# THE PROBLEM WITH INTERVIEWING

## HOW TO STOP HIRING THE WRONG PEOPLE

# THE PROBLEM WITH INTERVIEWING

## By: Joseph Toney

A Practical Guide to Transforming Interviews into Solution-Focused Conversations

---

Table of Contents

---

Introduction

Interviews are broken. Businesses are often stuck in the habit of using outdated, ineffective methods to evaluate candidates. Meanwhile, candidates walk into interviews trying to impress with a polished resume, hoping their experience alone will win them the role.

But companies aren't hiring a resume. They're hiring a solution.

And candidates aren't just selling experience. They're offering to solve problems.

This e-book will explore how businesses and candidates alike can shift from the traditional interview process to a problem-solving conversation. When both sides approach the interview with a focus on the challenges at hand and how to solve them, better hiring decisions are made — faster and more effectively.

## Chapter 1: The Problem with Traditional Interviews

If you've ever walked out of a job interview feeling like it was a waste of time, you're not alone. Most interviews follow a predictable, ineffective formula. They focus on a candidate's past experience, educational background, and hypothetical scenarios that have little relevance to the company's actual problems. Meanwhile, companies conduct these interviews without getting the insights they need to make an informed decision.

The result?

• Companies hire candidates who look good on paper but may not be able to solve real problems.

• Candidates miss the opportunity to demonstrate how they can add value.

• Both sides waste time and resources.

The root cause of this issue is a fundamental misunderstanding of what interviews are supposed to accomplish. Businesses aren't hiring resumes — they're hiring solutions. But instead of focusing on whether a candidate can solve their actual challenges, they get lost in outdated interview practices.

Let's break down why traditional interviews fail and how both companies and candidates can shift their mindset.

The Resume Obsession

Resumes have long been the centerpiece of the hiring process. Hiring managers sift through piles of applications, scanning for the perfect combination of qualifications, years of experience, and prestigious job titles. On the surface, this makes sense. A resume tells a story about where someone has been, what they've accomplished, and what skills they claim to have.

But resumes are inherently flawed as a primary decision-making tool.

• They lack context: A candidate's resume might highlight impressive accomplishments, but without understanding the circumstances behind those achievements, companies can't gauge how relevant they are to the role at hand. Did the candidate succeed because of their individual efforts, or was it a result of a strong team, ideal market conditions, or external factors?

• They don't predict problem-solving ability: A person may have excelled in a structured corporate environment, but that doesn't guarantee they can navigate the uncertainties of a startup or a company in crisis.

• They favor privilege over potential: Candidates with prestigious backgrounds often get prioritized, even though many capable problem solvers lack traditional credentials. Overlooking candidates without flashy resumes can lead to missed opportunities.

Businesses are not hiring the best "past performers" — they're hiring the best "future problem solvers." Resumes don't answer the critical question: Can this person solve the specific problems we're facing?

---

The Problem with Generic Questions

In most traditional interviews, the conversation revolves around predictable and often meaningless questions:

• "Tell me about yourself."

• "What are your strengths and weaknesses?"

• "Why should we hire you?"

While these may give hiring managers a surface-level understanding of a candidate, they offer little insight into how the person thinks and approaches real-world problems.

Consider this scenario: A company struggling with poor customer retention interviews a candidate for a marketing role. Instead of asking about the candidate's ideas to improve retention, the interviewer asks about their most significant accomplishment from five years ago. While that accomplishment may be impressive, it does nothing to reveal whether the candidate can tackle the company's current challenges.

The reliance on hypothetical, outdated, or irrelevant questions prevents both parties from having a meaningful discussion about what truly matters.

---

The Real Cost of a Bad Hire

The consequences of traditional interview mistakes are severe. Hiring the wrong person is not just an inconvenience — it's a financial and operational burden.

Consider these costs:

• Financial Impact: According to studies, the cost of a bad hire can be as much as 30% of the employee's annual salary. This includes recruitment fees, training costs, and lost productivity.
• Wasted Time: Hiring managers, HR teams, and executives invest weeks or months in the recruitment process, only to realize that the candidate isn't a good fit.

• Lower Morale: A poor hire can negatively impact team dynamics, leading to frustration and disengagement among other employees.

• Reputational Damage: Customer satisfaction may decline if a bad hire is placed in a customerfacing role, leading to lost business and negative reviews.

And let's not forget the opportunity cost. While companies are stuck onboarding and correcting the mistakes of a poor hire, competitors are growing, innovating, and gaining market share with the right talent in place.

---

## The Disconnect Between Problems and Solutions

Here's a truth that many businesses ignore: The primary reason to hire someone is to solve a problem.

• Sales are declining? The company needs a candidate who can identify gaps in the sales funnel and propose actionable solutions.

• Marketing campaigns aren't resonating? The business needs a creative problem solver who can analyze data, identify patterns, and optimize marketing strategies.

• Operations are inefficient? A candidate who understands process automation and team management can make a measurable impact.

Yet traditional interviews often dance around these issues. Instead of tackling the company's pain points head-on, businesses spend precious interview time discussing where a candidate went to school or what hobbies they have.

Imagine if doctors diagnosed patients like companies conduct interviews.

A doctor wouldn't ask a patient to recite their medical history without discussing their current symptoms. Instead, they'd diagnose the issue by asking targeted questions and running necessary tests. Businesses need to adopt the same mindset.

Key Insight: The most effective interviews are diagnostic. Companies should focus on uncovering whether the candidate can solve their real-world problems — not whether they have a flawless resume.

---

## Why the Candidate Experience Suffers

Candidates also suffer in traditional interviews. Many enter the process prepared to share their qualifications and accomplishments, only to be met with vague questions that fail to highlight their true strengths.

