



A SIMPLER WAY TO IDENTIFY THE RIGHT HIRE

Hiring success goes beyond technical skills.

It's about finding people who can solve problems, collaborate effectively, adapt to change, and align with your organization's values.

The most effective hiring teams focus on a **small set of core competencies** that predict performance across roles, industries, and stages of growth.

Rather than relying on lengthy interview guides, PrincetonOne recommends a **focused, repeatable approach**:

- Clarify what matters most for the role
- Assess a few critical competencies
- Ask questions that reveal real behavior—not rehearsed answers

The result: more consistent interviews, clearer candidate comparisons, and stronger long-term hiring outcomes.

THE CORE COMPETENCY HIRING CHECKLIST

A quick, practical tool for interviewers

Before the Interview:

- ☐ **Define** the role's required expertise and articulate what success looks like in the first 6-12 months
- ☐ **Identify and prioritize** the top 4-5 competencies critical to the role
- ☐ **Design and align** interview questions to directly test those competencies
- ☐ **Align interviewers** on evaluation criteria and expectations for success

During the interview, listen for:

- ☐ **Elicit and probe** for specific, concrete examples that demonstrate competency
- ☐ **Confirm ownership** by noting how clearly the candidate explains their actions and decisions
- ☐ **Assess learning and judgement** by exploring how the candidate adapts, reflects, and applies feedback
- ☐ **Observe collaboration under pressure** by asking how the candidate works with others in challenging situations

After the interview, assess:

- ☐ **Evaluate strengths and gaps** against the required competencies
- ☐ **Check for consistency** across experience, behaviors, and stated values
- ☐ **Determine potential impact** by assessing how the candidate would contribute to and elevate the team

CORE COMPETENCIES CHECKLIST

1. Role-Specific Expertise

- ☐ Demonstrates required technical or functional knowledge
- ☐ Applies expertise to real work situations

Example questions:

- Tell me about a challenge you were responsible for solving. What did you do, and what changed as a result?
- How do you approach problems when the answer is not obvious?

2. Problem Solving and Critical Thinking

- ☐ Breaks down complex problems
- ☐ Makes sound decisions with limited information

Example questions:

- Tell me about a complex problem you were responsible for solving.
- Describe a time you had to make an important decision with limited or unclear information.

3. Communication Skills

- ☐ Communicates clearly
- ☐ Adapts message for different audiences

Example questions:

- Describe a time you had to explain something complex to someone with a different background.
- How do you handle disagreements within a team?

4. Teamwork and Collaboration

- ☐ Works well with others
- ☐ Handles conflict constructively

Example questions:

- Tell me about a time you worked with people who had very different working styles or perspectives and explain how you handled that situation.
- Describe a situation where there was conflict or disagreement on a team. What did you do to solve it?

5. Leadership and Influence

- ☐ Takes ownership
- ☐ Influences without authority

Example questions:

- Share an example of when you stepped up and took ownership of a project or problem without being asked.
- How do you influence outcomes when you do not have direct authority?

6. Adaptability and Learning Agility

- ☐ Adjusts to change
- ☐ Learns new skills quickly

Example questions:

- Tell me about a time when priorities, expectations, or circumstances changed unexpectedly. How did you adapt to these changes?
- Describe a situation where you had to learn something new quickly to be effective.

7. Emotional Intelligence

- ☐ Manages emotions under pressure
- ☐ Demonstrates empathy

Example questions:

- Describe a difficult interpersonal situation and how you handle it.
- What kind of work environment helps you do your best work, and why?

8. Initiative and Drive

- ☐ Acts proactively
- ☐ Follows through

Example questions:

- Tell me about a time you took initiative in the workplace without being asked. What prompted you to act, and what was the result?
- Describe a situation where you identified an opportunity for improvement and acted on it.

9. Cultural Fit and Values Alignment

- ☐ Aligns with organizational values
- ☐ Demonstrates consistent behavior

Example questions:

- Tell me about a time you had to work closely with someone very different from you. What was challenging?
- What's a work principle you won't compromise on, even under pressure?
- What does meaningful work look like to you?
- What does respect at work mean to you in practice?

10. Customer Focus or Stakeholder Orientation

- ☐ Understand stakeholder needs
- ☐ Prioritizes value and impact

Example questions:

- Tell me about a time you had to balance competing needs from customers or stakeholders.
- Describe a situation where you improved an experience for a customer or internal partner.