



The Zappos Recruiting Process & 10 Tips to Make Sure That Your Next New Hire Is a Culture Fit

Have you seen the Zappos Family Core Values Interview Assessment and wondered how you could apply it to your recruiting efforts? Zappos Insights is glad to offer you these tips to complement the assessment. Of course, your core values may be different than ours and that's fine! These tips can be applied to any organization's core values. Before we get to the tips, check out this brief run-through of the Zappos recruiting process.

How Many Interviews?

Qualified candidates can expect, at a minimum, three-stage process after applying for a position at Zappos. 1) A recruiting phone screen. 2) A technical phone screen. 3) An onsite interview. These interviews and assessments allow the recruiter and hiring team to be absolutely sure that the candidate has the skills needed to do the job and is a culture fit for the team and company. Both aspects are important, and this is how the Zappos Family checks and rechecks for both.

The Recruiting Phone Screen

- 30 to 45 minutes
- Hosted by a recruiter
- Primary objective: To conduct a basic core values match and to assess any deal breakers.

- Examples of deal breakers include things like any clear and obvious red flags that show the candidate isn't aligned with one or more of our core values. We also look at work history alignment with the role they've applied for, career goals, salary requirements and willingness to relocate.
- Secondary objective: To gauge the applicant's interest in working for Zappos and to see if they've done their homework.
 - Has the applicant done any research on Zappos and have a sense of what it is like to work with Zappos?
 - Does the applicant want to work at Zappos or do they just want a job?

The Technical Phone Screen

- 30 to 45 minutes
- Hosted by the hiring manager
- Primary objective: Assess technical fit at a high level with the role.
- Secondary objective: Initial check for team fit and secondary touch-point for core values fit.

The Onsite Interview

If the applicant passes both phone screens above [and, in some cases, more than 1 phone or virtual interview may be done on the technical side with the department director, and/or additional members of the hiring manager's team], the recruiter will coordinate an onsite interview, which includes:

A Tour of the Zappos Family Offices

This is conducted by a member of the recruiting team or the Zappos tours team. This is an important step as it gives the candidate an opportunity to get a sense of the physical environment [the Zappos office is an open environment and can be chaotic], experience the culture a bit and learn about the history of the Zappos Family, including current ventures and organizational

structure. It's also a chance for the tour giver to gauge the applicant's reaction to what they are seeing. The Zappos Family is not for everyone. And it's critical that BOTH you and the candidate are a good match for one another. The tour giver pays attention to the types of questions the candidate asks during the tour. Is there genuine interest and excitement about what the applicant is seeing? Or are all the questions, "me, me, me."

Basic Skills Assessments

***Typically done pre-onsite interview**

A recruiter will conduct any skills assessments pertinent to the role the candidate is applying for. For example, in hiring new employees to our call center roles, we test on things like typing, grammar, and basic internet and computer literacy. For technical roles, there may be coding challenges. Sometimes, these skill evaluations are conducted pre-onsite interview, depending on the hiring manager's preference.

Technical Interviews

These interviews are usually 30-60 minutes. Depending on the size of the team or how many other departments the role may work closely with, this could be 5 - 8 separate interviews. Interviews may be in either one-on-one or group formats. The primary objective of these interviews is to get an in-depth assessment of the candidate's technical skills. The secondary objective is looking for a solid team fit.

Lunch with the Team

In order to get candidates out of the interview room and interacting a bit more comfortably, there is often a casual off-site interview over lunch. This gives the team a chance to see if there is a culture match with the group, and a chance for the hiring manager to make sure that the candidate can interact well with the team. Also, for large teams, it's not feasible to have everyone interview the candidate and this allows other members of the team who are not part of a more formal interview to meet with the candidate.

Core Value Interview

This is our most critical interview and lasts on average 60 to 90 minutes. The goal is to ensure that the candidate understands the culture, and has specific examples to share that support how they've already exhibited qualities that reflect our core values in previous positions. Let's take a deeper dive into this interview.

How Does Zappos Use the Core Value Assessment?

The core value interview trumps all other interviews and evaluations.

The recruiter will check for an overall fit with the Zappos core values and if the result is that the recruiter does NOT find the candidate to be aligned, we will not hire the candidate. Period. This holds true no matter if the candidate aced all other technical interviews and the hiring team wants to move forward. If you are truly committed to living your company's values, you have to commit to only hiring people aligned with those values.

What is the goal of the core value interview?

The basic idea is that the candidate must demonstrate through their responses to be naturally in line with our values. Remember that this is a 2 way street and it's as important for your company that the candidate aligns with your values as it is for the candidate to be aligned with the values of whatever company they are going to join. That's the right formula for a successful hire. Candidates also need to show a willingness to lead or at least participate in activities that enhance our culture. For example, one of our core values is "Create Fun & a Little Weirdness" but people can be fun and weird in different ways. A candidate may not want to lead a parade through our offices and that's OK. But they should be okay with the idea of being in a team parade, or at least enjoy parades going by their desk from time to time.

There is not a score

During a core values interview, the recruiter has the Core Values Assessment open on their laptop and chooses 2-5 questions from each of the 10 sections to ask the candidate [these sets of

questions correspond to the Zappos 10 Core Values]. The candidate's responses are entered into the appropriate fields. The notes are submitted to the hiring manager along with a summary and recommendation of whether or not the candidate is a culture match. The recruiter will highlight any red flags that come up where the candidate demonstrates they are not aligned with a particular core value or values.