Here's how candidates lose out:

•        Lack of Clarity: Candidates often leave interviews unsure of what the company's actual problems are. Without this information, they can't position themselves as the right solution. • Missed Opportunities to Add Value: Skilled problem solvers don't get the chance to demonstrate their abilities when the interview is focused solely on past experience.

•        Feeling Like a Commodity: Candidates are often treated as one of many applicants rather than as individuals who could bring unique value to the business.

Companies that fail to engage candidates in meaningful conversations risk losing out on top talent. Problem solvers won't stick around for a company that can't clearly define its challenges or recognize the value of innovative thinking.

A Better Way Forward

The good news? Interviews don't have to be this way.

By shifting the focus from qualifications to problem-solving, businesses can identify candidates who will drive measurable results. Similarly, candidates who approach interviews with curiosity and confidence can stand out by demonstrating how they would tackle the company's challenges.

In the next chapters, we'll dive deeper into how businesses can conduct solution-focused interviews and how candidates can take control of the conversation.

It's time to rethink the interview.

• For Businesses: Stop hiring resumes. Start hiring solutions.

• For Candidates: Stop reciting experience. Start solving problems.

That's how both sides win.

## Chapter 2: Why Businesses Need a Problem Solver, Not a Resume

Hiring isn't about collecting the most polished resumes — it's about finding the right problem solver for the company's unique challenges.

Every open position exists because something needs to be fixed, improved, or created. Whether it's addressing operational inefficiencies, boosting sales, or enhancing customer experience, companies are seeking individuals who can bring tangible solutions. Yet, traditional hiring methods often ignore this core purpose.

Instead of identifying the candidate best suited to solve their current problems, companies get lost in evaluating resumes. While past experience can be valuable, it isn't always an accurate predictor of future success. Businesses that prioritize solutions over resumes are far more likely to hire candidates who will make a lasting impact.

Let's explore why problem solvers are the most valuable hires — and how companies can shift their interview approach to find them.

Why Resumes Fail to Predict Success

Resumes are like carefully crafted marketing brochures. They showcase a candidate's career highlights, skills, and accomplishments. But they rarely tell the whole story.

Here's why resumes fall short:

1. They Lack Context

A resume may claim that a candidate "increased sales by 40%," but the story behind that number is missing. Was it due to market conditions? A strong product? An aggressive marketing budget? Without understanding the context, companies can't gauge whether the candidate was the driving force behind the success or simply a participant.

2. They Reward the Wrong Metrics

Hiring managers often default to looking for candidates with prestigious degrees, well-known employers, or long tenures. While these factors might suggest competence, they don't guarantee problem-solving ability. Some of the most innovative problem solvers come from unconventional backgrounds.

3. They Create Bias

Resumes tend to reinforce unconscious bias. Candidates with non-linear career paths or career gaps are often unfairly dismissed. On the other hand, candidates with traditional credentials may be hired despite lacking the skills necessary to solve the company's current problems.

4. They Don't Predict Adaptability

In today's rapidly changing business landscape, adaptability is essential. A candidate's past success in a different environment may not translate to success in a new role, especially if the company faces unfamiliar challenges. Problem solvers thrive in uncertainty — something resumes don't capture.

Key Insight: A resume can open the door to a conversation, but it shouldn't be the deciding factor. The real question is whether the candidate can solve the company's problem.

What Companies Are Actually Hiring For

Every hiring decision is fundamentally about solving a problem. When companies lose sight of this, they risk making poor hiring choices.

To course correct, businesses should ask themselves three questions before starting the hiring process:

1. What specific problems are we facing that this role will address?

2. What would a successful solution look like in six months or a year?

3. What qualities or skills would a problem solver need to succeed here?

For example:

•        Sales are lagging. The business needs someone who can analyze the sales pipeline, identify roadblocks, and develop a targeted strategy.

•        Customer service complaints are rising. A problem solver will evaluate customer feedback, streamline processes, and implement customer satisfaction initiatives.

•        Operational inefficiencies are costing time and money. The right candidate will assess workflows, suggest automation tools, and optimize productivity.

When businesses clearly define the problem, they create a targeted lens for evaluating candidates. Instead of passively accepting whatever talent emerges from a stack of resumes, they can actively seek individuals who are equipped to tackle their challenges.

Key Insight: Businesses aren't hiring experience. They're hiring the ability to create positive change.

The Problem-Solver Mindset

A problem solver approaches challenges differently from someone who simply completes tasks. They exhibit a mindset that thrives on identifying issues, brainstorming solutions, and implementing effective strategies.

Here are some traits that define problem solvers:

1. Curiosity

Problem solvers ask questions. They don't accept the status quo. Instead, they explore the "why" behind challenges and look for opportunities to innovate. During interviews, candidates who display curiosity often ask deeper questions about the company's pain points and goals.

2. Critical Thinking

Great problem solvers break down complex issues into manageable components. They analyze data, consider multiple perspectives, and weigh the pros and cons of potential solutions.

3. Creativity

Effective solutions often require thinking outside the box. Candidates who offer unconventional ideas and challenge existing assumptions demonstrate creative problem-solving abilities.

4. Adaptability

The best problem solvers are comfortable with ambiguity. They adjust their approach as new information emerges and remain solution-oriented, even in high-pressure situations.

5. Results-Driven Focus

Ultimately, problem solvers are focused on measurable outcomes. They define success, track progress, and refine their strategies to achieve tangible results.

Key Insight: During interviews, companies should prioritize identifying these traits over validating past accomplishments.

How to Structure a Problem-Solver Interview

Once companies understand the value of problem solvers, they can adjust their interview approach to evaluate candidates effectively. Instead of relying on generic questions, businesses should design interviews that simulate real-world problem-solving scenarios.

