Meta description: Unlearn the hiring habits that are holding you back from effective skills-based hiring by reading our guide.

4 habits you need to unlearn to use skills-based hiring effectively

If you're reading this, we probably don't need to tell you that skills-based hiring is a transformative practice.

You've heard the stories. You already know that hiring for skills reduces bias and that 92.5% of organizations saw a reduction in mis-hires after switching to skills-based methods. Maybe you've even started the process by using skills testing to find motivated candidates.

And yet, you have a hunch that you can go further, that there are more benefits to skills-based hiring you've yet to unlock.

It could be that old hiring habits are still holding you back.

While you might have consciously rejected common myths about skills-based hiring and even overcome some barriers to implementing skills-based hiring in your organization, peer-reviewed studies have found it can take anywhere from 18 to more than 250 days to break an ingrained habit.[1]

You may not even notice that well-worn hiring behaviors are getting in the way of your skills-based hiring strategies. In this post, we take you through what these habits look like and the habits you need to replace them with.

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How can you unlearn old hiring habits?

According to Mark Bonchek, the founder and chief executive officer of Shift Thinking, there are three distinct stages to unlearning old habits[2]:

1. Accepting that the old model of thinking is no longer useful or effective
2. Finding or creating a new model that will better achieve your goals
3. Ingraining the new mental habits

As we've already seen, change won't happen overnight. Many of the behaviors you engage in are largely unconscious, which makes them hard to tackle head-on.

However, when it comes to hiring, you've already got a head start: You understand the limitations of traditional hiring methods and have started using a skills-based approach. That's the biggest hurdle out of the way.

The next step is applying the advice in this post to your work and digging deep to change your behavior. That's easier said than done, sure, but the benefits are huge. By being more inquisitive about your own behavior and areas for development, you move from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset.

In short, instead of viewing intelligence, abilities, and talents as "fixed" and unchangeable – in yourself as well as others – you see these traits as flexible and open to change.

This helps you to adapt your practices in the short term and evolve ahead of the competition in the future. In hiring, a growth mindset involves:

- Looking for candidates with skills that can complement, not just replicate, skills you already have in your organization
- Seeking out candidates with a thirst for learning and development
- Creating opportunities for yourself and other employees to build on existing skills

4 habits you need to unlearn to use skills-based hiring (and how to do so)

As we've mentioned above, we're not going to focus on the big changes you need to make to adopt skills-based hiring in your organization.

We assume you already know the limitations of a resume and why you should use skills assessments early in the hiring process.
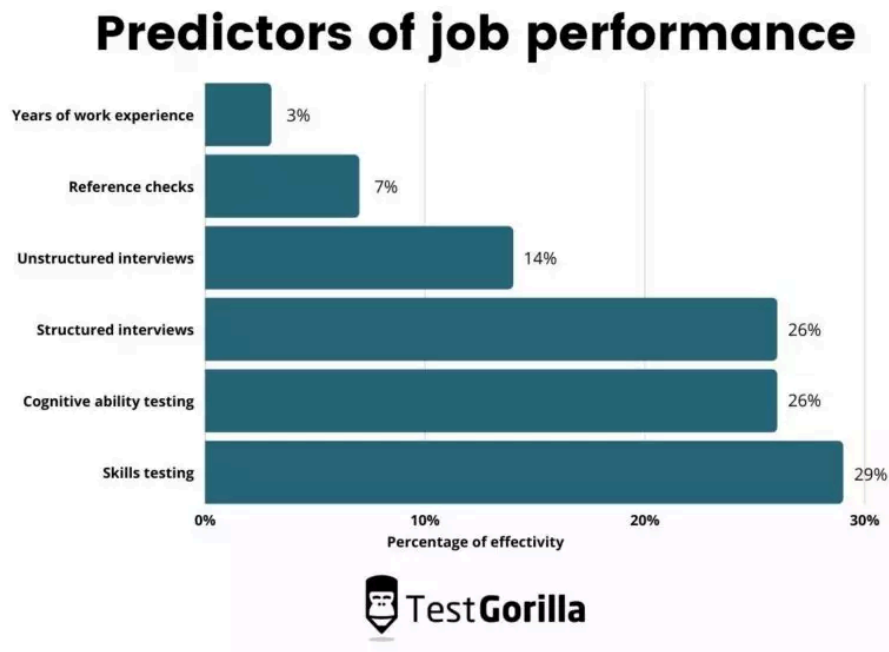
Instead, we'll look at the smaller changes you need to make. Some of these habits might be so deeply ingrained that you don't even notice how they're holding you back.

