



**THE ULTIMATE GUIDE
TO THE ULTIMATE
CANDIDATE
EXPERIENCE.**

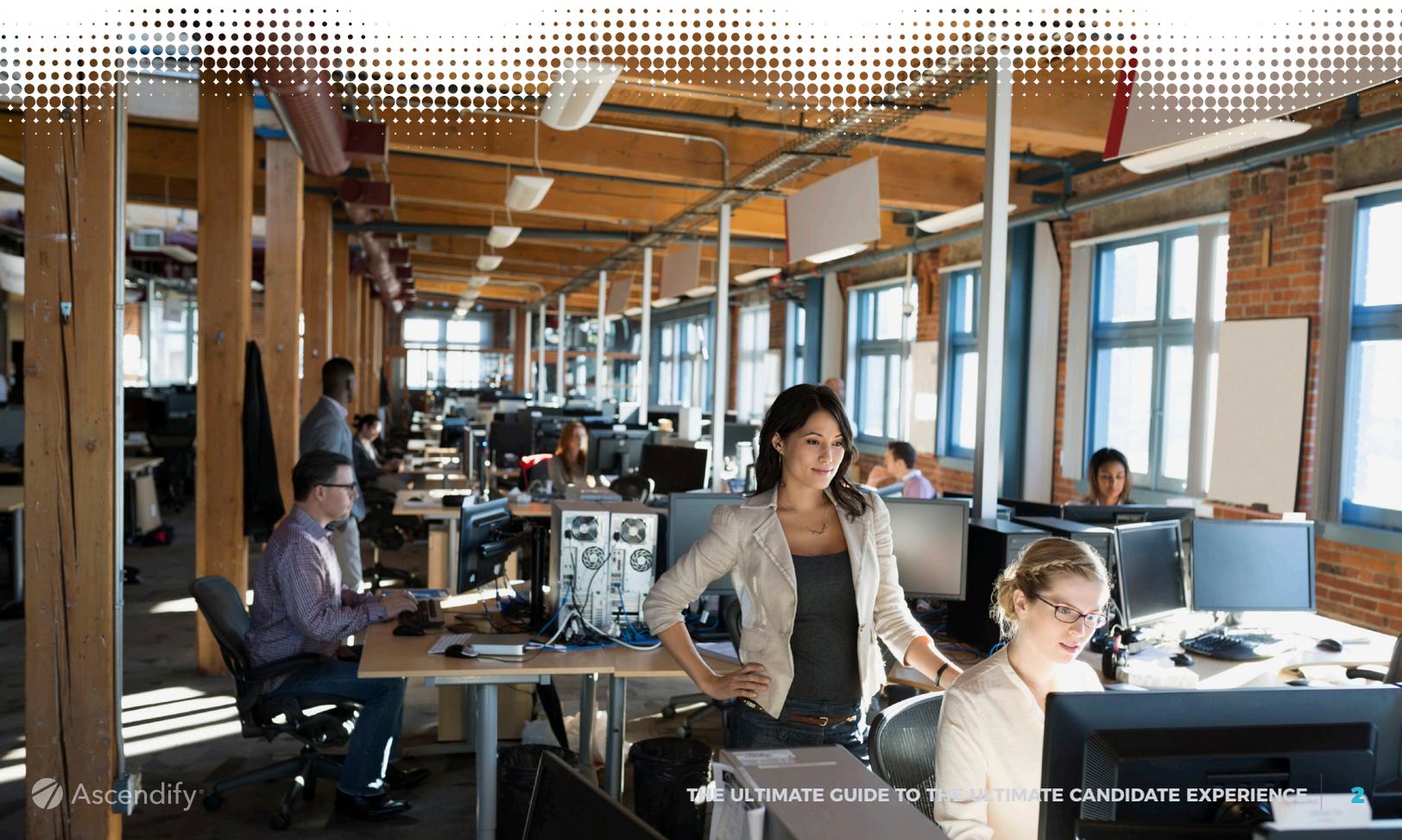
It's tough out there for an in-house recruiter these days. The talent market is tight, and you're constantly up against steep competition for top-tier candidates. You're likely already doing a lot of things right: You've freshened up your employer branding, supercharged your sourcing tactics, and worked with your team to develop compelling offers. But have you turned your focus outward to consider what the candidate experience is like with your organization? You're putting in so much effort to build your pipeline — you don't want that to go to waste because of a sub-par experience once a candidate is moving through your process.