Here's how:

1. Present Real Challenges

Provide candidates with a brief, real-world problem that the company is facing (while avoiding confidential information). Then ask how they would approach it. For example:

2. Assess Their Thinking Process

Rather than seeking a perfect answer, evaluate how the candidate approaches the problem. Do they ask clarifying questions? Do they consider both qualitative and quantitative factors? Are they open to feedback and willing to adjust their ideas?

3. Encourage Collaborative Problem Solving

Invite candidates to think aloud and explain their reasoning. If the initial answer isn't ideal, challenge them by adding new variables or constraints. Strong problem solvers will adapt and refine their solutions.

4. Focus on Results

Ask candidates how they would measure the success of their proposed solutions. This reveals their understanding of metrics and accountability.

5. Evaluate Problem-Solving Traits

Throughout the conversation, observe the candidate's curiosity, creativity, and adaptability. Problem solvers naturally engage with the problem, offer ideas, and remain focused on results.

Key Insight: A problem-solver interview isn't about getting the "right" answer — it's about understanding how the candidate thinks, adapts, and navigates challenges.

---

Why This Approach Works

Conducting problem-solving interviews benefits both businesses and candidates.

•	For Businesses: Companies gain a clearer understanding of how candidates approach challenges, providing a more accurate prediction of future performance.

•	For Candidates: Problem-solving interviews allow candidates to showcase their true strengths rather than relying solely on past experience. Candidates who may not have the most traditional resumes can still stand out by demonstrating their problem-solving abilities.

Ultimately, companies that hire problem solvers build stronger, more adaptable teams. These employees aren't just completing tasks — they're driving meaningful change.

Key Takeaway: The resume might get a candidate in the door, but it's their ability to solve realworld problems that will make them invaluable.

Next, we'll explore how candidates can flip the script and take control of the interview by leading with their problem-solving mindset.

## Chapter 3: Candidates Are Interviewing the Wrong Way Too

It's not just businesses that get interviews wrong — candidates are often just as guilty.

Most job seekers approach interviews like a performance. They meticulously prepare their answers, polish their resumes, and memorize impressive-sounding accomplishments. While preparation is important, this approach fundamentally misses the point of an interview.

The biggest mistake candidates make? They treat interviews as a test they need to pass instead of a collaborative conversation to solve a problem.

But what if candidates flipped the script? What if, instead of focusing on selling themselves, they focused on diagnosing the company's challenges and offering solutions? By shifting to a problem-solving mindset, candidates can stand out from the crowd and dramatically increase their chances of landing the job.

Let's break down how candidates are interviewing the wrong way — and how they can change that.

---

The Mistake of Playing It Safe

Many candidates think the goal of an interview is to say the "right" things and avoid saying anything "wrong." They give polished, rehearsed answers to common interview questions, aiming to present a flawless version of themselves.

This approach often looks like:

•	Reciting their resume: Candidates regurgitate what's already on paper instead of adding new insights.

•	Overemphasizing accomplishments: While achievements matter, focusing solely on the past doesn't demonstrate how they'll address the company's present and future challenges.

•	Dodging difficult questions: When faced with challenging questions, candidates may deflect or give generic answers instead of digging into the issue.

•	Avoiding curiosity: Many candidates fail to ask thoughtful questions about the company's goals and pain points.

The result? Candidates blend in with every other applicant. Even those with impressive backgrounds risk being overlooked if they fail to demonstrate how they'll solve the company's problems.

Key Insight: Candidates who play it safe miss the opportunity to differentiate themselves.

Why Candidates Should Lead the Conversation

The most successful candidates don't just answer questions — they ask them.

A job interview is a two-way conversation. Candidates should see it as an opportunity to uncover what challenges the company is facing and demonstrate how they can provide solutions.

When candidates take initiative, they:

•        Position themselves as problem solvers. By steering the conversation toward the company's issues, candidates demonstrate their analytical thinking.

•        Build credibility. Thoughtful questions signal that the candidate understands the company's industry, competitors, and pain points.

•        Control the narrative. Candidates who ask the right questions can naturally steer the conversation to highlight their strengths and past experiences in a relevant context.

Example:

This question not only redirects the conversation to the company's needs but also signals that the candidate is thinking like a business partner, not just an applicant.

Key Insight: Candidates who ask thoughtful, targeted questions create a lasting impression.

---

The Problem with Relying on Past Experience

Many candidates walk into interviews thinking that their past experience will speak for itself. They believe that if they present a polished resume and confidently talk about previous roles, they'll stand out. But this assumption is flawed.

Here's why:

1. Every Company's Problems Are Different

What worked in one company may not work in another. Businesses have different cultures, market conditions, and challenges. Candidates who only speak about past successes without tailoring their insights to the company's specific needs risk appearing disconnected.

2. Experience Doesn't Equal Problem-Solving Ability

Years of experience don't guarantee a candidate can solve complex problems. Some of the best problem solvers are early in their careers but have a sharp analytical mindset.

3. Companies Want Solutions, Not Stories

While storytelling can be effective, the primary goal of an interview is to assess whether the candidate can solve the company's challenges. Candidates who dwell on past achievements without relating them to the company's current problems miss the mark.

Key Insight: Candidates should focus on how their experience applies to the company's challenges, not just list accomplishments.

---

How to Flip the Script in an Interview

Candidates who want to stand out need to shift from a "job seeker" mindset to a "problem solver" mindset. Here's how to do it:

1. Start with Curiosity

The best way to uncover the company's challenges is to ask targeted questions like:

• "What are the biggest obstacles this team is facing right now?"

• "If I were successful in this role, what specific results would you expect to see within six months?"

