

Understanding the Hiring Process

Panelists: Mr. Harvey Yau, Kelly Services

Mr. David W. Cragg, Cytokinetics, Inc.

Moderator: Dr. Blake J. Aronson, American Chemical Society

The hiring process can be mysterious. Candidates fill out forms, submit resumes, go on interviews, and wait weeks for responses, which may or may not result in a job offer. The reasons for hiring or rejection can seem capricious, if they are revealed at all.

Technicians in the hiring process need to know all of their options and what to expect.

Understanding what to look for

One of challenges faced by chemical technicians is that they are not all called chemical technicians. Job titles include:

Lab technician	Process technician	Research associate
QA/QC technician	Plant operator	Scientist
R&D technician	Systems operator	Entry-level chemist

Job candidates need to focus on the requirements of the position, rather than the title.

As mentioned in [Identifying job opportunities](#), job-seekers have the option of pursuing a direct hire, seeking temporary or permanent placement through an agency, or becoming a contract employee.

In a direct hire, the hiring company does all of the work, placing the job ad, interviewing the candidates, and making the selections. Candidates hired through this process become employees of the company, with all the benefits shared by employees in similar positions.

In placement through an agency, the hiring company uses an agency as a mediator in the hiring process. The agency places the ad and screens most of the candidates. The employer makes the final selections, and the chosen candidates become employees of the company.

Contract employees are employees of the agency, receiving salary and benefits from the agency. Contract employees are sent to companies as needed. Sometimes contract employees are used to fill temporary positions with the companies. Sometimes employers use the contract companies to “test-drive” a potential employee prior to hiring.

Because contract agencies typically work with a large network of companies, contract employees can also “test-drive” different employers.

Understanding the process

Regardless of the type of job opportunity, there will be some sort of screening process to match the skills and knowledge of the candidate with the needs of the employer.

Typically, the screening has both written (applications, resumes, recommendations, etc.) and oral (interview) elements. Documentation of skills, such as official transcripts, writing samples, or training certificates, may be required.

Sometimes, pre-employment aptitude testing is used. Such tests can be specific, such as screening of math skills for manufacturing positions, or general, such as cognitive testing to ascertain attention to detail. Employers must be sure the tests have been carefully validated to ensure there is no bias in the results.

If the interview process requires screenings by several people, a rubric may be used. The rubric is a listing of all the skills an ideal candidate possesses, and it is used to ensure all of the interviewers screen candidates the same way. Typically, rubrics are kept confidential and not shown to the candidates.

Rubrics are not always used. Contract agencies, for example, fill many different types of positions. In this situation, an interviewer may match the skills of the candidates to the positions available, rather than the other way around.

Because the reasons for not hiring a candidate can vary greatly, few employers will divulge their reasons. A sudden shift in the budget could make hiring impossible, or a candidate's personality may not fit the culture of the company.

Understanding the need

The hiring process is all about matching the needs of the employer with the skills and knowledge of the right candidate. Most technician positions will require experience. Experience is particularly important in small companies, where technicians have a broader range of responsibilities and work with less supervision.

While a mid-career technician obviously has experience, the requirement can be a challenge for new technicians. Internships often provide needed experience, which is why they are frequent requirements in chemical technology programs.

New technicians who did not graduate from a chemical technology program, or who did not have an internship, may wish to consider employment with larger companies or contract agencies, where there are more positions available.

In some cases, experience and higher-order skills can make up for a degree that does not match the job description, especially at smaller companies. Higher-order skills include:

- *Interpersonal skills*: working with a wide variety of people, being professional
- *Work ethic*: working without supervision, taking initiative, being on time
- *Communication*: be able to write and speak clearly in a variety of formats
- *Presentation skills*: the ability to present work to peers and managers

The industry position on degrees is in a constant state of flux. Some companies have hired technicians with Bachelor's degrees, hoping for candidates with greater experience, higher-order skills, and science knowledge; instead they found that the new employees needed a lot of training and left their positions more frequently. Companies who work with two-year chemical technology programs generally find that their graduates require less training and are more committed.

While the hiring process can be mysterious, all employers are looking for the same things—the best employee for the job. Job seekers need to consider whether they are a good fit for the position, and, if so, be able to demonstrate that fit.

Follow-up activities

- Host a panel discussion with hiring managers and contract representatives in your area.
- Present workshops on higher-order skills; include both incumbent technicians and chemical technology students
- Set up a mentor system, wherein experienced technicians can guide new technicians through their chosen careers.
- Host a workshop on the hiring process; use original materials or request materials and speakers from a professional society.