Suma

The Suma Five.
An executive interview scorecard for early-stage consumer startups.

A practical way to compare senior candidates without hiring the best storyteller in the room.

Before you interview anyone

Write down these four things. It takes a little time, but it makes shortlisting much easier.

Three 12-month outcomes: specific results, not activities. If you can't name three, you might not need a full-time hire yet.

Clear metrics: how you'll measure each one.

Ownership boundaries: the decisions they can make without asking you first.

Available resources: budget, headcount, software and your time.

How to use this

Score every candidate against the same five traits straight after the interview, before talking to anyone else. If several of you interviewed them, score independently first and then compare. Differences will show you where impressions diverged.

Add a short note to explain each score. If you can't point to a specific example, the score shouldn't count.

Let the candidate do most of the talking. Save explaining the company and selling the opportunity for the end.

The scale (deliberately no middle score)

4 **Strong evidence.** A clear, specific example of something they actually did, with enough detail that you could check it.

3 **Good evidence.** Believable and relevant, but lacked detail or needed some prompting.

2 **Weak evidence.** General terms, avoided the question, or an example from a very different situation.

1 **Evidence against.** Something in their answer suggests they don't have this trait.

THE FIVE TRAITS, AND WHERE TO START

1. Comfort with ambiguity

"Tell me about a time things changed unexpectedly, the plan you were working towards was no longer possible and it wasn't obvious what to do next. What did you do?" Then: "How did you decide what to do?"

2. Stage fit and speed to impact

"Tell me about your first month in your last role. What did you achieve in those first few weeks?" Then: "How soon did you start making changes?"

3. Ownership beyond their function

"Tell me about a problem you ended up taking responsibility for that wasn't really yours to deal with." Then: "Why did you decide to get involved?"

4. Judgement under constraints

"Tell me about something important you had to get done with much less money or resource than you wanted. How did you approach it?" Then: "What did you decide not to do?"

5. Product and customer judgement

"What have you done to get to know our product?" Then: "What do you think we could improve?"

Deal fit (not scored)

Salary, equity, the trade between them, notice period, location and working pattern, conflicts and restrictions. Cover them early rather than at offer stage.

Don't lower a strong candidate's score because of a deal-fit gap - either bridge it or stop early.

Suma

CANDIDATE	ROLE	INTERVIEWER · DATE

	SCORE 1 TO 4	EVIDENCE, ONE SENTENCE	FIT NOTE	PROBE
Comfort with ambiguity				
Stage fit and speed to impact				
Ownership beyond their function				
Judgement under constraints				
Product and customer judgement				
Total, out of 20				

Fit note: what you observed, like how they spoke about a previous boss or reacted to pushback. Stick to what happened rather than personal preference.

Probe: anything to follow up at a second interview or reference call, rather than adjusting the score.

DEAL FIT	WORKS · DOESN'T · UNSURE	NOTE
Salary		
Equity		
The trade		
Notice period		
Location and working pattern		
Conflicts and restrictions		

Two rules

For an early-stage consumer business, my rule of thumb is 16 or more out of 20, with no 1s .

If any part of deal fit doesn't work and can't be made to work, stop there, whatever the score.

A last word

If someone scores 18 and you still don't want to hire them, don't ignore that. The scorecard is there to stop you hiring on gut feel alone, and part of that is making you say out loud what the feeling is about. Then you can decide whether it's based on something real or just nerves.

THE FULL VERSION

Follow-up questions, what a 4 and a 1 look like for each trait, role questions for CFO, COO, CMO, CRO, MD and Head of Customer, and the reference call: suma.ventures/guides/executive-interview-scorecard

The editable Google Sheet, with a tab per candidate and a comparison view, is linked from the same page.

A SECOND PAIR OF EYES

If you want a second pair of eyes on a shortlist, or someone else to run the search: simon@suma.ventures

Simon Cook, Suma. Executive search for venture-backed consumer companies. suma.ventures