• "What systems or processes could be improved to increase efficiency?"

These questions create an opportunity for candidates to offer insights and propose solutions.

2. Diagnose Before You Prescribe

Just like a doctor wouldn't prescribe treatment without a diagnosis, candidates shouldn't jump to solutions without understanding the root problem. Ask follow-up questions like:

• "What solutions have been tried so far?"

• "Where do you think the bottlenecks are?"

• "How do you measure success in this role?"

This step not only shows critical thinking but also ensures candidates provide relevant solutions.

3. Offer Actionable Solutions

Once candidates understand the challenge, they can share ideas and insights. They don't need to solve the problem on the spot, but offering a clear thought process goes a long way.

For example:

## 4. Demonstrate Adaptability

If interviewers challenge the candidate's ideas or add complexity to the scenario, candidates should remain composed and adjust their approach. This demonstrates adaptability — a key trait for problem solvers.

## 5. Focus on Impact, Not Just Tasks

Candidates should frame their solutions around measurable results. Instead of saying, "I led a marketing campaign," they should say, "I led a marketing campaign that resulted in a 40% increase in qualified leads within three months."

Key Insight: Candidates who can clearly explain how their proposed solutions will create positive results stand out as true problem solvers.

---

## The Power of Taking Control

When candidates shift the focus of the interview to problem-solving, they become active participants instead of passive applicants. They gain control of the conversation, which boosts their confidence and leaves a memorable impression.

Here's how this benefits candidates:

• They stand out as proactive thinkers.

• They demonstrate their ability to provide value from day one.

• They build a stronger connection with the interviewer through meaningful dialogue.

On the flip side, companies benefit too. Hiring managers get a firsthand look at how candidates think, communicate, and solve problems — which is a far better predictor of success than a resume alone.

---

Final Thoughts

Candidates who treat interviews as opportunities to solve problems — rather than as one-sided evaluations — unlock new opportunities. They build credibility, differentiate themselves from the competition, and often walk away with job offers.

Next time you step into an interview, remember this:

• Don't just sell your experience. Solve their problem.

• Don't wait for the interviewer to lead. Take initiative.

• Don't fear challenges. Embrace them.

That's how you win the interview. And that's how you land the job.

**Chapter 4: Shifting the Focus to Problem Solving**

Interviews aren't supposed to be a one-way interrogation where candidates are judged solely on their past experiences. Instead, they should be dynamic conversations focused on the company's challenges and how the candidate can help solve them.

When both the business and the candidate embrace a problem-solving mindset, interviews become far more productive. Companies gain clarity on whether a candidate can genuinely contribute, and candidates get a clear sense of whether the role is a good fit for their skills.

This chapter will explore how both sides can shift their focus to problem solving, leading to more effective hiring decisions and better career matches.

---

Why Problem Solving Should Be the Focus

A company doesn't hire a new employee just to fill a seat — they hire to solve a problem.

Think about it:

• Sales teams hire to increase revenue and expand market share.

• Marketing teams hire to generate leads and build brand awareness.

• Customer service teams hire to enhance customer satisfaction and retention.

• Operations teams hire to streamline processes and improve efficiency.

Yet, during the interview, many companies barely mention the specific problems they're facing. Likewise, candidates often fail to ask.

Focusing on problem solving benefits both parties:

• For Businesses: They can better assess whether the candidate has the right skills and mindset to tackle challenges.

• For Candidates: They gain deeper insight into what success in the role looks like and how they can make an immediate impact.

Key Insight: When the interview shifts from a scripted Q&A to a collaborative conversation about solving real problems, both sides win.

---

Shifting the Company's Mindset

Businesses often default to traditional interviews because they're easy and familiar. But if companies want to find true problem solvers, they need to rethink how they assess candidates.

Here's how companies can shift their mindset:

1. Identify the Problem Before the Interview

Hiring managers should ask themselves:

• What specific problem are we trying to solve by hiring for this role?

• What would success look like in 6 months or a year?

• What obstacles are currently preventing success?

When the interview starts, clearly communicating these challenges to candidates helps set the stage for a solution-oriented conversation.

Example:

2. Ask Problem-Solving Questions

Instead of asking questions like "Tell me about yourself" or "Where do you see yourself in five years?", companies should ask scenario-based questions that assess a candidate's thinking process.

Effective Problem-Solving Questions:

• "If we gave you $50,000 to fix our customer retention issue, how would you spend it?"

• "We've noticed our social media engagement has declined. What steps would you take to diagnose the issue?"

• "We're experiencing longer lead times in our supply chain. How would you approach this challenge?"

These questions simulate the kinds of problems candidates would face on the job, giving hiring managers a realistic understanding of their abilities.

## 3. Encourage Collaboration

Some of the most insightful interviews happen when companies treat them as working sessions. Give candidates room to ask follow-up questions, explore potential solutions, and even challenge assumptions. This back-and-forth mirrors the collaborative environment of the workplace.

Key Insight: Companies that prioritize problem-solving discussions make smarter hiring decisions.

---

## Shifting the Candidate's Mindset

Candidates often enter interviews feeling like they need to impress by listing accomplishments and qualifications. While sharing experience is valuable, the real opportunity lies in demonstrating how they think.

Here's how candidates can shift their mindset:

## 1. Approach the Interview Like a Consultant

Consultants are brought in to solve problems, not to talk about their credentials. Candidates should take the same approach by focusing on the company's challenges rather than solely discussing their resumes.

Key Question to Ask:

• "What's the biggest challenge your team is currently facing?"

From there, candidates can begin diagnosing the problem and brainstorming potential solutions.

## 2. Ask Thoughtful Follow-Up Questions

Effective problem solvers don't jump to solutions without first understanding the root of the issue. Candidates should ask clarifying questions to gain context and demonstrate critical thinking.

