It is important for the credibility of a search that internal and external candidates undergo the same review process. Employers sometimes do less due diligence on internal candidates than external ones, assuming that they already know enough about people who have worked for them for years. But in reality, all candidates for a position should be subjected to the same type of review. That means having the same types and number of interviews, with the same panel of interviewers and interview questions. While it may seem unnecessary, it is helpful to conduct reference checks for internal candidates as well as the external ones. Other aspects of the interview process for external applicants should be offered to internal applicants as well, including but not limited to specific information on the interview itinerary (i.e., names, titles, room #s of interviewers), and lunch if that is part of the external applicant interviews.

It sometimes may be difficult for a hiring manager to be as frank with internal candidates as they are with external candidates about how their qualifications stack up against the job requirements. But allowing an internal candidate to enter or continue in the hiring process when they have no realistic shot at the job can result in feelings of resentment down the road when the hiring decision is announced.

The most difficult scenario that an organization may face is when a very strong internal candidate makes it to the final stages of the interview process but ultimately does not get the job. However, there are several ways to soften the blow and, hopefully, keep the employee from either leaving the organization or harboring bad feelings. As with every other step of the recruiting process, clear communication is the key.

A best practice approach would be to arrange an in-person meeting with the unsuccessful internal candidate to explain why they are not getting the position.

- Inform them of the key requirements of the job and explain that there are other candidates who more closely align with those requirements.
- Emphasize that the organization really needs to gain that particular skill set. It’s helpful to assure the internal candidate that you’re really glad they applied and that going through the process has given the organization a better understanding of their background.
- Tell the candidate they will continue to have opportunities, if appropriate, but for this particular role, it’s imperative for the new hire to have all the key requirements.

Having one or more strong internal candidate for a position is a valuable opportunity for an organization. An internal candidate already knows your organization’s culture, and can hit the ground running in a new role. The key to overcoming any challenges that may crop up during the hiring process is relatively simple: Provide clear and constant communication from the time an internal candidate announces their interest to when the final decision is made. By being clear about the organization’s expectations and requirements from the start, you can make the hiring process a positive experience for both the organization and the internal candidate—whether or not they ultimately get the position.

**NOTE:** Please refer to *Tips on Preparing for Interviews* for additional information on this topic.