You may not realize it, but the candidate experience has implications beyond individual's perception of your brand

and your overall company reputation. Those things are incredibly important, of course, but a poor candidate experience can actually have a serious impact on your bottom line, too, especially if your candidates are also customers.

In this Guide, we'll walk through the full candidate experience step by step, to discuss the considerations to keep in mind at each stage, and the improvements you can make to optimize each touch point prospective employees have with your company. We'll end with some action items you can tackle right away to see immediate improvement at your organization.

Let's get started.



CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE MATTERS.

It turns out, the candidate experience has wide-reaching impact – sometimes in areas you might not expect.

Candidates as Customers

If you work at a consumer-focused company, you already know there's a lot of overlap between prospective employees and current customers. Treating either group inappropriately hurts the business on both sides: Fifty-eight percent¹ of candidates who have had a bad experience [say they're unlikely](#) to buy from the company in the future.

Take this example from Virgin Mobile, who conducted a [study](#) in an effort to gauge the impact of disconnected service resulting from poor candidate experience. They found that of 123,000 applicants they rejected, six percent of them switched to a different carrier. The overall impact of losing those customers? A loss of 5.4 million annually. Yikes.

Another thing to think about: If a candidate is also a customer, they may have their consumer hat on when they apply for a job with your company. As a consumer, they're used to easy, quick feedback. How do you think this translates to the application process?

It's a high bar, for sure, to meet that level of expectation. Yet it's worth it to keep that potential candidate mindset in mind, and totally possible to meet their expectations with [the right recruitment marketing tool](#).

1: <http://www.recruitingblogs.com/profiles/blogs/5-facts-you-should-know-about-the-candidate-experience>

“If a candidate is also a customer, they may have their consumer hat on when they apply for a job with your company.”

Loud and Lost Forever

It's true for all reviewable products, services, and experiences: **People are far more likely to leave feedback when things went poorly.** From a talent acquisition perspective, that's frustrating — you're putting so much effort into reputation — and brand-building, the last thing you need is someone bad-mouthing the company on the internet. Unfortunately, 60 percent of candidates report that they've had a negative experience, and 72 percent of them say they've shared it online, whether on Glassdoor or through their social networks.² You can't drop the ball with a candidate and expect them not to talk about it.

And think about this: Forty-two percent of candidates who have had a negative experience say they won't apply again to the organization. forty-two percent!³ That's far too many future candidates to lose. A great candidate experience must be one of your top priorities.

Get Clear With Data

Do you have measurement methods or feedback loops set up within your candidate experience? Perhaps you're calculating NPS scores or sending out surveys; maybe (hopefully!) you're checking in on Glassdoor regularly and reviewing and responding to messages. Different approaches work for different teams, but the point is: if you're not measuring, you don't know where the problems are and you don't know what the full impact is. Stay on top of measurement!

Map to Values

While we'll cover the interview phase in-depth later in the guide, it's important to remember there are multiple touch points before, during, and after the interview that make up the full candidate experience. We want each of those to be positive, and to convey our company values.

Here are some **interesting numbers** to consider from ERE Media: For every job posting, there are an average of 1,000 views. From those views, there are roughly 100 applications. From the 100 applicants, there are about 75 phone screens, 25 manager phone screens, and six in-person interviews. This all results in one hire. Just one. Out of a hundred hopeful applicants. That means you're delivering bad news 99 percent of the time.