Examples:

• "Have you noticed any particular trends leading to this challenge?"

• "What solutions have you tried so far, and how did they work?"

• "What tools or resources are currently in place to address this issue?"

The ability to ask the right questions is often just as valuable as having the right answers.

## 3. Present Actionable Solutions

Once candidates understand the problem, they should propose actionable ideas. Solutions don't have to be perfect — what matters is showing a logical thought process and creativity.

Example:

4. Show Adaptability

Hiring managers may challenge candidates by presenting additional variables or constraints. Candidates who adapt their thinking in real time, adjust their solutions, and stay calm under pressure show their ability to handle real-world challenges.

Example:

A strong candidate will think on their feet and propose alternatives.

Key Insight: Candidates who engage in problem-solving conversations stand out as confident, capable thinkers.

---

Building a Collaborative Conversation

The most successful interviews are those where both sides work together to explore solutions. When companies are open about their challenges and candidates are empowered to offer insights, the interview becomes a valuable exchange of ideas.

Here's what a collaborative interview might look like:

1. The Business Shares the Problem

2. The Candidate Asks Clarifying Questions

3. The Business Provides Context

4. The Candidate Proposes Solutions

This exchange reflects how both sides contribute to the conversation. The company gains valuable insights, and the candidate demonstrates their value.

Key Insight: Collaborative conversations lead to smarter hiring decisions and more authentic candidate evaluations.

---

Final Thoughts

The days of one-sided interviews should be over. Businesses that focus on their challenges — and assess candidates' abilities to solve them — will make better hiring decisions. Likewise, candidates who approach interviews with curiosity and confidence will stand out as the true problem solvers companies need.

Next time you're in an interview, whether as a business or a candidate, remember this: • For Companies: Be transparent about your challenges and invite candidates to help you think through them.

• For Candidates: Stop just selling your experience. Start offering solutions.

When both sides shift their focus to problem solving, the interview becomes a gateway to longterm success.

**Chapter 5: How Businesses Can Conduct Solution-Focused Interviews**

For businesses, the interview process is often a high-stakes decision. Every hire can significantly impact a company's success, especially when the role is meant to solve a critical problem. Yet, too often, interviews are treated like routine exercises — filled with generic questions that do little to reveal a candidate's true capabilities.

A solution-focused interview turns this outdated approach on its head. Instead of evaluating candidates solely on their past experience or cultural fit, businesses can gauge how well candidates think, adapt, and apply their problem-solving skills to real-world scenarios.

This chapter will guide companies on how to structure, conduct, and evaluate solution-focused interviews — leading to smarter, more confident hiring decisions.

Why Traditional Interviews Fail Companies

Before we dive into how to fix interviews, let's take a quick look at why the traditional model is so ineffective for businesses:

1.      Misaligned Priorities: Companies often emphasize qualifications and credentials over actual problem-solving skills. A candidate might look great on paper but struggle when faced with real challenges.

2.      Lack of Contextual Evaluation: Traditional interview questions rarely reflect the actual challenges the business is experiencing. This makes it nearly impossible to predict how a candidate will perform in the role.

3.      Surface-Level Responses: Many candidates prepare canned answers to typical interview questions. While these might sound good, they offer little insight into how the candidate thinks under pressure.

4.      Failure to Identify Problem Solvers: Without a clear focus on practical scenarios, businesses often hire candidates who excel in interviews but fail to deliver results on the job.

A solution-focused interview corrects these issues by making the company's real challenges the center of the conversation.

Step 1: Define the Problem Before the Interview

Before any interviews begin, companies must clearly define why they are hiring in the first place. Every open position exists because a problem needs to be solved — whether it's related to sales, operations, customer satisfaction, or product development.

To clarify the purpose of the hire, companies should ask:

• What specific challenges is the business facing?

• What role will this position play in solving those challenges?

• What metrics will define success in this role?

• What has been tried so far to solve the problem?

Once the problem is clearly defined, companies can shape the interview to assess whether candidates have the skills, mindset, and creativity to tackle it.

---

Step 2: Structure the Interview Around Problem Solving

A solution-focused interview typically has three distinct phases:

1. Problem Introduction

Start by introducing a real-world challenge the company is facing. This doesn't have to be highly sensitive information — just a general description of a relevant issue.

Example:

This immediately shifts the interview to a practical discussion, encouraging candidates to think critically.

2. Evaluate Problem-Solving Thought Process

Once the candidate responds, encourage them to walk through their thinking. Great problem solvers will naturally ask clarifying questions before offering solutions. They may ask:

• "What data points are you currently tracking?"

• "Have you identified any trends in the drop-off rate?"

• "What's your current customer feedback suggesting?"

Candidates who ask insightful questions before proposing a solution demonstrate strong analytical thinking.

3. Adjust the Scenario

To further evaluate adaptability and creativity, consider introducing new variables or constraints. This simulates the uncertainty candidates will likely face on the job.

Example:

This interactive style of interviewing reveals how candidates adjust their thinking, prioritize solutions, and stay calm under pressure.

---

Step 3: Use the Right Problem-Solving Questions

Here are several types of questions that encourage solution-oriented thinking:

Scenario-Based Questions

• "You're given six months to turn around declining customer retention. What steps would you take?"

• "Our social media engagement has plateaued. Walk me through how you'd analyze the situation and build a new strategy."

Prioritization Questions

• "If you identified three potential solutions to a problem, how would you decide which one to pursue first?"

• "We have limited resources. How would you allocate your time and budget to maximize impact?"

Diagnostic Questions

• "We've noticed a drop in sales from repeat customers. What factors would you investigate first?"

