

CHEMISTRY STAFFING

Resume Screening Playbook

A Guidebook for Successfully
Reviewing Candidate Resumes



It happens in every search...

Shortly after making public job posts, resumes begin rolling in. At Chemistry Staffing, we often hear about the shock at the sheer volume of resumes, followed by *"I just don't know what to do with all of these resumes..."* The truth is the way that a church screens resumes is crucial to the overall success of their search. As we have partnered with churches over the years, we have learned that approximately 95% of submitted resumes represent candidates that will just not be a good fit for your church.

So how do you find and focus on the 5% of candidates that could potentially be a long-term, healthy fit for your church?

This playbook will walk you through a screening process that will help you discover which candidates to focus on and who will not be the right fit. We'll share our search philosophy and give you the tools you will need to make the screening process more consistent, with clear goals.

A word of warning: while this tool will help simplify the process and clarify your goals, the resume screening process is not easy... it is a difficult and time-consuming task, and it is probably one of the most important steps in your search process.

Who should we be looking for?

In our time serving churches, we have learned that a long-term, healthy fit relies on 5 factors:

- **Theological Alignment:** Does your potential pastor align with your church on theological non-negotiables? Is there a general agreement around non-essentials?
- **Cultural Competence:** Does your candidate have experience working in churches with a similar culture? Will they be a fit for our community?
- **Appropriate Skills and Abilities:** Have they done the job before or does their training suggest that they are ready to take the next step?
- **Personality Fit:** Does their personality seem as though it will fit in with your team and congregation?
- **Chemistry:** Is this someone that you would like to serve alongside for the next five years?

When we partner with a church, we are looking to find someone who will be in that position for five years or longer, and we are convinced that will not happen unless your next staff member fits in all five of these areas. The assumption made by many churches is that you cannot discover whether a candidate matches your church in all five areas until you begin the interview process.

We would disagree.

Through proper screening, you can develop a general understanding of a candidate's potential in each of these five areas. With that understanding, you are able to focus the majority of your time and effort getting to know the candidates who are the most likely to be the right fit for your church, saving you time and money spent on on-site visits for candidates that aren't the right fit.

Cultural competence is admittedly more subjective than other pieces of this puzzle, so you may walk away with far more yellow lights than green on this. That is okay! These yellow light issues give you an understanding of what you need to learn from a candidate when you begin the interview process.

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Prepare Yourself

This guide will take you step by step through the process of evaluating a resume and determining whether to move them forward in your process or not. Before you get started, here are a few important things to consider:

- This process will only succeed if bathed in prayer. Before looking at a resume, take some time to pray for wisdom, clarity, and discernment. Pray also for the candidates represented by each resume that you will be looking at. Each of these people is in a stressful time of discernment and transition and will appreciate the prayer.
- Screening a resume takes time. It is easy to look at a stack of resumes and feel the pressure to move quickly. Resist this urge. Plan to spend approximately 30 minutes per resume as you evaluate the potential fit between the candidate and your church.
- Understand that you will come across the resume of some phenomenal pastors who will be an amazing addition to a church's team... just not yours. Resist the urge to move a candidate forward who is not a theological, cultural, or personality fit just because they have incredible skills and abilities.
- Remember: resumes are a flawed snapshot of a candidate. No sheet of paper can fully tell someone's story. Part of your role is to discern whether there is a potential fit or not. It can be easy to allow graphic design skills, spelling proficiency, or church names to sway you one way or another. While these are valid points of data, resist the urge to go strictly off of these data points.

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Scoring

Plan on sorting resumes into three categories: red light, yellow light, and green light. As you work through each section of the worksheet, you will assign each section a color based on what you discover. Here is what those colors mean:

- **Red Light:** This candidate violates a non-negotiable requirement set by your church. This could be a theological position, skillset, or ministry philosophy. When you come across a red light, stop screening the resume and move on. One red light disqualifies a candidate from consideration.
- **Yellow Light:** This area requires further investigation. Whether it is different leanings on non-essential theological beliefs, questions about background or preparation, or something that is unclear, these are areas that you will want to probe into if and when you begin interviews.
- **Green Light:** These are areas of fit. Based on the work you have done, the candidate matches what you are looking for in this area. You will still want to investigate this during interviews, but it seems as though there is alignment in this area.

