

CHEMISTRY STAFFING

Interview Playbook

A Guidebook for Successfully
Interviewing Candidates



It's starting to get serious...

Interview.

The word alone is enough to send shivers down one's spine. Whether you are interviewing or being interviewed, this step of the hiring process can be intimidating for even the most experienced participant. This phase of the hiring process is where things begin to feel real. You are moving from evaluating resumes to interacting with a human being. Things are getting personal, and you may start feeling the weight of that responsibility.

We're here to help.

This playbook is designed to help guide you through the process of conducting candidate interviews as you seek to fill your ministry opening. The provided worksheet will help you organize your thoughts and reactions to the questions that you discuss with a candidate. We have also included sample questions at the end of the document to get you started with planning out your interviews. We will also include some best practices for your team to consider as you map out your interview process and a tool that will help you come to a consensus on the candidate(s) that you move forward with.

Ready to get started? Let's begin with the basics.

What makes a healthy fit?

In our time serving churches, we have learned that a long-term, healthy fit relies on five 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 your 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 pastor or staff member fits in all five of these areas. As you use the worksheet provided in this playbook, be listening for areas of agreement and areas of unclarity around alignment and be sure to make a note about it. This will help you to know what areas need to be covered in future conversations. The worksheet included in this playbook uses a traffic light style scoring system:

- **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, you have accomplished your goal with this candidate by determining that they are not a good fit for your church. 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. It never hurts to have another conversation about these areas, but your primary focus should be on yellow light issues.

The purpose of your interviews

When we have seen interview processes bog down for a church, it is typically because of a misunderstanding behind the purpose of this phase of your search.

Contrary to popular belief, the goal of interviewing a candidate is not to determine who a church's next pastor or ministry staffer will be. It is simply to determine who you believe that God is calling you to investigate further. It is natural for you to have questions about whether someone is the right fit or not after conducting interviews.

The truth is, you will likely still have questions when you make an offer to someone.

Your job, during the interview, process is to develop a clearer understanding of each candidate that you are interacting with and develop a sense of whether they can fulfill the responsibilities of the role in a manner that fits with your church's unique calling.

With this in mind, the role of the interview team is to engage in ways that turn the aforementioned yellow light issues to green or red. When you get to a point where those lights can change only through a face-to-face meeting, that is when you engage in an on-site visit.

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 contacting a candidate, take some time to pray for wisdom, clarity, and discernment. Pray also for the candidate that you will be interacting with. Each of these people is in a stressful time of discernment and transition and will appreciate the prayer.
- **This process takes time.** You will feel pressure when navigating this process. People will ask you on a weekly basis "have you found our pastor yet?" There is a temptation to move quickly, be decisive, and take action. While it is important to move with intentionality, this is a process that should not be rushed. Setting aside intentional times of prayer to prepare for and process your interviews will be helpful, as you move forward.
- **Not everyone is the right fit.** Understand that you will have conversations with 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.
- **Interviews are two-sided.** At this point, a candidate will be interviewing you just as much as you are interviewing them. Keep in mind that the way that you communicate with them, the questions you ask, and the hoops that you ask them to jump through will tell them much about who you are as a church.

The role of the interview team is to engage in ways that turn the yellow light issues to green or red

What we have learned

A quick google search will result in an infinite number of suggestions on how to conduct your interviews... many of them contradictory. To save you the hassle of trying to discern which suggestions apply to the ministry context, here is what we have learned through our thousands of hours of interviewing candidates for ministry positions:

- **Multiple Conversations:** At Chemistry, we are advocates of having at least two real conversations with every candidate that a church interviews (in fact, we conduct 3 interviews before bringing a candidate to a church). We believe that this gives your team a better opportunity to develop a clear sense of who a candidate is and whether they could be a good fit for your church. We also believe that this will level the playing field between introverts and extroverts while also giving those who are less charismatic an opportunity to truly share who they are with your team. We have found that due to the highly relational manner of ministry work, one interview is simply not enough to develop a fair assessment of a candidate.
- **Leverage Technology:** The technology at our disposal makes interviewing incredibly convenient and affordable for everyone. We suggest leveraging platforms like Zoom to conduct your first interviews and encourage you to record those conversations.
- **Hear the Story:** During your first few interview with a candidate, use the same set of questions for everyone. View this conversation as an icebreaker and focus the questions on getting to know who the candidate is and how they have gotten to this season of transition. This is a great time to understand their background, their call to ministry, and where they believe that God is taking them in the season to come. Ask questions that draw out stories and give you insight into who they are as a person and as a pastor. This will help you develop a level of comfort and make it easier to ask more pressing questions during the second interview.
- **Press for Clarity:** The second interview is where you begin to dive more deeply into whether the candidate is a good fit or not. Using your notes from the first interview and what you uncovered while working through the resume screening process, begin to lean into yellow light issues to gain clarity on their alignment with your church.

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- **Come to Closure:** While the technology available makes it easy to conduct interviews from a distance, we encourage churches to limit the number of video interviews to four. Most of the churches we work with will come to clarity on who to move forward with after the second interview, though some need a third call. Occasionally a fourth call is needed to clarify an issue or two. We have found that churches requiring more than four calls are either attempting to massage a red light issue or have a clarity issue among their team about what they are looking for.

When you get stuck

As you work through the interview process it typically becomes clear who you believe is the best fit for your church. In these cases, the next step is to invite that candidate out for in person interviews. At Chemistry, we generally advocate for two visits. The first visit is under the radar and less formal. It is a chance for your search team, your board, and select stakeholders in the church to meet the candidate and offer feedback to church leadership about the candidate. This is also a time for the candidate to develop a better understanding of your church, of the area, and develop a sense of whether this is where God is calling them for their next season of ministry. The second visit is a more formal candidating weekend.