• "What tools or data sources would you rely on to diagnose a productivity slowdown?"

Innovation Questions

• "What's a process or strategy you've used in the past that could be applied to solve challenges here?"

• "If there were no limitations, what's an innovative solution you'd propose?"

By incorporating these types of questions, companies get a clearer sense of how candidates analyze problems, form strategies, and take action.

---

Step 4: Evaluate Problem-Solving Skills

A candidate's performance in a solution-focused interview isn't measured by whether they give a "perfect" answer. Instead, assess them based on:

1. Curiosity and Critical Thinking: Did the candidate ask thoughtful questions before suggesting solutions?

2. Logical Reasoning: Was their thought process clear and methodical?

3. Creativity and Adaptability: Did they suggest innovative ideas and adjust when presented with new challenges?

4. Confidence and Communication: Could they articulate their ideas clearly and persuasively?

5. Business Acumen: Did they consider the financial, operational, and customer impact of their proposed solutions?

It's also important to observe how candidates respond to feedback or challenges. Those who listen carefully, adjust their thinking, and remain composed often excel in problem-solving roles.

---

Step 5: Make the Offer — or Not

Once the interviews are complete, companies will have a much clearer picture of how each candidate thinks and operates. Ideally, the candidate who demonstrates the most confidence and clarity in problem-solving will rise to the top.

However, if no candidate performs well in the problem-solving aspect, companies should think twice before making an offer. A candidate with a strong resume but weak problem-solving skills may not deliver the results the company needs.

Remember: It's better to take more time to find the right problem solver than to rush and hire someone who won't address your challenges.

---

Final Thoughts

Businesses that prioritize solution-focused interviews make better hires — period.

By clearly defining their challenges, presenting realistic scenarios, and evaluating candidates based on their thinking and adaptability, companies can uncover who will deliver the best results.

So, the next time you sit down to conduct an interview, ask yourself:

• What problem are we trying to solve?

• Can this candidate solve it?

When you stop hiring based on resumes and start hiring for problem-solving ability, you'll build stronger teams, drive faster results, and set your company up for long-term success.

**Chapter 6: How Candidates Can Take Control of the Interview**

Interviews are often seen as a one-sided evaluation, with candidates at the mercy of hiring managers. But that's the wrong way to look at it. In reality, candidates have just as much power in an interview as the interviewer does — if they choose to use it.

Most candidates prepare to answer questions, hoping to impress with their qualifications and experience. But the most successful candidates don't just wait for questions — they take control of the conversation by shifting the focus to how they can solve the company's problems.

This chapter will explore how candidates can confidently lead interviews by identifying challenges, offering solutions, and proving their value. If you treat the interview as a collaborative conversation instead of a scripted Q&A, you'll stand out from the competition and dramatically improve your chances of landing the job.

Why Most Candidates Get It Wrong

Candidates often make the mistake of thinking that interviews are a test of their past. They assume that their goal is to convince the company that their experience makes them the most qualified. While experience is valuable, it's not what most companies care about the most.

Companies don't hire candidates just because of their past experience. They hire candidates who can solve their current problems.

Here's where most candidates go wrong:

•	They Let the Interviewer Control the Conversation: Instead of steering the discussion toward how they can add value, candidates passively answer whatever questions are thrown at them.

•	They Fail to Uncover the Company's Pain Points: Without understanding the problems the company is facing, candidates miss the opportunity to position themselves as the solution.

•	They Focus Too Much on Their Resume: While a resume can get you in the door, it's not what will get you the job. Companies want to know what you can do for them now — not just what you did in the past.

•	They Avoid Asking Questions: Many candidates are hesitant to ask meaningful questions, fearing they'll appear inexperienced. In reality, well-thought-out questions show curiosity and problem-solving ability.

Key Insight: The most successful candidates lead the conversation by uncovering the company's challenges and offering clear, actionable solutions.

---

The Mindset Shift: From Job Seeker to Problem Solver

If you walk into an interview with the mindset of a job seeker, you'll act like one. But if you walk in as a problem solver — someone ready to diagnose and tackle the company's issues — you'll stand out.

Think like a consultant, not a candidate.

Consultants are hired to solve problems. They don't spend time trying to impress their clients with their resumes. Instead, they ask smart questions, diagnose challenges, and offer solutions. That's the mindset candidates should bring into every interview.

Ask yourself:

• What problem is this company trying to solve by hiring for this role?

• What insights can I offer to address that problem?

• How can I demonstrate my value as a solution provider?

By adopting this mindset, you transform from a passive candidate to an active, engaged professional.

---

## Step 1: Take Control Early with the Right Questions

The fastest way to shift the conversation is to ask powerful, problem-focused questions. This shows you're thinking strategically and positions you as someone who cares about the company's success.

### Effective Questions to Ask Early

• "What are the biggest challenges this team is currently facing?"

• "What key results would you like to see from the person in this role within the first 90 days?"

• "What obstacles have prevented the company from achieving its goals so far?"

• "What's the most pressing issue that you hope to solve with this hire?"

These types of questions not only uncover the company's pain points but also allow you to tailor your responses and demonstrate your problem-solving capabilities.

Key Insight: Asking the right questions early signals confidence, curiosity, and a solutionoriented mindset.

---

## Step 2: Diagnose Before You Prescribe

Once you understand the problem, don't rush to offer a solution. The best problem solvers take time to diagnose the root cause before recommending a course of action.

Candidates who immediately jump to solutions without asking follow-up questions often appear reckless or unprepared. Instead, show that you can analyze the problem thoughtfully.

Follow-Up Questions to Diagnose the Problem:

• "Have you identified any trends that may be contributing to this issue?"

• "What solutions have been attempted so far, and why didn't they work?"