Habit 1: Using resumes as a tool for screening candidates

Look, we get it: The shift away from using resumes in hiring can be daunting at first.

You might agree that resumes aren't that useful. They don't verify a candidate's skills or give you enough data to compare different candidates' competencies, and there's no standard format for the information.

It's probably no surprise that a Google study found that experience only predicts job performance with 3% accuracy, while skills testing is almost 10 times as effective.[3]

Predictors of job performance

Years of work experience	3%
Reference checks	7%
Unstructured interviews	14%
Structured interviews	26%
Cognitive ability testing	26%
Skills testing	29%

Percentage of effectivity

TestGorilla

Source

But still, you can't quite let go of them. They're your safety blanket. Of course, you care more about a candidate's test scores, but you want to see how many years of experience they have, too. And really, what difference does it make? You're just getting the best of both worlds, right?

Not quite.

Time and time again, we see that unconscious bias plays a role in analyzing resumes. **For example, companies hiring for STEM roles rated candidates with female and minority names lower than candidates with White male names, even when they had the same or higher GPA.**

The same study found that female and minority candidates received less credit for prestigious internships in all fields. It also discovered that employers placed no value in students having so-called "low-skilled" summer jobs during their senior year – a big mistake, if you ask us.

Clearly, asking for resumes up-front during the hiring process opens the door to a lot of bias.

This isn't a personal judgment about whether individuals are prejudiced; bias is something everyone has in their brain. Think of it like the human instinct to walk in circles when lost[4]: You don't fix it by insisting you know how to walk in a straight line; you make sure you have a compass.

Skills testing – or, more accurately, the data you get from it – is that compass. You can use them to help you screen in the best candidates, which lets you use the resume for a slightly different purpose…

New habit: Use resumes to contextualize candidates, not screen them

Instead of looking at a resume as a screening tool – something to help you progress or disqualify candidates early on in the process – we believe it's more useful to look at it as an investigative aid at the interview stage.

You should use the resume alongside personality and cognition tests to direct your questioning about topics such as:

- **Candidate motivation**. What are they looking for in the next role that they haven't yet experienced in their career?
- **Self-awareness and goals**. If they've changed fields or functions, what prompted this change, and how does this role fit into their overall career plan?
- **Development goals**. How have they worked to develop their skills so far in their career, and what opportunities for development are they looking for in their next role?

How to break the habit

The first step is pretty simple: Stop asking for a resume at the start of the hiring process. Instead, administer skills and personality testing to all candidates. Only introduce resumes to the hiring process once you have a clear picture of each candidate's unique skills and have moved on to assessing the more qualitative aspects of their application.

In doing so, you form stronger impressions of each candidate's skill level unclouded by their resume, which, as we mentioned above, holds many opportunities for bias.

When you do ask for resumes from candidates, give your shortlisted candidates specific instructions for what information to include and perhaps even a template to work from.

Habit 2: Being skeptical of candidates with gaps in their resume

It's a cliché question at this point, and one that many candidates dread: "Can you please explain this gap in your resume?"

Hiring managers swear by it. In fact, when surveyed, [49% of HR professionals and employers](#) thought candidates with a career gap should be prepared to explain it in a job interview.

But this line of questioning is rarely necessary. Long-term absences from the workplace occur for many reasons, often highly personal ones, and they usually don't impact the skills

that a candidate would bring to a role. For instance, one UK study found that the top three causes of a long-term absence of work were[5]:

1. Mental health
2. Musculoskeletal conditions like neck strain, repetitive strain injury, and back pain
3. Stress

None of these are grounds for disqualification from most roles.

When you negatively judge candidates with a career gap, you not only exclude people with legitimate mental or physical health issues like the above, but you also exclude those who have taken time out of the workforce for other reasons.

These might include caring responsibilities, retirement that they've had to leave due to financial pressures, or even a simple desire to see the world.

