

Skills You Need To Demonstrate To Land A Remote Job

As more companies transition teams to remote arrangements, managers and employees are learning firsthand that it takes a different skill set to work from home. And for those that are hiring right now, they're looking for employees who can show that they've got what it takes to work from home right out of the gate.

"For those looking for a job, showing hiring managers you can adapt to the remote interviewing process will be key to making a notable impression among other candidates," says Claudia Johnson, director of internal recruiting at the Addison Group, a national staffing firm.

These are five skills remote employees need to possess, as well as how you can prove to an employer that you're a good candidate:

1. Organization

When you work from home, you have to be more disciplined in your organizational and scheduling skills, says Angela Hall, associate professor and associate director for graduate programs at Michigan State University's School of Human Resources and Labor Relations. "You need to be able to set a schedule and work, even though you have distractions," she says.

Hall recommends setting up goals at the beginning of the workweek as a way to stay on track. "Knowing how long this will take can take trial and error," she says. "Things that might take a long time to complete in an office might go quicker at home, and conversely some things take a lot longer at home."

You can demonstrate these skills in an interview by talking about how you built a schedule for yourself when you worked at home, says Hall. "Talk about your successes," she says. "Even if the job wasn't remote, you can share a time when you had a long-term project and you had to self-manage and organize. Self-management and self-organization are the big keys when working remotely."

2. Technical prowess

Remote hiring managers also look for people who are familiar with typical remote communication and collaboration tools because they'll be able to come up to speed quickly in a new job, says Brie Weiler Reynolds, career development manager and coach for the job sites Remote.co and FlexJobs. "Instant messaging, video and web conferencing, project collaboration, and document sharing tools are the most common," she says.

While employees don't necessarily need to have a deep knowledge of every app or type of technology, they need to be comfortable trying and using new tools.

"You'll need to think through work-arounds that come from working remotely," says Hall. "Even things like signing letters or receiving mail. These tasks will now need to be done with digital tools."

With most interviews taking place remotely by phone or video, it's easy to demonstrate your ability to adapt to technology by being prepared and proficient with the tools being used, says Johnson.

“The best way to make a good first virtual impression is by showing you can be adaptable to these new processes,” she says. “Ensure any tools you need, such as Skype or Zoom, are properly set up and working well before the interview. Be the candidate who is reliable, prepared, and flexible if something goes awry. This illustrates for employers your ability to be productive and professional while working in a remote environment.”

3. Collaboration

Collaboration is easier when you’re in an office setting because you’re physically close. When you work remotely you still need to be successful at connecting with coworkers and your boss in ways that will maintain that relationship.

“Collaboration can be one of the hardest skills to have if you become disconnected,” says Hall. “To collaborate remotely, it’s important for the team to stay connected with daily or weekly check-ins. Teams perform a lot better when they have a rapport. The more you can engage in more sharing, the better the team’s productivity and performance can be. A good boss will make sure employees are engaged.”

Demonstrate this skill during the hiring process by sharing projects you were a part of that had remote team members. Explain how you handled working with a group that was geographically dispersed. And share any challenges you had to overcome.

4. Communication

Remote workers need to keep others updated on progress, which requires constant communication, says Ning Wang, CEO of Offensive Security, a cybersecurity firm that operates 100% remotely. “In an office setting, you can run into someone in the pantry and talk about project status,” she says. “In the remote setting, this is done via the unstructured, asynchronous written communication.”

Every email, chat, and videoconference needs to be effective, says Jo Deal, chief human resources officer at LogMeIn, a remote desktop software provider. “Employees that clearly explain issues, ask questions, and present ideas are more productive themselves and foster productivity on wider teams,” she says.

Deal suggests that candidates start demonstrating these skills from their first contact with a potential employer. “Craft a clear résumé and cover letter, be courteous and concise in your follow-ups, and fight back the nerves that may make you want to rush to answer every interview question without thinking it through fully,” she says. “If you have writing examples, accolades from teammates, or projects that you’ve completed with remote teammates before, all of these can show your ability to be a strategic communicator and are worth sharing with potential employers.”

5. Self-motivation

Remote employees need to be proactive and take initiative to get things done without being constantly reminded, monitored, or pinged for progress updates, says Wang. “In an office setting, your manager may sit next to you and can monitor you or help you throughout the day,” she says. “In a remote setting, you need the person to be able to do things on his or her own with a lot more independence.”

Remote workers need to be self-starters, says Hall. “Employers want to know, does this person require a lot of direction? Does this person keep their deadlines? Can this person set goals and achieve them?” she says. “Employers often structure interviews with behavior-based questions that post hypothetical situations, asking how the employee would approach a project.”

Be sure your answer demonstrates your motivation by including the methods and systems you use to get the job done. “You can say, ‘This is what I would do in this situation,’” says Hall. “Share how you would structure a task and prioritize important work. Show the employer how you get things done.”

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