



Universal Red Flags

Every company has unique red flags based on character fit and role fit that you have to define for yourself first.

But these are the red flags that tend to stand across the board—the ones I've seen over and over that cause problems no matter the company or role.

1) Failure to Show Up or Reschedule Properly

This is a non-negotiable deal-breaker. If a candidate no-shows without proactive communication, it indicates a lack of respect for commitments. Even with an excuse like traffic or technical issues, the failure to text or call ahead of time suggests this pattern will repeat once they are hired.

2) Failure to Accept Calendar Invitations

While not always a deal-breaker, it is a signal worth noticing. It can point to disorganization, lack of attention to detail, or low comfort with basic tools (especially for remote/hybrid roles). Small things like this often reveal bigger patterns.

3) Using AI During the Interview

In virtual settings, look for eye drops (reading notes on a screen) or unnatural pacing and cadence. If a candidate uses AI to script their answers, they are choosing to be deceitful rather than authentic. You want the real person, not a rehearsed bot.

4) Slow response and delayed follow-through

Responsiveness is a reliability signal. If it takes days to reply, confirm, send requested info, or complete a step, pay attention — because the hiring process is the easiest they'll ever have it. If you're not impressed upfront, it usually gets worse once they're comfortable.

5) Over-focus on pay and benefits

Comp matters. But if pay/benefits becomes the *main thread* — repeatedly — it can signal that money/security is the primary driver. That often translates to “I’ll stay until something better shows up.” Not always a disqualifier, but it deserves deeper questions about motivation and priorities.

6) Over-focus on promotion and status

This can signal they may see the job as a stepping stone to validation through status. If someone is fixated on being promoted, or they frame past roles primarily through status and being overlooked, you may be hiring someone who will become resentful if their timeline isn't met and leave for the next opportunity to improve their status.

7) Lack of strong personal relationships

Healthy relationships outside of work often correlate with healthier relationships inside of work. Friendship and family dynamics teach communication, teamwork, repair after conflict, humility, and trust. If someone seems isolated or can't speak to meaningful relationships, it can be a signal to dig deeper.

8) Oversharing and drama

Chaos and constant emergencies can be a boundaries issue. If someone dumps overly personal details in an interview, it can signal poor discernment, weak filters, or a pattern of instability — which often spills into missed work, conflict, distraction, and emotional exhaustion for the team.

9) Overemphasis on hobbies over professional growth

You want people to have a life. You're not looking for workaholics. But if the energy is clearly "work is just a paycheck and I'm not invested in doing excellent work," that can be a misalignment depending on your standards and role expectations. This one is usually a "dig deeper" flag.



10) Generic, vague answers (claims without proof)

“I’m hardworking, detail-oriented, coachable” means nothing without evidence. The red flag is when they can’t provide real examples, specifics, outcomes, timelines, or trade-offs. Vague answers often signal low self-awareness, exaggeration, or lack of real experience..

11) Sugarcoating everything

No flaws, no failures, no lessons. If every story is polished and perfect, you’re not hearing the truth. Strong people can own mistakes, talk about hard lessons, and explain how they changed. The absence of imperfection is often the biggest tell.

12) A lot of confidence, little substance

You ask a question and they launch into a five-minute monologue. Lots of words, lots of confidence, quick answers... but then you realize: They didn’t actually say anything. No pause. No reflection. No “Let me think about that.” We want to ask questions that make people pause and think.

13) Blaming others for past failures

If every story is finger-pointing—bad boss, terrible coworker, clueless manager, nightmare client—and it's never their responsibility..you're likely dealing with low ownership, low humility, and a high likelihood of conflict. This is one of the most predictive red flags for culture damage.

14) No genuine connection in the interview

If they stay guarded, performative, or overly polished and you can't get a glimpse of who they actually are, you can't make a wise decision. The real person always shows up eventually — usually after the offer. If you can't see them now, you're guessing.

And sometimes you just don't connect. Trust that. Because at the most basic level, you are choosing who you and your team spend 40 hours a week with.

If you don't like them now, don't hire them.

