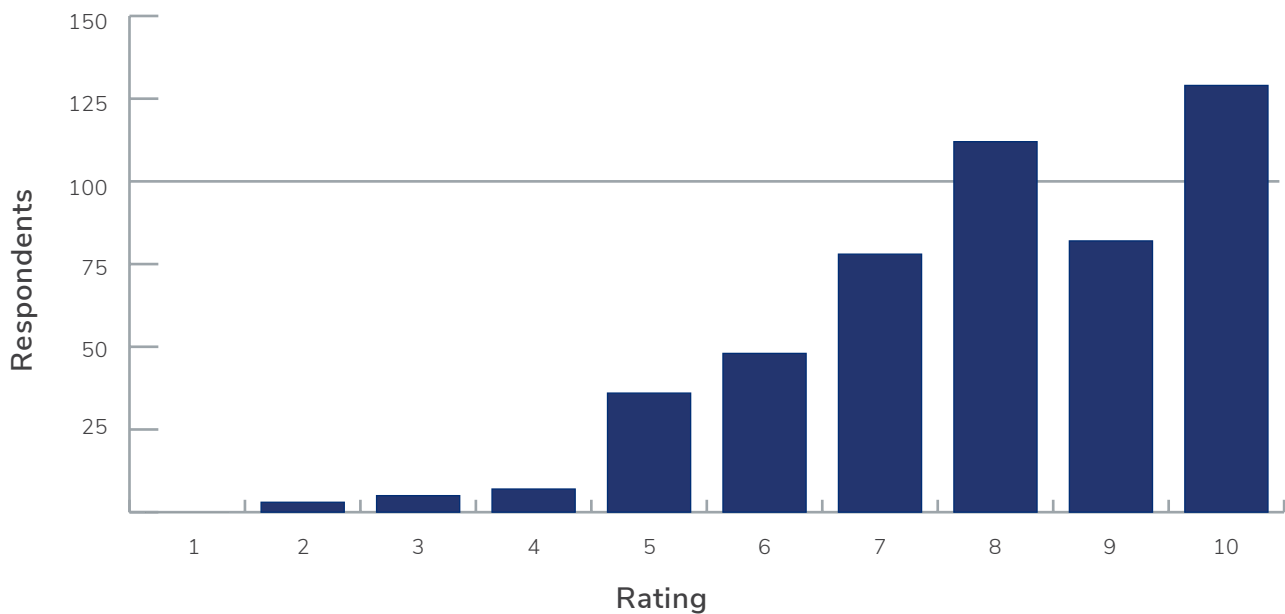


61% of candidates said they've left a **positive** review online after having a positive experience.

In our survey, **37% of respondents said they have left a negative review online after having a negative candidate experience.** This is significant because over half of job seekers abandon their pursuit of a company after reading negative reviews. Don't miss out on the best candidates by letting negative candidate reviews define your employer brand.

Job seekers have made it clear: the hiring process experience is very important to them.

On a scale of 1-10, how important is the hiring process experience to you?
(1 = Not Important; 10 = Very important)



We asked job seekers to rate how important the hiring process is to them, with 1 being “not important” and 10 being “very important.” The overwhelming majority rated the hiring process between 8 and 10, indicating that most candidates pay close attention to how a company carries out its hiring process. Very few respondents indicated that the hiring process was of low importance to them (between 1 and 4).



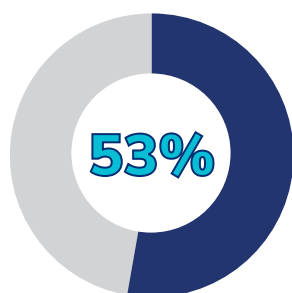
Industry Insight:



Hospitality, Entertainment & Recreation

42% of job seekers in the **Hospitality, Entertainment & Recreation** Industry rated the hiring process experience a “10” on this scale. No other industry reported such a high percentage of “10” scores. Employers in this industry should take note that their applicants consider their candidate experience to play a crucial role in deciding whether or not to accept an offer.

Job seekers say they care more about the hiring process now than they did before the pandemic.



53% of of job seekers said they care more about the hiring process experience now than they did before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Concerns over COVID-19 safety still plague many job seekers. A [U.S. Census survey](#) conducted in March 2021 found that **4.2 million adults are not working because they are worried about getting or spreading COVID-19.**

Employers should take this into account during their hiring processes. Create COVID-safe candidate experiences by incorporating [phone and video interviews](#) when possible. If you need to conduct interviews in-person, understand that many of your candidates will be evaluating the health and safety measures you've taken in your workplace.

