

8 YEARS IN TECH RECRUITING

10 hiring red flags I catch before the *“real” interview* even starts

I've done talent acquisition for teams scaling from 70 people to 400, and for early-stage startups making their first ten hires. Different context every time. But the signals that make me pause, almost always the same.

None of these are dealbreakers on their own. Together, they add up fast — usually well before we get anywhere near the actual skills questions.

~~A good hire is a skills match.~~

What actually predicts a good hire is how someone behaves *when nobody's grading them yet.*

The first five

1 **Late, with no word about it**

More than a minute or two, no apology, no explanation. It happens — but how someone handles being late tells you more than the lateness itself.

2 **Zero research**

No sense of what the company actually does, beyond the job title. If there's a candidate handbook linked in the invite, I expect at least a skim.

3 **Can't read the room**

Either a monologue with no pause for air, or answers so short there's nothing to build on. Both make it hard to have a conversation instead of an interrogation.

4 **Vague on purpose**

Dodging the question, or answering a different one entirely. Once or twice, fine. A pattern of it is a pattern.

5 **Talking down about a former employer**

Everyone's allowed one honest gripe. Unprompted, repeated bad-mouthing tells me how they'll talk about this job in a year.

The second five

1 **Can't take feedback**

I'll sometimes push back gently mid-interview, just to see the reaction. Defensive or dismissive every time is a preview of how they'll take feedback on the job.

2 **It's always someone else's fault**

Every story about a past team, project, or manager going wrong — and somehow their own part in it never comes up.

3 **Joining from somewhere unprofessional, unacknowledged**

A candidate calling in from somewhere loud or clearly mid-errand isn't automatically a problem — life happens. Not saying anything about it is.

4 **Language gets in the way of the conversation**

Not about accent. About whether we can actually understand each other well enough to work together, especially remote.

5 **Rude, patronizing, or just genuinely difficult**

Interrupting, cursing, condescension, “my way or the highway” energy. Rare — but when it shows up, it shows up early.

The 5 questions I ask before we get anywhere near skills

- 1 *"Who am I talking to, and what brought you to this point?"*
Career history, but also — what's actually motivating the move right now.
- 2 *"What do you know about us, and why does this feel right for you?"*
Tells me how much homework they did, and whether they've actually thought about fit, not just the title.
- 3 *"Where do you want to be in two to five years?"*
And does this role honestly get them there — or are we setting up a resignation we could see coming today.
- 4 *"What matters to you in a team or way of working?"*
The culture-fit question, minus the buzzword. I want the real answer, not the interview answer.
- 5 *The practical stuff — early, not at offer stage*
Eligibility to work, notice period, comp expectations, time zone. Asking upfront saves everyone weeks.

Want this run **for** you, not just by you?

I've spent 8 years doing this for founders who'd rather be building the product than reading 40 CVs a week. If hiring your next person feels like a full-time job on top of your actual full-time job — that's exactly what I take off your plate.

[Book a free call →](#)

I also write about work, people, and everything messier than a job description over at *rich in thoughts* on Substack.