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How to Hire People Who Fit and Stay

12 Questions That Uncover Fit, Drive, and Staying Power

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Hiring for the Long Haul: Questions That Uncover Fit, Drive, and Staying Power



Often, a candidate who looks fantastic on paper appears in your hiring pool. They have all the credentials you've been looking for, maybe they have even done the job before, and their references check out. Everything seems to line up until they start.

Then, within a few weeks, you notice that something feels off. The energy's not there. They always seem distracted or unprepared. Sometimes they even clash with other team members. By the end of the quarter, they're gone.

What You'll Learn:

- **12 strategic interview questions** organized into four categories: job fit, cultural alignment, motivational drivers, and long-term commitment. These reveal whether candidates will thrive in your role beyond day one
- **Why 66% of HR executives** cite retention as their biggest challenge in 2025, and how asking the right questions during interviews can prevent costly early turnover before it starts
- **How to assess three critical dimensions of fit:** technical capability, cultural compatibility, and motivational alignment -that determine whether new hires stay engaged or disengage within months
- **Practical question frameworks** that move beyond credentials to uncover what truly motivates candidates, how they work best, and whether your role can deliver what they need to succeed

This happens more often than most people admit and costs more than time. Team trust suffers, momentum stalls, and your hiring strategy is back to square one.

Lately, the issue has become even more common. In 2025, 66% of HR executives say retention is still their biggest challenge. Companies can't solve this problem with intuition alone. A strong CV won't tell you what motivates someone or how they really think. You need to ask the right questions.

Understanding Fit and Motivation in Hiring

When a hire doesn't work out, you'll first hear that the job just wasn't the right "fit". Sometimes, employees give up straight away, realising they can't mesh with the culture. Others spend months trying to make things click. Either way, you end up with a gap in your team.

Poor "fit" can really mean multiple things. Sometimes, the problem is the job itself. Someone might have the experience and ability to do the work technically, but they have trouble following your processes or need more direction than you can give.

Other times it's the culture. 74% of employees feel demotivated by poor cultural fit. They can't communicate and connect well enough with their team and managers, so they start to disengage, and conflict starts to happen more than cohesion.

Another issue –often the hardest to see and the most impactful – is a lack of motivational fit. It's about what keeps someone going, what they care about, and what they need from work to feel like it matters. That might be purpose, learning, stability, creativity, recognition, room to grow, or something they hope to find here. If that part's missing, the rest won't hold.

That's usually what "fit" means. Three things, more or less:

- Are they set up to do the work well?
- Can they work well with the people around them?
- Do they actually want to be here?

We don't always ask those questions directly. It's easier to talk about background, strengths, tools, and results. But if all the pillars of "fit" aren't in place, the rest falls through.

The Top Questions for Assessing Candidate Fit and Motivation

The easiest way to solve the fit problem before it starts dragging down your team, or costing you more in hiring and retention strategies, is to ask the right questions. You can break those questions into four categories: job fit, culture fit, motivational fit, and long-term fit.

Category 1: Job Fit Assessment Questions

Sometimes the mismatch shows up right away. The person gets the job and starts strong, but a few weeks in, things feel slow. They're doing the work, but it's not clicking. Or they're asking many questions that suggest they pictured something different. You notice it in how they talk about their day. You notice how they don't quite settle into the rhythm.

That's usually a job fit issue. It's not a question of capability, just whether the way someone works aligns with what the role needs.

Some people want variety, others want depth. Some thrive with a clear process and a reliable routine, while others want room to build their own way of doing things. Most roles can't offer all of that.

Here are the questions that will help bring job fit into focus:

“Describe your ideal work environment and the conditions that help you be most productive.”

This question opens the door to how someone works best, not how they think you want them to work. You'll often hear about pace, communication, independence, structure, quiet, and chaos. It's not about judging the answer. It's about hearing whether that productivity version fits the environment you can offer.

“Walk me through a typical day or week in your current role. What parts of it energise you most?”

You're not just looking for a job description here. You're listening for what they lean toward, what they skip over, and what they get excited to talk about. That's where the energy is. You're trying to understand how much of what they enjoy is present in the job you're hiring for.

“Tell me about a time you had to adapt your work style to meet changing requirements.”

Jobs shift. Priorities change. So much job fit comes down to whether someone can adjust without losing momentum or morale. This question helps you see how a candidate responds to change, their baseline style, and whether they've had to stretch before.

Category 2: Cultural Fit Assessment Questions

Some people join a team and fall into step. The conversations make sense. The way things move, the decisions, the meetings, and the pace all feel familiar. They're not trying to adjust. They just started working.

Other times, you can feel the strain early on. There's hesitation. A few missed signals. They might not say anything, but something's off. You can sense it in how they talk during check-ins. Or how they hold back in group settings. Or how they never quite seem comfortable.

That's cultural fit. Or the lack of it. It doesn't mean someone's wrong for the role. It just means the way they prefer to work isn't lining up with how your team actually works.

You can't spot this mismatch from a resume, but you can see it in the answer to a few questions:

“Tell me about a work environment where you felt you belonged.”

The word “belonged” usually shifts the answer. People stop summarising and start describing. You'll hear things like, “I didn't have to explain myself all the time,” or “They trusted me from day one,” or “We could disagree without it turning tense.” Those revelations tell you something valuable.