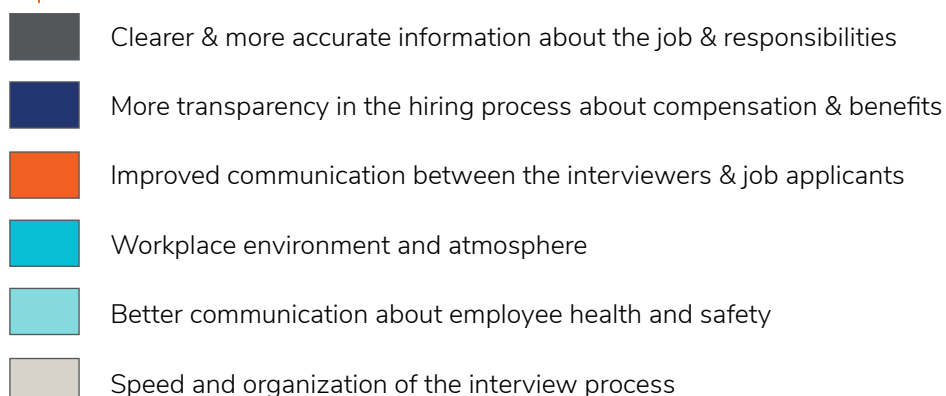
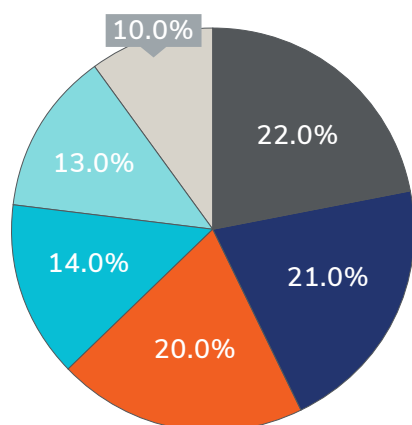
Lastly, we recommend approaching virtual interviews the same way you would approach in-person interviews – don't cut corners or give in to the temptation to ask candidates for [one-way video interviews](#).

How to Improve the Candidate Experience

We asked job seekers to weigh in on specific advice employers can use to improve their hiring processes.

What should employers focus on most to improve the hiring process?

Improvements employers should focus on most:



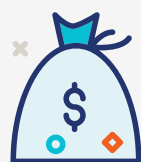
The top two recommendations from job seekers were:

1. Provide clearer and more accurate information about the job and responsibilities
2. Create more transparency in the hiring process about compensation and benefits

Both of these issues should be easy for employers to address. You have all the information about the role you're offering, so be sure to communicate it to applicants.

Job seekers want more information earlier in the hiring process.

Job seekers want to know more details about a role earlier in the hiring process so they can make informed decisions. For example, **39% of respondents expected to be informed about compensation in the initial job post.** This is a huge – and easy – opportunity for employers to improve candidate experience while also creating a win for their [applicant screening process](#), as job seekers will self-select in or out early in the process.



39% of respondents expected to be informed about compensation in the initial job post.

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

	BEFORE APPLYING/ IN THE JOB POST	BEFORE THE INITIAL INTERVIEW	DURING THE INITIAL INTERVIEW	IN THE LATER INTERVIEW STAGES	AT THE OFFER STAGE
Compensation	39%	17%	28%	8%	7%
Benefits	25%	19%	36%	13%	7%
Company Culture	18%	18%	43%	15%	6%
Stages/Next Steps in the Hiring Process	13%	21%	44%	17%	5%

Job seekers say that ALL parts of a hiring process influence their decision to accept an offer.



90% of job seeker respondents ranked atmosphere of the workplace as an “important” or “very important” factor influencing their decision to join a company.

What factors influence a candidate’s decision to join a company?

FACTOR	PERCENTAGE OF JOB SEEKERS WHO RATED AS “IMPORTANT” OR “VERY IMPORTANT”
Atmosphere of the workplace (e.g. fun, welcoming, etc.)	90%
Interviewer Experience (e.g. personality, body language)	86%
Responsiveness later in the hiring process (e.g. follow-up emails after interview)	85%
Responsiveness after initially applying (e.g. how quickly you receive an email)	84%
Hiring process transparency (e.g. being told the number of steps, types of interviews, etc.)	84%
Appearance of the workplace (e.g. physical office or remote/hybrid environment)	81%
Remote technology experience (e.g. ease of joining a video interview, video quality, etc.)	72%

We asked job seekers to rate each of these factors in terms of importance from 1 to 4, with 1 being “not important” and 4 being “very important.” What we learned was that job seekers reported all factors to be highly influential to their decision-making process.

While “**atmosphere of the workplace**” was ranked highest at **90%**, we see that interviewer experience, responsiveness after applying and throughout the hiring process, and hiring process transparency do not lag far behind. From this data, we can conclude that job seekers take into consideration all aspects of a hiring process when making their decision to accept an offer.



OUR ADVICE:

Create a hiring process that showcases your business as a great place to work — because candidates are paying attention.



Industry Insight:



Insurance & Financial Services

98% of job seekers in the **Insurance & Financial Services** industry rated “atmosphere of the workplace” as “very important” or “important.” Why should employers care? People are retiring from the insurance industry at a high rate. Insurance businesses need to make a strong effort to appeal to job seekers who are earlier in their careers. Focus on becoming a great place to work and then showcase your employer brand throughout your hiring process.



Hospitality, Entertainment & Recreation

98% of job seekers in the **Hospitality, Entertainment & Recreation** industry rated “responsiveness later in the hiring process” as “very important” or “important.” Employers in this industry should focus on sending follow-up emails after interviewing candidates to give them updates on what to expect next in the hiring process or send a polite rejection email if they won’t be moving ahead.

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. You need to create 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

Remember to do the following before your next round of hiring:

- Write **accurate job descriptions** that include core responsibilities and requirements.
- Include **compensation and benefits information** early in the process, on job descriptions or during the initial phone screen.
- Communicate the hiring process steps and timeline upfront**, either during initial phone screens, in the job postings, or on your careers page.
- 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**.



ABOUT CAREERPLUG

CareerPlug is a software company on a mission to solve the #1 challenge of running a business: attracting and hiring the right people. More than 12,000 clients love working with us because we give them a proven playbook to make the right hires. And you don't need to be an HR pro to succeed, since our software is easy enough for anyone to use. We're so committed to making hiring easier that we require every one of our employees to become a certified Hiring Expert so that they can contribute to our mission.

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