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The role of the search team in this stage of the process is two-fold: identify red-light issues that disqualify a candidate from consideration and identify a pool of candidates who are most likely to be a long-term, healthy fit for your church. As you complete the process of screening a resume, take time to look back over how you scored the document. Any red lights should immediately land the resume in the red light pile, and the candidate should be thanked for submitting their resume and informed that they will not be considered for the role.

If there are no red lights, your next step is to consider whether the resume should be placed in the green light pile or the yellow light pile. Greenlight resumes are those where you believe there is a strong chance of a candidate being a good fit. There may be yellow lights on the resume, and they will need to be addressed, but you believe that based on your evaluation, this person should be moved to the next stage of the process. Yellow light resumes are those who, after investigating, have more questions than answers. These are candidates who you believe might be a good fit but will need further investigation. We'd suggest that yellow light resumes undergo a second review before advancing them in your process.

The Process

This section will help you understand how to use the worksheet at the end of this playbook and take you step by step through the screening process. Once you have spent time preparing yourself spiritually and have set aside the time to dive into the process, it's time to get started.

Theological Alignment:

Your goal in this section is to discern whether a candidate's theology is similar to that of your church. Begin by looking at the website of the candidate's seminary or bible college (if applicable) and most recent churches. Do the statements of faith line up with that of your church? Do your non-negotiables align? When you watch a sermon or a teaching sample, do they teach from the same translation of the Bible as you do?

We suggest that you use this time to determine whether there is alignment around a few main theological areas:

- **The doctrine of salvation:** Are they reformed or more Arminian? Do they share a similar fervor in this area as your church does?
- **Women in leadership roles:** Do they come from an egalitarian or complementarian background? Do you notice women in positions that your church would not permit?
- **Gifts of the Spirit:** Do they come from a continuationist or cessationist background? Does their teaching on gifts of the Spirit align with yours?
- **Unique theological non-negotiables:** Every church has its own unique theological non-negotiables. Use the extra spaces provided in the worksheet to investigate those as well.

One thing to keep in mind as you work through this process; it is not uncommon for pastors to evolve theologically during their time in ministry. Look for themes and trends over the course of time. Someone who has been pastoring for more than twenty years may be in a much different place theologically than they were when in Bible college.

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Cultural Competence:

This section is designed to help you determine whether someone will fit your church's unique culture. We do this by developing an understanding of the types of churches that a candidate has served in previously. Your goal is to develop a sense of whether a candidate will align with your church in the following areas:

- **Preaching and teaching:** Does the preaching style in a candidate's previous churches fit your church's style?
- **Worship style:** How does the candidate's previous church's Sunday morning worship compare to yours? Is there a significant stylistic difference?
- **Leadership styles:** What type of leadership structure is the candidate used to? Strong elder board? Strong pastor led? Committee driven?
- **Vision of the church:** Each church needs to have its own unique vision, but do you sense a similarity in the vision of the two churches? Is there a similarity in outreach philosophy and the purpose of Sunday morning worship?
- **Social issues:** As you explore their previous church do they share similar positions on social issues as your church?
- **Geographic culture:** Does the location of the church feel similar to your area?

Appropriate Skills & Abilities:

This is where you spend some time digging into what they have done over the course of their career. It can be tempting to focus only on skills and abilities when looking to make a hire. Don't give in to the temptation! Remember, if they don't have all five areas, they will not be a long-term, healthy fit. As you look at their resume, read through the description of each position they have had and their educational background. Use that information to determine:

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- **Education:** Do they possess the minimum required education?
- **Experience:** Do they have the minimum required experience?
- **Background:** Based on their resume and the websites of churches that they have served, do they appear to be able to lead in a church of our size?
- **History:** Is there a proven track record that suggests they have the skills needed to lead this ministry area?
- **Longevity:** Do they have a track record of staying in a church for more than three years?

As you work through the skills and abilities section of the resume, it can be easy to disqualify those whose most recent ministry tenure is short or those who may not currently be serving in a church. I encourage churches not to make those automatic red-light issues. As we work with candidates, we see many incredibly talented pastors who have had an occasional short stay at a church. While these are always yellow light issues for us that we need to explore, we at least want to hear the story. In the same vein, it is not uncommon for pastors to need to take a season out of ministry. We call this a working sabbatical... a season of restoration, working in the marketplace in preparation to return to a local church.