How do you create a positive experience when you're almost always telling candidates what they don't want to hear? How do you make brand fans out of candidates who didn't get the result they wanted? Simple: be **candidate-focused, not req-focused**. This guide will help you shift your mindset.

2: <http://www.careerarc.com/blog/2016/06/candidate-experience-study-infographic/>

3: <https://www.stackoverflowbusiness.com/blog/the-hidden-cost-of-a-poor-candidate-experience>

BEFORE THEY APPLY.

Let's talk about the moments and interactions that happen prior to a candidate applying. Candidates in this stage have perhaps come to your [career site](#) to explore the possibility of working for you, or maybe they've just gotten an email from you or someone on your hiring team. Speaking of email...

Sourcing Responsibly

We all know the “post and pray” method isn't the only – nor best – way to source candidates; we need to be proactive in bringing folks into the system. But how we reach out, and what we say when we do, can really make or break that first touch point.

Candidates want to feel like they've been properly considered, and that you're approaching them because you have at least some understanding of their strengths and skills. They believe you have an opportunity for which they may be a good fit. If you're blasting out a generic email to all your contacts, or shooting a message over to everyone who maybe-sorta could be a fit based on a keyword match, it's very obvious, and very annoying to candidates. You're essentially spamming them, and everyone hates spam.

Likewise, it's a bad candidate experience for multiple people from your team to reach out to the same person, clearly not knowing they've *already* been contacted. It reflects poorly on the brand. This happens when your ATS and CRM don't talk to each other – **things are documented and tracked and searched in two different places, and wires get crossed.** A candidate gets hit up multiple times, or even more embarrassingly, gets hit up multiple times by the same person, maybe even with same message! This is a really bad look for your employer brand and can be avoided with [a more integrated solution.](#)



Branding Done Right

It's common to look at branding efforts and [recruitment marketing](#) as an attempt to “sell” the organization, but you should also think of branding as educating. As in, not every company is the right place to work for every person, and your employer brand should be as much about communicating the type of employees, culture, and work a candidate can expect from your organization as much as they are about getting folks excited to work there.

How do you do educational recruitment marketing? Here a few ideas:



Talent Communities: Go beyond a standard careers page and offer a personalized candidate experience. Share the pros of working with you, and give folks an easy way to express interest in your company even before that perfect job opens up. Keep them engaged with relevant communications over time.



“Meet the Team” sections: It's a great candidate experience to be able to virtually “meet” the people they may interview (and work) with. Showcase key team members' photos, bios and fun facts – and maybe link to their LinkedIn and Twitter profiles. This provides a lot of transparency to the candidate, and is always appreciated.



Employee storytelling and blogging: By having your employees talk or write about their experience, and perhaps having your execs communicate your company values, you can be sure you're painting the right picture and inspiring the right people to apply.



Branded job postings: Embed a video with a message from the hiring manager, include employee spotlights, and link to an experience blog post written by someone on the team. Give the candidate that inside look before they even apply.



Targeted newsletters and email campaigns: In the same way you want to avoid spamming for reqs, you also want to be really targeted with your newsletters and nurture campaigns. Make sure your campaigns are reaching [the right people at the right time](#).



Glassdoor reviews and responses: Check it and respond regularly. A simple “thanks for sharing” to acknowledge you've seen someone's note goes a long way. Participating in the conversation shows that you and the organization take feedback seriously and genuinely care to get things right.

WHEN THEY APPLY.

Great! You've got the candidate interested in applying. You've represented the brand well, sourced responsibly, and educated them on company culture – and now they're ready to apply for an opening. What's that experience like? If your application process is like that of most companies, the candidate is in for some pain. Which is a bummer on both sides, after all your pre-apply work.

Arduous Applications Stink

It is unbelievably frustrating for the candidate when there are endless tedious hoops to jump through just to apply. In fact, 60 percent of people say⁴ they have quit an application process midway due to length or complexity; perhaps you've done it yourself. That means if you've got a long or difficult application, you're losing well over half of the people who are otherwise interested in working at your company (and who have even found a specific role they're a match for). The kicker: You have no way of getting back in touch with them. They're gone forever.