There are times that your team may find themselves with two candidates that they struggle to choose between. While there are certain cases where we would advise bringing both candidates in for an onsite visit, we generally encourage a church to focus on one candidate for the on-site phase of the interview process.

One of the tools that we have found to be helpful in cases like these is the levels of consensus:

LEVELS OF CONSENSUS

1. I can say an unqualified “yes” to the decision. I am satisfied that the decision is an expression of the wisdom of the group.
2. I find the decision perfectly acceptable.
3. I can live with the decision. I’m not especially enthusiastic about it.
4. I do not fully agree with the decision. However, I do not choose to block the decision. I am willing to support the decision because I trust the wisdom of the group.
5. I do not agree with the decision and feel the need to stand in the way of this decision being accepted.
6. I feel that we have no clear sense of unity in the group. We need to do more work before consensus can be reached.

This tool forces team members to clarify where they stand in regards to bringing a candidate forward

This tool forces team members to clarify where they stand in regards to bringing a candidate forward. We would encourage you to determine early on in your process what is your threshold for moving forward with a candidate. Ask yourselves, “How many people are we comfortable with being at each stage and still bringing a candidate in for a visit?”

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, we’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, we’d love to serve. [This link will help us find a time to talk.](#)

INTERVIEW QUESTION

CANDIDATE

REVIEWER

QUESTION

GREEN, YELLOW, RED**NOTES****QUESTION**

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Sample Question Bank

Not every question will translate to every candidate. Aim to use 10 of these questions created by our experienced team at Chemistry Staffing to use during your interview process.

Tell Us About Yourself

- Tell me your story (about yourself, your family, and how you grew up).
- Tell about how you came to faith in Christ, came into ministry, and how you got to where you are today.
- Tell me about your initial 'call to ministry' and how that has changed from then until today.
- What would you say is your greatest strength?
- What would you say is your greatest weakness?
- What are your primary areas of gifting?
- What is your leadership style?
- What do you find most exciting about the ministry?
- What do you find most challenging or frustrating about the ministry?
- What energizes you?/ What are you passionate about?
- What keeps you up at night?
- What do you typically wake up thinking about?
- What is your favorite Scripture or life verse?
- Tell me about a favorite ministry success story for which you were responsible.
- Tell us about your personal discipleship habits
- What is God currently showing you in His Word and via other spiritual habits?
- Who are you currently pouring into? Who pours into you?
- What is your spiritual "Achilles heel"?
- We all have a "Shadow Side" that we can default to, so what do you feel is your Shadow Self?
- What are some blind spots do your wife and or friends tell you have?

Tell Us About Your Circumstances

- Tell me about your current/previous ministry/role.
- Why are you looking for a new role NOW?
- How does your family feel about the

- possibility of this new ministry opportunity?
- How do you/your family feel about relocating (if applicable)?
- Where do you want to be (or NOT want to be) geographically?
- What do you feel are the specific opportunities and challenges in the region/ geographical area?
- Tell us about your mentors and friends.

Tell Us About Your Experience

- What has been your experience with church leadership?
- Tell me about your last ministry conflict (and how you dealt with it).
- How do you stay organized?
- How do you develop your staff or encourage those around you?
- What was your all-time worst ministry experience?
- What was your all-time best ministry experience?
- Tell us a time when you went over and above what was expected by your church.
- Tell us a time when you felt you were in over your head. What did you do?
- What is an area of your life or pastoral roles would you like to strengthen.
- Tell us about the last problem you solved.
- Tell us about someone that you've invested in, and why you're proud of them.
- Tell us about someone you've spiritually mentored.
- Tell us about someone who has spiritually mentored you.
- Would you do anything differently if you could do it over?
- Who are your confidants? Who do you talk honestly with?
- Give me an example of a fulfilling aspect of ministry
- What aspect of your ministry do you find most enjoyment in? What least?

Sample Question Bank

Tell Us About Your Goals

- What are your ministry career goals?
- Why are you looking for a new role now?
- Describe your dream ministry position and type of church you'd love to serve in.
- How long do you see yourself continuing to work in the local church?
- Describe your ideal working relationship with other staff.
- Discuss your understanding of the purpose and vision of the local church
- Describe your ideal working relationship with other staff.
- Discuss your understanding of the purpose and vision of the local church.
- Briefly describe your 'philosophy of ministry'. In simplest terms, a philosophy of ministry is "a statement of how you will accomplish your purpose and why you do what you do in ministry."
- What key qualities do you look for in aspiring staff members or lay leaders?
- How important is communication between the church body and those in positions of leadership?
- How is COVID going to affect where the Church is in 2021?
- What do you see as the main things the evangelical church in America needs to do better or differently to effectively communicate the Gospel?
- Are there any 'skeletons' in your closet that we should know about? That is, you are getting ready to shake hands on a deal with a church and they find out something about you that they would say, "Oh, that would have been good to talk about a little earlier"?
- How long do you see yourself continuing to work in the local church?
- What kind of supervisor do you work best under?

Tell Us About Looking Ahead

- What would your first six months look like in this new role?
- Tell me what you know about the church and the position. What excites you about it?
- From what you know about the church so far, what do you think are going to be some of your early hurdles?
- How would you motivate a staff member that's just not cutting it?

Closing Questions

- What question(s) do you have for us?
- What is your ideal timeline for making a transition?
- Does your current church know that you are looking for a new position?

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