None of these reasons for leaving work should be penalized by a potential employer, and doing so could cost you a highly-skilled candidate. Here's how to stop doing it.

New habit: Open your hiring process to returnees

Consciously adapting your hiring process so that it is friendly to candidates <u>returning to work after a long absence</u> can make a world of difference to the diversity of your hires. It also:

- Sends a supportive message to all employees
- Boosts your employer brand
- Signals to decision-makers that more supportive practices are needed

De-emphasizing resumes early in the hiring process does some of the work here for you, but you can also achieve this through other initiatives.

How to break the habit

In addition to removing resumes from the first round of the hiring process, you should also clearly explain to candidates what you're assessing with their resumes.

For instance, you can tell them that you're using their resume to get a sense of their career trajectory and understand where this role fits into it. You should also explicitly state that they won't be penalized for having gaps between roles.

Another way to break this habit is to give yourself better structural support for hiring returnees by building specific onboarding and training programs. One such example is [Amazon's "returnships" program](), which is designed to alleviate the challenges of returning to the workforce after a long absence:

Challenge for returnees	Amazon policies

Risk of taking a returnship with no guarantee of a role at the end of it	● All returnships are fully paid and benefits-eligible ● They are also virtual, minimizing costs and culture shock for the returnee ● Amazon provides a home office setup, so workers don't have to invest their own money
Lack of confidence	● Returnships have a limited initial duration of 16 weeks with regular performance check-ins ● Amazon offers classroom training and self-service development
Lack of support	● Returnees receive mentorship from direct managers ● Amazon organizes networking events with other returnees and employees

Having these plans available not only supports the returnees, but it also supports you as a hiring manager because it gives you confidence that there is:

- An onboarding structure in place ready to cater to these hires (you don't need to create one from scratch)
- Development support to help them expand and update their existing skills
- A process for performance check-ins to ensure success

Habit 3: Winging it in interviews

One bad habit that we see time and again, even in hiring managers who swear by pre-interview assessments, is a lack of structure when it comes to interviews. These interviewers simply wing it, and they:

- Ask each candidate a different set of questions
- Ask these questions in a different order each time
- Don't specifically target the role's core requirements with their questions
- Neglect to set benchmarks for candidates' answers beforehand
- Only reflect on the candidate's answers once the interview is over

These habits usually come from a desire to save time before the interview, but they actually make your job much harder and more time-consuming. Since you're not giving yourself a clear way of comparing candidates, you end up spending more time mulling each one over after the interview.

But there is another way.

New habit: Use a structured interview approach

Skills-based hiring practices can help you [eliminate interviewer bias](#) by replacing the unstructured interview approach described above with a [structured interview approach](#).

Unlike the scenario described above, in a structured interview, each candidate:

- Is asked the same set of questions, in the same order
- Is asked questions that relate directly to each of the role's critical skills
- Is assessed based on criteria pre-agreed by the hiring team

Although it may be more work upfront, it massively streamlines the hiring process as you get closer to the finish line because, especially in combination with skills tests, it gives you even more data to work with when making hiring decisions.

It also leaves less room for the interviewer's mood or general perception of the candidate to unfairly influence the information they get about a candidate's competency.

[Source](#)

How to break the habit

On an organizational level, you can ingrain this habit by making it a formal part of your hiring process.

For example, you agree with senior leadership that every recruitment plan must include a half-hour meeting with key stakeholders before interviews. This meeting will discuss the core competencies required for the role, after which the hiring manager in charge will draft and circulate interview questions.

On an individual level, in addition to adopting a structured interview approach, reprogram your reactions to your interviewee by doing the opposite of what comes naturally. By consciously being aware of how you initially react to a person, you can avoid first impression bias. This is also known as "reverse logic."

As humans, we tend to be more close-minded to people we dislike and more open-minded toward people we like.

Be aware of your own reactions throughout the interview. When you want to shut down a line of questioning because you dislike someone – or, conversely, find yourself on a tangent because you *do* like them – work to get the interview back on track by challenging this surface instinct. The results could surprise you.