Here's what every candidate's worst nightmare looks like:

EMPLOYMENT FOR THE PAST 10 YEARS			
Start with your present or most recent job. Include Job related military service requirements.			
1.	Dates Employed	Hourly Rate/Salary	
		Starting \$	Final \$
* CURRENT OR MOST RECENT EMPLOYER NAME:		* From	* To
Address		City, State, Zip:	
Job Title:	Telephone Number:	Supervisor's Name:	May We Contact? <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
Description of Job Duties:		Reason for Leaving:	

Yuck. Not only is filling out endless fields a lot of extra work for the candidate when they've already taken the time to create and upload a resume, **but it also makes your brand look archaic.** Candidates know there are far "smarter" application tools out there, and may be disappointed by a company that seems so behind-the-times with an application process like this. Additionally, it can send the message that your organization is not as respectful of employees' time as it could be, when you require unnecessary steps that could (and should) be eliminated with [smarter software](#).

If your system requires this sort of application and it's not a priority within your company to fix it, sit down with your leadership team and have them try to apply for a job. It will quickly become a priority.

4: <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/technology/pages/study-most-job-seekers-abandon-online-job-applications.aspx>

Check out the average application time of some industry leaders:



Source: Indeed and Ascendify data

Less than one minute to join the Talent Community at Panasonic? Wow. That's certainly something to strive for. Do you know how long your application process takes? Do you know what your drop-off rate is like? These are things you should be continuously monitoring and working to improve.

Some immediate suggestions:

Don't use pop-ups. Most people have pop-up blockers, so if your process requires them, candidates may not get past the first page. Also, it's not 2006. No pop-ups.

Use a progress indicator. That's the thing that tells you how many more pages you have to go in the process. It keeps the applicant engaged. Sometimes a candidate is applying over their lunch break and they want to know: Am I getting close? Let them know. Better yet — keep it to one page!

Optimize for mobile. If an old-school application process is a nightmare on a desktop, it's one big "NOPE" on mobile — no one's filling out field after field on their smartphone. And folks are absolutely using their phones to apply, not only because online activity is rapidly shifting to mobile, but also because candidates (wisely) don't want to use their work computers to apply for jobs. And it's not quite enough to be mobile-friendly — you want candidates to be able to **mobile-apply** with their LinkedIn profiles or join your talent community with Facebook or a simple email.

The numbers are telling:

90% of job seekers say they use mobile devices as part of their job search strategy

44% of job seekers on Indeed say they *only* use mobile

And yet: *Fifty-six percent* of Fortune 500 career sites are reportedly not mobile-friendly.⁵

Think about ways you can remove barriers to entry in your application process. You can always ask for more information later, but make it easier for them to get in the door. The average Fortune 500 company's application process includes **62 screening questions** between filling out the application and getting through the first part of interviewing – that's a lot of questions! And a lot of points at which applicants might choose to drop out.

Decrease Bounce Rate With a Talent Community

Most career page bounce rates – the percent of visitor who leave the page without taking action – are upwards of 90 percent. So 90 percent of people going to a typical careers page aren't applying. Why is that?

Maybe the application is too long or complex, or isn't mobile-friendly, or maybe they just didn't find any opening that was a match for them. So, they bounced

– what else was there to do? And now they're gone forever and you have no way to market to them, nor to keep them warm, educate them further about the company nor let them know about future openings.

The solution: **talent communities**. If a candidate doesn't see a job that's right for them on your careers page, they can join your talent community to express interest in working for your organization and be alerted of new openings that may be a fit. In a pinch, you can simply create a prominent section on your careers page that says something like, *"Don't see the perfect job for you? Join our talent community and send us your info so we'll be able to consider you as new positions become available."* And then of course you need to source your TRM/ATS to find them later.