• "Are there any constraints I should be aware of, like budget or timeline restrictions?"

• "What data or feedback do you have that could help diagnose the issue further?"

By taking a consultative approach, you demonstrate critical thinking, which is far more valuable than a quick, surface-level solution.

Key Insight: Great problem solvers ask questions before offering solutions.

---

Step 3: Offer Practical, Actionable Solutions

After you've gained enough insight, confidently present your ideas. You don't need to provide a perfect solution — instead, show your thinking process and explain how you would approach the problem step by step.

Structure Your Solution with This Framework:

1. State Your Understanding:

• "Based on what you've shared, it sounds like the main issue is ____."

2. Outline Your Approach:

• "If I were in this role, my first step would be to gather additional data by ____."

• "Next, I'd identify key stakeholders and collaborate to develop a solution that addresses ____."

3. Provide Examples:

• "I've tackled a similar challenge in the past by ____ and achieved ____."

4. Show Flexibility:

• "Of course, I'd adjust my approach as I gather more information and get feedback from the team."

This framework helps you sound strategic, adaptable, and solution-oriented.

Key Insight: Employers are more impressed by a clear problem-solving process than a flawless answer.

---

Step 4: Control the Narrative with Strategic Storytelling

While offering solutions is crucial, it's equally important to back them up with examples from your experience. Effective storytelling makes your solutions more credible and memorable.

When sharing an example, use the STAR method:

• Situation: Describe the context of the problem.

• Task: Explain your responsibility in addressing it.

• Action: Outline the steps you took to solve the problem.

• Result: Share the measurable outcomes of your actions.

## Chapter 7: The Power of a Collaborative Interview

When businesses and candidates approach interviews as a collaborative conversation rather than a rigid evaluation, they unlock the full potential of the hiring process. A collaborative interview is a dynamic exchange where both sides explore challenges, discuss ideas, and co-create solutions.

Instead of an interviewer simply assessing the candidate's qualifications and the candidate nervously reciting accomplishments, the conversation shifts to a partnership. The company presents real-world challenges, and the candidate actively participates in problem-solving.

This approach is more than just a trend — it's a practical way to make smarter hiring decisions, uncover authentic insights, and build stronger professional relationships from day one.

Why Collaborative Interviews Work

Collaborative interviews create a more accurate assessment of a candidate's abilities and cultural fit. Here's why they're effective:

1. Real Insights Over Rehearsed Answers

Traditional interviews often feel like scripted performances. Candidates rehearse answers to predictable questions, while interviewers follow a checklist of talking points. This artificial environment rarely provides genuine insight into how a candidate thinks or works.

In a collaborative interview, candidates are invited to solve problems in real-time. Interviewers see firsthand how candidates approach challenges, ask clarifying questions, and propose solutions. This offers a far clearer understanding of a candidate's capabilities.

## 2. Faster Evaluation of Problem-Solving Skills

Rather than spending hours reviewing resumes and conducting multiple rounds of interviews, a collaborative discussion allows hiring managers to assess candidates efficiently. Problem-solving scenarios reveal the candidate's analytical thinking, creativity, and adaptability — all in one conversation.

## 3. Reduced Bias and Assumptions

Collaborative interviews minimize unconscious bias. When the focus is on real-world problem solving, factors like educational background, previous employers, or gaps in employment carry less weight. What matters is how the candidate thinks and whether they can provide value.

## 4. Stronger Candidate Experience

Candidates also benefit from collaborative interviews. They're given a voice in the conversation and a deeper understanding of the company's challenges. This allows them to assess whether the role is a good fit and demonstrate their abilities in a meaningful way.

Key Insight: Collaborative interviews are a win-win. Businesses make smarter hiring decisions, and candidates gain a fair opportunity to prove their value.

---

How to Create a Collaborative Interview

A successful collaborative interview isn't just about throwing challenges at the candidate. It requires thoughtful planning and facilitation. Here's how companies can structure one effectively:

1. Set the Stage

Start by framing the interview as a two-way discussion. Make it clear that the goal is to explore how the candidate thinks, not to evaluate whether they have all the answers.

Example Introduction:

This immediately puts candidates at ease and sets a tone of mutual respect.

2. Present a Real-World Scenario

Provide a challenge that reflects the actual problems the company is experiencing. Keep it relevant to the role and provide enough context for the candidate to engage thoughtfully.

Example for a Marketing Role:

Example for an Operations Role:

The goal isn't to stump the candidate. Instead, it's to create a problem-solving dialogue where both parties exchange insights.

3. Encourage Questions and Discussion

Give candidates the freedom to ask follow-up questions. Strong candidates will naturally seek additional information to better understand the challenge.

Good Questions Candidates Might Ask:

• "What tools or analytics do you currently use to monitor this problem?"

• "Have you received any feedback from customers or employees about this issue?"

• "Are there any budget or resource constraints I should consider in my solution?"

Candidates who ask thoughtful questions demonstrate their curiosity and ability to approach challenges methodically.

4. Collaborate on Potential Solutions

Once the candidate has a clear understanding of the problem, encourage them to share their ideas. Ask them to explain their thought process, propose strategies, and consider the trade-offs of their decisions.

Rather than judging whether their solution is "right" or "wrong," assess how they approach uncertainty and adapt their thinking. You can also add new variables to see how candidates respond to changing circumstances.

Example Follow-Up:

This back-and-forth mirrors the way problems are solved in real business environments.

---

Evaluating Candidates in a Collaborative Interview

To evaluate candidates fairly and objectively, consider these key traits during the conversation:

1. Curiosity and Critical Thinking:

• Did the candidate ask thoughtful questions?

• Were they genuinely curious about understanding the problem?