Red Flags

Here's an example of a deal breaker question. "Do you ever socialize with co-workers outside of the office?" The candidate's willingness to spend time with co-workers outside of work is important at Zappos. We don't believe in work-life balance but rather, work-life integration. To that end, we blur the line between work and play and everyone who works here needs to believe in this concept. This is just in keeping with our Core Value #7: Build a Positive Team and Family Spirit. Employees are not expected to attend every event but the candidate should be comfortable with the fact that all employees interact regularly with peers, direct-reports, and managers alike; outside of the work environment and in social settings.

Without further adieu, here are the tips for you to take home to your company!

10 Tips to Make Sure Your Next New Hire Is a Culture Fit

1. Take your time.

We've learned that hiring the wrong people, people not aligned with your core values, can have disastrous results. To truly assess culture and core values fit, you need to invest the time up-front. This may slow down your hiring process but it's that important. It's not one "bad" or misaligned hire that will damage your culture but rather a snowball effect if you focus only on hiring for skills in your recruitment process. Even the most talented folks, those that can do the job well and make an instant impact, are worth passing on if you are committed to building and protecting your company's culture.* *Take your time to find the right person for every position and for the values of your company.

2. Show candidates the real you!

Through every touch point you have with candidates, infuse your values and culture. When a candidate is brought onsite, tour them through your office.* *This allows them to see the work environment up close, and make the personal decision regarding whether or not they can work within your environment and your culture. Are they used to working in a private office, a bullpen set-up, other? You want to make sure the candidate has every opportunity to assess YOU as you assess him or her for a role within your company. This way, there will be no surprises for a new hire when they start their new job.

3. Check to see if the candidate did their homework.

Ask questions to see if the candidate is familiar with your company. Do they know anything about your history, mission, successes, challenges, etc.? If the candidate is excited about the prospect of working for your company and is familiar with these areas, it helps assure that they aren't just looking for a "job," but rather a long-time career opportunity.

4. Make it a team effort

Candidates may be "on" for people they perceive matter in the interview process and who impact their chances of getting a job offer. But in any company, new hires will work not just with the hiring manager but their team and other departments as well. Finding someone who aligns with your values means they truly fit with them, not just act like they do. To make sure that the applicant is not just putting their best foot forward for only the "important" people, our recruiting team asks for feedback from everyone who interacts with the candidate. This includes our shuttle drivers who pick up out of state candidates from the airport as well as our front-desk team who greet the candidates upon check-in. Make sure teams who interact with the candidate also share any good or concerning feedback about these interactions with your recruiting team so you are getting a full view of the candidates personality and fit.

5. Recognize that it's as much the candidate's decision as it is yours.

Be open and honest about what you expect, the work environment and any potential challenges to the position (distractions, evolving processes, new systems, etc.). For example, within the Zappos Customer Loyalty team, there is not a lot of flexibility with regards to shift scheduling initially. And this should not be a surprise when the new hire shows up to training on day one.

6. Find out about deal breakers early!

The earlier you find out about any deal breaking issues, the less time and resources you need to spend continuing the interviewing process for both your team and the candidate. Deal breakers for the Zappos Family include: the applicant is not willing to relocate, prefers not to socialize with coworkers, and/or is looking for a different compensation package than the role offers. And of course, a deal breaker is not being aligned with one of our core values. For example, our core value “Be Humble.” If the candidate is arrogant, they won't be a fit at Zappos. All of these are discussed and evaluated in the initial recruiting phone screen, at least in general terms.

7. If you only ask canned interview questions, you will likely get canned responses.

Make sure that your questions are constructed to elicit actual examples of the candidate's past behavior in the workplace. Although this is a commonly known technique [“behavioral interviewing”], Zappos recruiters apply it to both hard skills and soft skills as they relate to our core values. As a result, there are unique questions that most candidates have not heard before, in addition to the more standard questions. This helps differentiate between the people who are simply good interviewees, and can say the “right” things, from those who have actually demonstrated the behaviors aligned with our values in previous positions they've held.

8. Make sure company culture matters to the candidate.

Does the candidate understand the importance of company core values? Have they had ideas to improve a previous company's performance and culture and had the drive to implement them? If you want your company to continue to grow, and the culture to continually improve, you need people with the desire to take themselves and their company to the next level. At Zappos, we believe a company's core values should influence every decision that the company makes. We

also believe your company's culture is the responsibility of each and every employee, not a committee in HR, if it's going to be authentic and genuine.

9. Recognize that you aren't hiring a “type” or looking for clones.

Employees will interpret the core values differently. They will exhibit each one in different ways and to different degrees. And that is what you want! Really, it's less about hiring a certain cookie-cutter type and more about finding talented people who are not at odds with any of your values. Every employee needs to be adaptable to the different levels of energy, humor, humility, spontaneity, etc. that other co-workers have. Adaptability and openness is key. We don't expect or want every employee to be super extroverted or a stand up comedian, but we do look for individuals that are open to interacting within their team and across departments and are able to genuinely articulate points of interest about the position they are applying for and the company.

10. Commit to the idea that core values fit is 100% necessary while technical skills may be optional.

Within Zappos, and especially in our Customer Loyalty Team, there are many positions that people are hired for based on their personality, passion and drive. Technical requirements are less important because people can be trained on the technical side of the job. For people who are not aligned with your core values, there is not a lot that can be done on the part of your organization to “fix” that. Of course, many positions you recruit for may require technical skills to start, but you need to find candidates who have BOTH the skills and the core value fit before moving to hire. At Zappos, we firmly believe that culture fit trumps technical fit, everyday of the week.

Happy Recruiting!