5: <https://www.inc.com/laura-montini/survey-9-in-10-jobseekers-are-looking-for-work-on-their-mobile-devices.html>

After They Hit Submit

In most cases, submitting an application triggers an auto-email that says something to the effect of, “Thanks for applying. We now have your information.” And that’s it. It also usually instructs the recipient not to respond directly, because the email is coming from an unmonitored account. That’s not a great candidate experience. The applicant has no way or option of getting in touch with you – which, of course, is intentional; you certainly can’t have candidates contacting you all day.

This experience can still be improved, though, without you having to give out your contact info: drive them to your talent community.

Keep them excited and engaged by directing them to your talent community page. Even if they’re already signed up for updates, post-application is a great time to encourage them to check out the inside-look content you’ve produced, and the industry/thought leadership/press pieces you’ve linked up.

Give Referrals the White Glove Treatment

One last note on the application process: Make sure you’re treating referrals well. They should feel a little special; they should definitely not feel like they’re disappearing into the system.

It’s a good idea to take a look at your [referral process](#) and ensure the person who was referred and the person who did the referring are getting some sort of update. You don’t have to interview every single referral, but acknowledging you received the referral and explaining a bit about what happens next is far better than no communication at all. As referrals are an excellent resource, you never want to lose them.





THE INTERVIEW.

Now we get to the interview, which is what most people think of when they think of the candidate experience. And yes, there's plenty to evaluate and improve with this step of the process.

Transparency is Key

The best thing you can do at the interview stage is answer as many questions as possible, because as a candidate, there are many. Applicants are often anxious to know what's going on behind the scenes, and they can read into everything: It's been three days since my phone screen — is that bad? What happens next? Do I talk to the hiring manager? Do I come in for an in-person interview? How many in-person interviews are there? Why haven't I heard from them?

Whether on your website or over the phone or email, give candidates some insight into the next few steps of the process to ease their minds.

One Point of Contact

One thing that tends to happen when you have a dedicated sourcing team is that candidates sort of “latch on” to the sourcer, forming a bit of an emotional connection. It makes sense: the sourcer is the one who got them hooked, got them to respond, sold them on the job, and got them interested in taking the next step. What's disappointing for the candidate, then, is when they're passed around to other people for future steps. They may talk to a recruiter next, then the recruiting coordinator, then the hiring manager, then someone else may be reaching out for references. It can be disorienting. Meanwhile, they're wishing they could just communicate with the person they know and whom they feel *knows them*. Especially if they get an offer, they want to share and celebrate with that person who was there at the beginning.

This isn't to say a sourcing model is a bad idea; rather, it's a reminder of what the candidate is likely experiencing and a suggestion to establish a single point of contact. **Give candidates a point person for all their questions and check-ins.** It'll improve their experience.

Reduce Wasted Time

This is an easy fix, and it's easy to understand why not fixing it is frustrating: [Automate your scheduling](#) for interviews. The back and forth of who is and is not available through emails and phone calls is maddening – and a poor candidate experience. If you're using an [end-to-end talent acquisition platform](#), streamlined scheduling is already built into your process. Everyone will be happier.

Provide Interview Prep

Many candidates receive no interview prep. They're told where the interview is and what time to be there, but not much beyond that. That does nothing to address all the aspects of the interview the candidate is surely wondering about. You can help by sending an "interview readiness" email (or create a Google Doc or [landing page](#)).

Suggestions for what to include:

Detailed job description

Fill in what's already posted online with more detail and maybe some commentary.

Interview team and schedule

Give them a rundown of who they're meeting with and what times.

Possible interview questions

This isn't allowing them to cheat; it's allowing them to prepare. It gives them a glimpse into how deep or formal (or not) the questions may be.

Driving directions

Parking instructions, too.

Emergency contact/phone

What if an interviewer never shows up, and the candidate's left alone in the conference room of an unfamiliar building? What if they need a bathroom break or a glass of water and don't know where to go? Give them a lifeline to call.

Meal preferences

Share a bit about what the typical interview lunch is and ask if the candidate has any specific preferences or restrictions.

