

HR HUDDLE

Is Your Hiring Process Letting You Down?

From writing better job ads to assessing real skills on the floor, here's how to build a system that works for your practice.

BY KELLIE OLAH, SPHR, CVPM, SHRM-SCP



Q: We hired someone who interviewed really well, but once they started, they struggled with clients and didn't take feedback well. Now, it's impacting the team. How do we prevent this?

A: It sounds like you didn't adequately evaluate behavior during the interview. Instead of asking surface-level or hypothetical interview questions, ask candidates to walk you through real experiences. For example, "Tell me about a time you dealt with an upset client. How did you handle it?"

This kind of question forces them to give you something concrete. What matters is not just the story, but how they tell it. Are they taking ownership, explaining how they worked toward a solution, and reflecting on what they could have done better, or are they blaming the client and minimizing their role in the situation?

You can take it further by asking what they would do differently next time, which provides insight into their ability to reflect and grow.

I also ask questions that go a little deeper, because I want to understand the person, not just their experience. A couple of my go-to questions are:

► **"Why should I not hire you?"** This tells me how self-aware someone is. Strong candidates will acknowledge a weakness, explain how it shows up, and talk about what they are doing to improve.

► **"What's the most valuable thing you've learned in the past year?"**

I want to understand whether someone is growing or just showing up. In this field, things are constantly changing, and I'm looking for people who learn, adapt, and reflect on their experiences. A strong answer shows that they have gone through something, thought about it, and changed how they approach their work as a result.

Behavioral interviewing is not about asking better questions just for the sake of it. It's about understanding how someone is going to show up when things get difficult, because that's where most performance issues come from. People rarely fail because they can't technically do the job; it's how they handle stress, feedback, communication, and accountability.

The more specific and real your questions are, the happier you'll be with your hiring decisions.

Q: We've had a technician position open for months. We posted on Indeed, reached out locally, and asked our team for referrals, but we are barely getting any qualified applicants. Are we doing something wrong, or is it the market?

A: This is a common frustration, and the instinct is to focus on where you're

Technicians know what other practices are offering, and if your package is not aligned with the market, it will limit your applicant pool significantly.

posting, but more often than not, the issue is not visibility; it's how the role is being defined and presented.

The first place to look is the role itself. Many practices move quickly into recruiting without defining what they are hiring for. With technician roles in particular, I often see job descriptions that are outdated or too broad. When that happens, candidates can't grasp what the role actually is and what will be expected of them. Strong technicians won't apply to something that feels unclear or like it's trying to do too much, especially when they have options.

The next issue is how the job is being presented. Most technician job postings read like a task list. They focus on what the practice needs instead of what the technician is looking for. In today's market, that approach does not work. Technicians are evaluating you just as much as you are evaluating them.

Your job ad has to sell the practice. That means clearly communicating what it's like to work there. Technicians want to understand things like how they'll be utilized and what kind of support they'll have. They are also looking closely at work-life balance and team dynamics. Instead of listing duties in your job ads, talk about:

- ▶ How technicians are used in appointments, surgery, and case management
- ▶ What support staff looks like and how responsibilities are shared
- ▶ Your training, mentorship, and growth opportunities
- ▶ How the schedule is structured
- ▶ What a typical day feels like
- ▶ What makes your team and culture different from other practices

Another piece that often gets overlooked is how competitive the overall offering is for technicians. Compensation, workload expectations, and benefits, like paid time off and continuing

education, are major factors right now. Technicians know what other practices are offering, and if your package is not aligned with the market, it will limit your applicant pool significantly.

There is also a lifestyle component to consider. Depending on your location, schedule, and caseload, you may be asking technicians to take on something that feels demanding. If that's the case, it needs to be acknowledged and balanced with what you offer in return.

Finally, sourcing still matters, but it needs to be intentional. Posting online is not enough. Practices should also be thinking about:

- ▶ Building relationships with local technician programs
- ▶ Leveraging referrals from current team members
- ▶ Networking within the local veterinary community
- ▶ Being open to training newer technicians, if you have the structure to support them

If you aren't getting applicants, it's usually not because technicians aren't out there. It's because the role is not clearly defined, competitive, or presented in a way that reflects what technicians are looking for.

Q: We've hired a few technicians who interviewed well, but once they started, their skill level didn't match what we expected. Is there a better way to evaluate candidates?

A: Practices rely on resumes and interviews. A resume tells you where they've been. A traditional interview tells you how well they can talk about themselves. Neither confirms whether they can function in your environment.

It's important to validate skills and behavior before hiring. That starts with clearly defining the job itself. Once you know what the person will be responsible for, you can assess those specific competencies.

To get the most accurate picture of a candidate, implement a working interview. During the working interview, you'll see how they interact with patients, communicate with clients, respond to your team, and handle the pace of your practice. It also gives the candidate a realistic view of your practice, which is just as important for retention.

Working interviews have to be paid. That matters from a compliance standpoint and from a cultural standpoint. It sets the tone that you respect their time and that you run a professional operation.

When assessing the interviewee's technical skill, don't look for perfection; look at how they approach the work. With a technician, you might observe how they handle restraint, prepare for a procedure, or navigate simple tasks. But where



KELLIE G. OLAH

The HR Huddle columnist is the practice management and human resources consultant at Veterinary Business Advisors. The company provides legal, human resources, and practice management services to veterinarians nationwide. Email questions to speaking@veterinarybusinessadvisors.com.

working interviews really become valuable is everything outside of the technical skill. Watch how they:

- **Communicate with clients:** Do they explain things clearly?
- **Interact with your team:** Do they jump in to help?
- **Handle stress:** What happens when things get busy?
- **Respond to feedback:** If someone redirects them, do they adjust or get defensive?

I also recommend layering in simple testing that reflects the job. It doesn't need to be complicated, but it should be intentional. You can incorporate:

- **Scenario-based questions:** "A client is upset about their wait time and is raising their voice at the front desk. Walk me through how you would handle that." You are looking at communication, composure, and problem-solving.
- **Prioritization exercises:** Give them a scenario where multiple patients need attention and ask how they would prioritize. This tells you how they think under pressure.
- **Basic knowledge checks:** Ask them to explain vaccine protocols or discharge instructions in their own words. This reveals their depth of knowledge and communication skills.
- **Role-play situations:** Have them explain a treatment plan or answer a common client question.

All of this ties back to evaluating real competencies, not just experience. Your goal is not to make the process harder for candidates; it's to make better hiring decisions. A structured process that includes a working interview and a few targeted assessments gives you a clearer picture of who someone is and how they will perform, which is something an interview alone will never fully do. **TVB**

HIRING CHECKLIST

Before you post:

- ☐ Have one person manage the hiring process end-to-end.
- ☐ Ensure timely and consistent communication.
- ☐ Clearly define the role.
- ☐ Ensure the job description reflects what the position does.
- ☐ Explain what success looks like in this role.

Before you interview:

- ☐ Review resumes.
- ☐ Create a consistent set of behavioral questions.
- ☐ Ensure the team is aligned on what you are evaluating.

During the interview:

- ☐ Assess behavior by asking real, scenario-based questions.
- ☐ Assess skill by including a paid working interview.
- ☐ "Sell" the practice. Don't just evaluate the candidate.
- ☐ Evaluate communication, teamwork, and response to feedback.

After the interview:

- ☐ Make timely decisions.
- ☐ Ensure offers are clear, competitive, and reinforce why your practice is the right fit.