

Front-Desk Interview Questions That Predict Retention

Front-office turnover runs near 40%, and every departure resets training and drives denials. These behavioral questions surface who will actually stay, not just who interviews well. Ask every candidate the same questions, take notes, and score on the traits that matter.

How to run it

Ask for real past behavior, not hypotheticals, a real story is far harder to fake and far more revealing. Ask every candidate the same core questions so you compare on the same ground. Take notes as you go; the details that predict fit are the ones you forget.

1. Tell me about a time a patient or customer was upset with you. What happened?

What a strong answer reveals: Composure under pressure; whether they take ownership or shift blame; how they de-escalate.

Listen for these red flags: Blames the customer entirely; no resolution; describes losing their temper.

2. Describe a typical busy day in your last role. How did you handle competing demands?

What a strong answer reveals: A realistic grasp of pace; how they prioritize; comfort with a high-volume environment.

Listen for these red flags: Describes the job as slow or easy; no prioritization method; seems surprised by volume.

3. Walk me through a task that required a lot of repetitive attention to detail.

What a strong answer reveals: Genuine comfort with the detail work the role is made of; pride in accuracy.

Listen for these red flags: Calls detail work boring or beneath them; cannot give an example.

4. Why did you leave your last role, and the one before?

What a strong answer reveals: Tenure patterns; how they frame past employers; reasonable, honest reasons.

Listen for these red flags: A string of very short stays with no clear reason; every past employer was the problem.

5. What does a good day at a front desk look like to you?

What a strong answer reveals: Whether their picture of the job matches the real one; what energizes them.

Listen for these red flags: An idealized or unrealistic picture; expects calm, variety, or autonomy the role lacks.

6. Tell me about a mistake you caught, or one you missed. What did you do?

What a strong answer reveals: Accountability; attention to accuracy; how they respond to their own errors.

Listen for these red flags: Has never made a mistake; hides errors; no learning from it.

Score on the traits that matter

After the interview, rate the candidate on the four traits that actually predict retention, rather than a vague overall impression:

	Composure under pressure Stays calm and service-oriented when it is busy or tense
	Comfort with detail and repetition Genuinely at ease with the repetitive, accuracy-heavy core of the role
	Service orientation Energized rather than drained by patient contact
	Realistic expectations Understands and wants the actual job, not an idealized version

Beyond the interview

A good hire poorly onboarded still leaves. Give a realistic job preview so mismatches opt out before you hire, and back every hire with a structured first week. Retention is built across the whole cycle, hire for fit, preview honestly, onboard properly.