What to wear

Many candidates stress out about this. Help them out by explaining what's acceptable and expected from candidates at your organization.

Company values

They should certainly be studying these before the interview; offering them here is helpful.

Benefits and perks

Interviewers may share info about these during their sessions with the candidate, so it's nice for the candidate to have some context.

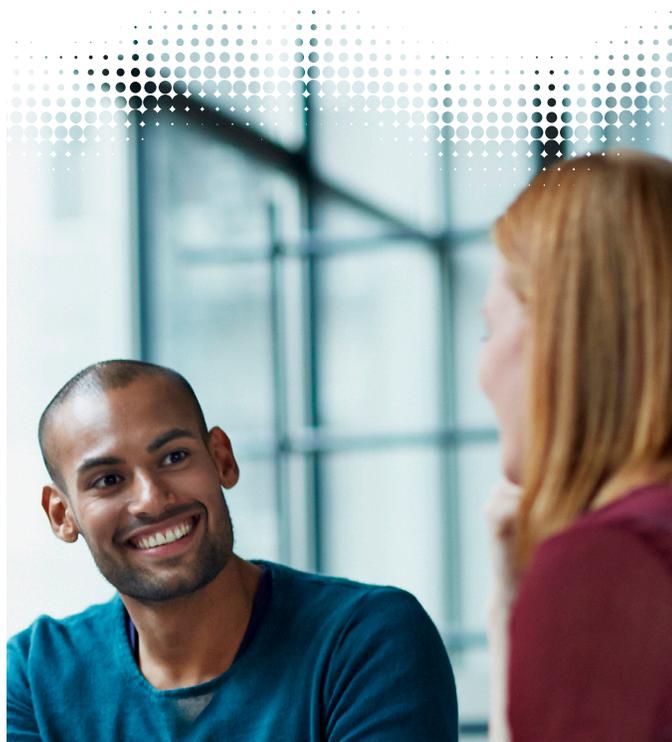
Glassdoor page

Maybe it's not all positive, but that's okay. It's helpful info for the candidate regardless, and if it prompts certain questions, it may give the team a chance to address any reservations the candidate may have.

Prep Your Interviewers

It sets a bad tone for the candidate when an interviewer is late. It's even worse if, after they stroll in, they pull out the candidate's resume to review it for what is obviously the first time. Emphasize the importance of being on time to your interviewers, and be sure they have a handy copy of the candidate's resume — and that they've taken a couple minute to look over it — before they head in.

It's also a great idea to have an [intentional structure](#) to the full interview process. Each interviewer should be tasked with assessing specific skills, and should ask specific questions, with no overlap between interviewers. It can be frustrating to the candidate to have to repeat themselves all day, answering the same questions over and over.



End With This Question

At the end of every interview, ask, *“Is there anything else that didn't come up today that you think would be helpful for me to know?”* You'll be amazed at the (indeed helpful) responses you get — everything from “I have two other offers” to “I haven't actually moved to this city yet.” You can get some really positive responses, too, like, “I led that exact same project you're working on at my old company” or “I've won an award in XYZ.” Sometimes these things just don't come up through regular interview questions. And if you don't ask, you won't know.

But more than that, asking this question gives the candidate a chance to fully sell themselves. They won't walk away from the interview frustrated that they didn't get to share something — which improves their experience.

Stay in Communication

Don't let a candidate go into the weekend without hearing from you. Update them, even if the update is “there's no update.” Candidates have a real warped sense of time when they're waiting for feedback after an interview — a day, which is no big deal to you, feels like a week, and pure agony, to them. Don't leave them hanging. Reach out before the end of the day on Friday.

THE DECISION.

Decision time! One candidate is about to be super excited. The others, if you don't have a good process in place, are about to fall into the dreaded "black hole."