“How do you like to receive feedback?”

Everyone says they're open to it. That's not the point. You're listening to how they've been supported before. What landed. What stuck. Some people need space. Others want directness. You want to know whether your team's way will work for them.

“Think of a time you disagreed with your team. What did you do?”

This one's not about the outcome. It's about the tone. Can they hold their view without steamrolling others? Can they stay connected when it's hard? Can they speak up without needing to be right? You're listening for emotional steadiness here, not just strategy.

Category 3: Motivational Drivers Questions

Most people in the industry want to do good work. The harder thing to figure out is what makes the work feel worth doing for them.

That's what motivation is. It's not just energy. Its direction. It's what pulls someone toward a certain kind of work, or a certain kind of team. Sometimes it's learning. Sometimes it's stability. Often, lately, it's been part of something they believe in.

Whatever it is, if that piece doesn't line up with the role, everything starts to drag. Tasks take longer. Feedback hits differently. Things feel heavier than they should.

Here are three questions that help define motivation:

"What parts of your work have felt most fulfilling?"

Fulfilling is a useful word. It invites more than achievement. People talk about moments that stuck with them. It's not always big wins; sometimes something small matters to them for reasons they didn't expect. Listen closely here. The details often say more than the headline.

"Tell me about a project you're proud of. What made it meaningful?"

This one gets at values. The kind employees feel when they do things that align with their moral compass and priorities. It might have an impact. Or ownership. Or being trusted. If that part shows up in your hiring job, you're in good shape. If not, it's something to talk about.

"What would make you leave a role within the first six months?"

It's a tough question, but a fair one. Everyone has a limit. Some answers will be about management. Some about the workload. Some about purpose. The point isn't to talk them out of it. The fact is to understand whether the job, as it really is, crosses any of those lines.

Category 4: Long-term Alignment Questions

It's one thing for someone to be a good fit today; it's another for the fit to be sustained over time.

Sometimes, the shift happens quickly. They take the role thinking it's a stepping stone. Or a fix. Or a reset. But by the time they're six months in, they're restless. Not because anything's gone wrong, exactly. Just because what they were looking for and what the job offers turned out to be were different things.

Other times, it takes longer. A year in, the work starts to feel flat. Or they're still waiting for opportunities that never came. It's not about ambition or patience. It's about whether the career path they're on matches the one you can offer.

Here's what to ask:

"Where do you see your work going in the next few years?"

You don't need a five-year plan. You want to hear how they think about direction. What they're curious about. What they'd like to grow into. Some will name a skill, some a role, and others a team or challenge.

The details matter less than whether their answer fits what's real for your organisation. If it doesn't, it's better to see that now.

“What kind of manager brings out your best work?”

This tells you more than just preference. It gives you a sense of what kind of support they expect and whether your current structure can provide it. If they need daily coaching and your team works independently by design, it'll shape how the whole experience feels.

“If you were in this role a year from now, what would tell you it's been a good fit?”

This one helps surface quiet expectations. Some people talk about outcomes: projects launched, goals hit. Others talk about relationships, or how they've felt showing up to work each day. Either way, you're getting a window into what success means to them, and whether that version of success is something this role is built to offer.

Hiring for More Than Day One

A good interview doesn't predict everything. People change. Teams evolve. Roles shift. There's always some uncertainty. But the clearer you are about the work, the team, and what the person in front of you really wants, the better your chance of making a hire that holds.

These twelve questions won't fix every challenge. What they can do is give you language - a way to slow down, step past the surface, and talk about what makes work feel meaningful and what makes it last.

That's where the real value is. Not just in who can do the job. In those who will care enough to keep doing it, even when the work gets hard.

A little about Sarah Bishop and Recruit Recruit Ltd



Whether you're a sole trader hiring your first team member, a VC-backed startup needing to scale fast, or a corporate looking for top-tier C-suite talent, one thing stays true:

Your business grows when your people grow.

I help founders, CEOs and business leaders build brilliant teams through:

- **Recruitment:** finding and placing the right people for the right roles or embedding a talent team into growing businesses
- **Sales & Leadership Training:** developing high-performing teams that sell, lead and deliver
- **Speaking & EmCeeing:** energising events and conferences with insight, humour and practical takeaways
- **Coaching:** supporting leaders to grow confidently, communicate better, and build culture that sticks

Over the years, I've supported businesses at every stage, from bedroom startups to scale-ups and established firms navigating change. What they all have in common? A vision to grow and the ambition to get the right people on board to make it happen.

I bring no-nonsense advice, energy, empathy and results, whether I'm:

- Hiring a game-changing leadership role
- Training a founder-led team to sell with confidence
- Speaking on stage about team-building, fearless follow-up, or people strategy
- Coaching a business owner through their first ever hire

So, let's talk if:

- You're ready to grow and want to hire with confidence
- You need training or coaching to get more from your team (or yourself!)
- You're planning an event and want a speaker or EmCee who brings both energy and value

Drop me a message or connect – let's build something brilliant together.

Now – #1 Bestseller on Amazon –

Scale Up!: The Founders' Guide to Accelerating Growth by Building Dream Teams by Sarah Bishop

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