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Personality Fit:

In this final section, you are going to work to develop a sense of whether a candidate's personality will fit your church's. While this is another subjective area, you will be seeking to discover who the candidate is based on what they have shared with you:

- **Clarity of communication:** Do they effectively communicate? Is their resume, clear, concise, and informative? Does it use language similar to what our church uses?
- **Familiar feel:** Does the design of the resume feel similar to our design aesthetic?
- **Accuracy:** Does the resume display attention to detail? Are there grammar or spelling errors?
- **Social media:** When examining the candidate's social media channels, are there any posts that do not align with your staff values?
- **Public Information:** When conducting a basic internet search, are there any surprises about the candidate?

In this section, you are looking for those points of potential friction that could make a person's time in your church untenable. Each church has its own unique quirks, just as every candidate does. Part of this process is developing an understanding of whether our quirks work well together, or if they will be a constant source of conflict.

Chemistry:

You will notice that we do not include a chemistry section on the resume. This is intentional. While a resume and cover letter will begin to give you hints about the potential for chemistry, we are convinced that chemistry happens off of the page. As you screen the documents provided, you will begin to develop an understanding of who a person is, but you will only begin to fully develop a sense of whether their is true chemistry between a candidate and your team as you spend more time interacting with them over the course of your process.

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Final Screen

Now that you have worked through the resume and developed a basic understanding of the candidate, it is time to look back over the work you have done and determine what comes next. You are looking to sort resumes into three categories:

- **Red Light:** Red Light resumes are those that have one or more red-light areas identified through the screening process. These are also resumes that have so many yellow light areas that you believe it will be hard to overcome all of the questions raised from the resume. These are the candidates that you believe have very little chance to be a long-term, healthy fit in your church.
- **Yellow Light:** These are the proceed-with-caution resumes. These candidates may have one or two green light scores, but have several areas that need to be explored. Yellow light resumes should have an additional screen before moving forward, and a plan to address the yellow light areas needs to be created.
- **Green Light:** These are the candidates that you believe have a better than average chance of being a long-term, healthy fit in your church. While there are probably yellow light areas that need to be explored, your sense is that they align well with your church in each of the four areas we have screened for, and it is time to begin having a conversation with them.

What happens next?

One of the most common sources of frustration that candidates in the search process share with us is a lack of communication. As a member of a search team, one of the most important parts of your role is to clearly communicate with a candidate what to expect from the process and their status in it. Now that you have eliminated candidates and have identified candidates who should be interviewed, we strongly advise that you clearly communicate with those candidates where they stand and what to expect next. We have found that speed, clarity, and regularity matter when communicating with candidates as it sets your church apart from those who can go weeks without letting them know where things stand (if they communicate at all).

Through proper screening, you can develop a general understanding of a candidate's potential to know whether they might be the right fit for your church.

NEED HELP?

Finding the right person to serve your church is tough work. It is a time-consuming, weighty responsibility that is often thankless. Many of us feel the spiritual weight of the responsibility, but don't feel as though we have the training needed to know how to make the right decision. That's why we created Chemistry Staffing. We have created a process that helps churches better understand who they are looking for and identify those candidates that have the best chance of being a long-term, healthy fit for the church.

As you lean into your search and work through your process, I'd love to be a resource for you and your team. If you get stuck, have a question, or just need an outside set of eyes, I'd love to serve you.

[This link will help us find a time to talk.](#)

RESUME SCREENING

CANDIDATE

REVIEWER

GREEN, YELLOW, RED

THEOLOGY

NOTES

The doctrine of salvation

Women in ministry

Gifts of the Spirit

Theological non-negotiables:

GREEN, YELLOW, RED

CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Preaching & teaching

Worship style

Leadership style

Vision

Social issues

Geographic culture

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RESUME SCREENING

CANDIDATE

REVIEWER

GREEN, YELLOW, RED**APPROPRIATE SKILLS & ABILITIES****NOTES**

Required education

Required experience

Appropriate experience for church size?

Track record using skills needed?

Longevity in past positions?

GREEN, YELLOW, RED**PERSONALITY FIT**

Communication

Resume design aesthetic

Displays attention to detail?

Social media

Internet search

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