## Habit 4: Only using skills assessments when you need to hire someone new

Skills assessments are a wonderful tool for illuminating a candidate's potential, but you don't have to retire them once the papers are signed. In fact, doing so is very short-sighted.

By only using skills tests during hiring, you miss out on their potential as an auditing tool, helping you identify the skills you have – or, more importantly, the ones you don't have – in your workforce.

They can also help you identify the skills you'll need in the future. **Did you know that [87% of companies worldwide](#) either already have a skills gap or expect to within the next five years?** If you don't plan ahead, you'll fall behind.

When skill gaps are expected to occur within organizations, % of respondents

43	22	22	5	6
Now	In next 2 years	In next 3–5 years	In next 6–10 years	None in next 10 years
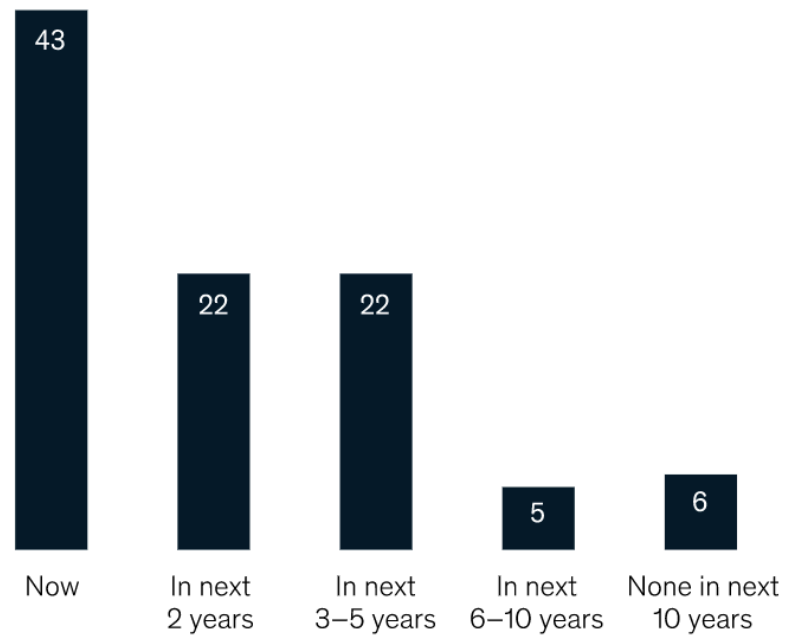
Note: Responses of "Don't know" (2%) not shown.

[Source](#)

New habit: Use skills assessments to develop your workforce after hiring

You can bust this habit by using skills assessments to [analyze the skills of your employees](#) throughout their time at your company. This can start when employees are hired, as you can use tests to identify not only the skills they already have coming in, but also to:

- Note the gaps in their current skill sets
- Identify skills they might want to develop
- Track this development as they undergo training

To really feel the effects of this strategy, you should also collect this information in a comprehensive skills inventory. You might do this using dedicated software or just a simple Excel spreadsheet that shows the skills information for each employee.

A skills inventory further illuminates [skills gaps](#) and helps you compensate for them by either upskilling your current employees or looking for these skills in new hires. It also improves internal mobility by identifying individuals whose skills could suit other roles within the organization.

How to break the habit

Use new employees' performance in pre-interview assessments as a base from which to grow their skills once they start at your company.

For instance, if you see that a new web developer has great people management skills, you can encourage them to pursue development opportunities focused on project management and leadership. This way, they can later graduate to senior roles leading digital projects.

As you do this, you can use skills assessments as a key performance indicator for team members' development. Ask team leaders to plug their findings regularly back into your skills inventory, so you have an up-to-date view of the skills available within your company.

Set new habits by talent mapping your workforce

After reading this post, you now know how to turbo-charge your skills-based hiring efforts by:

1. Asking for resumes later in the hiring process and removing employment start and end dates
2. Creating a dedicated onboarding process for returnees
3. Scheduling time to discuss interview questions when recruitment planning
4. Introducing skills assessments as development tracking tools for current employees

Next, it's time to turn these habits into long-term business change. You can start by reading our guide to talent mapping, which provides even more information about creating a skills inventory for your organization.

Alternatively, you can get started straight away by mapping the personalities in your workforce using our 16 personalities test.

Sources

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