Avoid the Black Hole

**How do we avoid the recruiting black hole?
Keep people informed and give them closure.**

When you hire a candidate and let all the other prospects know they didn't get the job, before you close out the req, send a quick email to all the other candidates who didn't get an interview. Thank them for applying, explain that you filled the role, and encourage them to be sure they're part of your talent network and to reach out if they see an opening they're interested in in the future. Depending on your preferences, you can also invite them to connect on LinkedIn, offer to help them network or put them in touch with someone.

Even though they're not getting the update they wanted, this feels much better to the candidate as a close-out to the application than the silence they typically get.

Give Thanks and Ask for Feedback

A lot of interview teams expect a thank-you note from the candidate. What if you turned this on its head and thanked the candidate for interviewing? It's a nice gesture, and would certainly help you stand out from the competition if they're interviewing elsewhere. You can also ask for feedback as part of your thank you – embed a quick NPS survey or direct them to your Glassdoor page to leave a review on the overall candidate experience.

DID YOU KNOW:

80%

of candidates report applying and **never hearing back?**

80%

of candidates say they likely **won't consider future openings** at the organization if they're never updated on application status?

47%

of surveyed candidates said they were **still waiting to hear back** from employers more than two months after they applied?

3.5X

Candidates are reportedly **3.5 times more likely to re-apply** to a company if they are notified of application status?

ONBOARDING.

The candidate experience doesn't end at the hiring decision. As a completely new employee, your new hire is still very much in the candidate-experience phase, and a [great onboarding process](#) rounds out a great candidate experience.

A few ideas to consider:

-  **Give them a personalized greeting:** A handwritten card from a senior executive, a selection of their favorite candy and a small, customized welcome gift is an extra special way to induce those warm & fuzzies.
-  **Establish a lunch buddy:** Lunch on the first day can be super awkward. The new person don't know anyone and there are all these seemingly impenetrable cliques. Try to ensure someone – maybe even their team – is available to take them to lunch.
-  **Introduce them to affinity groups:** Hook your new hire up with people they share a common bond with – gamers, dog lovers, whatever.
-  **Create a handy to-do list:** Set up [onboarding tasks with due dates](#) that are automatically checked off when completed.
-  **Eliminate paperwork:** Store all the important forms and documents in your talent acquisition platform, and [do all the signing online](#). So much easier!
-  **Point them to helpful training:** Help them ramp up with [customized training recommendations](#) on the company or industry, or to fill skill gaps identified in the interview process.
-  **Provide resources for success:** With a [comprehensive talent acquisition platform](#), your new hire can access all the key onboarding resources in one place. Include things like:
 - A welcome message from the CEO or a senior executive
 - The company vision, strategy, and mission statement
 - Your employee handbook and company policies
 - HRIS information (encrypted SSN)
 - Your candidate experience survey
 - A company events and holidays calendar

KEY TAKEAWAYS.

Let's sum it all up! Here are the main points to take away, and the things you can implement today to improve the candidate experience for your organization:

- **Take a walk in their shoes:** Apply for a job at your own company. Assess it. Really read the email you receive after you submit your application. How do you feel?
- **Listen to your candidates (and take action):** Conduct surveys, send out emails, maybe even randomly call folks—gather feedback, absorb it, and act on it.
- **Stay on top of Glassdoor:** Pay attention to your page, read and respond, and show you care.
- **Measure what matters:** What you measure = what you care about. If you're not measuring, you don't fully understand what's going on, and you certainly don't know how to fix it.
- **Tag, flag, connect, pipeline, nurture:** In your network, CRM, ATS, or pipeline, have conversations, follow up, and nurture the folks who are interested in working for your company. Show them you care and keep them engaged, and you'll absolutely stand out from the competition and be able to attract the candidates you want for your company.



ABOUT ASCENDIFY.

Ascendify's Intelligent People Management™ platform reinvents how companies attract, develop and inspire their talent. Built for global organizations, Ascendify integrates machine learning and predictive analytics into recruiting and talent development with one seamless platform. Headquartered in San Francisco, Ascendify's customers include GE, Cisco, Panasonic, Disney, Deloitte, and Marriott.

Learn more at ascendify.com.