2. Problem-Solving Ability:

• Did they apply logic and reasoning to arrive at their solutions?

• Were their suggestions practical and actionable?

3. Adaptability:

• How did they respond when new information was introduced?

• Were they able to adjust their thinking without becoming defensive?

4. Collaboration and Communication:

• Did they listen actively and engage respectfully?

• Were they able to clearly explain their thought process?

5. Business Acumen:

• Did their solution consider the company's goals, constraints, and resources?

• Did they demonstrate a solid understanding of the industry and market?

Ultimately, the most successful candidates will be those who think strategically, communicate effectively, and collaborate with confidence.

---

How Candidates Can Prepare for Collaborative Interviews

If you're a candidate heading into a collaborative interview, preparation is key. While you won't know the exact problem you'll be asked to solve, you can strengthen your problem-solving mindset and build confidence.

Here's how:

1. Research the Company:

• Understand their products, services, and market.

• Identify potential challenges they might be facing based on public information.

2. Practice Problem Solving:

• Review case studies and work through hypothetical scenarios.

• Practice structuring your thought process logically and clearly.

3. Sharpen Your Questions:

• Prepare thoughtful questions to ask when diagnosing a problem.

4. Stay Flexible:

• Be comfortable thinking on your feet. Don't be afraid to say, "That's an interesting variable — I'd adjust my solution by considering X."

---

Final Thoughts

Collaborative interviews represent the future of hiring. They empower both companies and candidates to make informed decisions based on real-world problem solving rather than scripted evaluations.

For companies, this approach leads to better hires — people who can think critically, adapt to challenges, and drive meaningful results. For candidates, it provides a platform to demonstrate their value in a way that a resume never could.

So, the next time you're part of an interview — whether as a hiring manager or a candidate — remember that it's not just a question-and-answer session. It's a collaboration. And the best collaborations lead to real solutions.

Conclusion: Redefining Interview Success

The traditional interview model is broken — for both businesses and candidates. Companies waste valuable time trying to assess candidates based on past experiences that may have little relevance to their current challenges. Meanwhile, candidates spend their energy rehearsing polished responses instead of showcasing their problem-solving abilities.

But there's a better way.

When interviews shift from one-sided evaluations to collaborative conversations, the entire dynamic changes. Companies get a clearer picture of how candidates think, adapt, and apply their skills to solve real-world problems. Candidates, in turn, have the opportunity to prove their value by demonstrating how they can contribute — not just based on their past, but through their ideas and solutions for the future.

Interviews should no longer be treated as a performance. They should be treated as a partnership.

For Businesses: Start Hiring Problem Solvers

As a business, your ultimate goal isn't to hire the most experienced candidate — it's to hire the one who can solve your challenges.

Here's how to apply what you've learned:

• Define the Problem First: Before you even write a job description, ask yourself what specific challenges you need this hire to solve. Build the interview around evaluating whether the candidate can address those challenges.

• Conduct Collaborative Interviews: Move beyond the resume. Present real-world scenarios, encourage candidates to ask questions, and assess their thought process in real time.

• Focus on Problem-Solving Skills: Prioritize curiosity, adaptability, and creativity over years of experience or prestigious job titles. The best candidates often aren't the most traditional ones.

• Create a Two-Way Conversation: Allow candidates to challenge assumptions, ask follow-up questions, and propose alternative solutions. Collaboration is a key indicator of future success.

When you hire problem solvers, you're not just filling roles — you're creating a team that can drive meaningful, lasting results.

---

For Candidates: Take Control of Your Narrative

If you're a candidate, it's time to rethink how you approach interviews. Companies don't just want to hear about your experience — they want to know how you'll apply that experience to solve their problems.

Here's how you can stand out:

- Shift Your Mindset: Walk into the interview as a problem solver, not a job seeker. Your goal isn't simply to land a job — it's to prove you can deliver value.

- Ask Smart Questions: Take control of the conversation by asking about the company's challenges, goals, and expectations. The best candidates lead with curiosity.

- Diagnose Before You Prescribe: Just like a doctor wouldn't suggest treatment without understanding the patient's symptoms, don't jump to solutions without gathering information. Listen, ask follow-up questions, and explore the problem.

- Offer Actionable Solutions: Once you've gained clarity on the challenge, propose thoughtful solutions. Explain your reasoning and demonstrate how you approach problem-solving.

- Collaborate, Don't Perform: Treat the interview like a working session. Engage in back-andforth dialogue, adjust your thinking based on feedback, and show how you would operate in a real-world environment.

Remember, companies aren't just hiring your resume — they're hiring your mind. Show them how you think, and they'll remember you long after the interview ends.

---

Why This Approach Works

When businesses prioritize problem-solving in their interviews, they:

• Reduce the risk of bad hires.

• Gain deeper insights into candidates' abilities.

• Build teams that are more resilient and adaptable.

When candidates adopt a problem-solver mindset, they:

• Stand out from the competition.

• Build genuine rapport with interviewers.

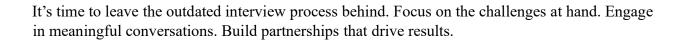• Demonstrate their value in a way that goes beyond their resume.

Both sides benefit when interviews become opportunities for collaborative problem-solving. The hiring process becomes faster, more accurate, and more rewarding.

---

The Final Word

The next time you find yourself in an interview — whether as a hiring manager or a candidate — remember this:

• For Businesses: Stop hiring resumes. Start hiring problem solvers.

• For Candidates: Stop proving your past. Start solving their problems.

That's how real hiring success happens.

It's time to leave the outdated interview process behind. Focus on the challenges at hand. Engage in meaningful conversations. Build partnerships that drive results.

And most importantly — solve the problem.