

The Hiring Conversation

A four-stage guide for finding the right stylist · v6 · June 2026

How to use this. This is a four-stage filter for hiring your next stylist, run in order. A quick phone screen, then a longer sit-down, then a two-day shadow, then a final check right before you make an offer. Each stage only moves forward if the one before it felt right.

Read the questions out loud in your own voice, like you're talking to her, not running her through a checklist. The **Listen for** note under each one is just for you. It names what a strong answer sounds like and what to watch out for, so there's nothing to memorize. Keep it warm and slow. The calmer you are, the more honest she gets.

STAGE 1 · PHONE SCREEN · 15–20 MINUTES

Five fit questions, then a straight-talk check.

This call is there to find out whether her direction fits the chapter you're opening, and to catch any dealbreaker before anyone drives out for an interview. If the arcs

don't line up, you've saved everyone a shadow day. Keep it loose. You're getting to know her, not putting her on trial.

PS1

"Before we get into anything, what made you reach out to me specifically? What do you already know about the studio?"

LISTEN FOR

Whether she's actually been watching your work or sending the same note to ten salons. The right one names real things she's seen. A service, a color, a post. "I'm just looking for a job" tells you what you need to know.

PS2

"Take me back to the moment you knew you loved this. Not why you signed up for school, the actual moment hair clicked for you. What was happening?"

LISTEN FOR

A real story, usually with a person in it or one specific head of hair. She lights up, and she talks about the craft. Watch if she goes to being her own boss, the flexibility, or Instagram before she ever mentions the work.

PS3

"Think about the hair you've already done. What's the kind of work you keep finding yourself wanting more of?"

LISTEN FOR

This is direction, grounded in what she already reaches for instead of a five-year plan she makes up on the spot. The right answer pulls toward depth. Color, blondes, extensions, one thing she wants to get great at. "A little of everything," or "my own salon in two years," means the chapter she wants and the one you're offering aren't the same.

PS4

"Tell me about the best person you've ever learned under. A teacher, a boss, anyone. What did they actually do that worked for you?"

LISTEN FOR

Whether she can name real behavior. "She let me try and fail without making it a thing." "She was honest with me." That tells you what she'll need from you, and whether you can give it. If the best mentorship she can picture is someone telling her she's great, better to find that out now than in month three.

PS5

"I want to be straight with you about what this job is, so let me ask. A year from now, if this turned out to be the best decision you made, what would've made it that? I'm really just making sure what I'm offering lines up with what you want."

LISTEN FOR

Her honest read on a good year. If it's skill, confidence, the clients, getting great at the work, that's exactly what you're offering and the arc lines up. If it's followers, a bigger book, money, building her own name, she might be lovely and still be after a different chapter than the one you're opening.

PS6 · THE STRAIGHT TALK

"Last thing before we hang up, and I'd rather be straight so neither of us wastes a drive. Are you licensed, or do you have a date? Fridays and Saturdays are our busiest days, so I need someone solid on those. And the first stretch is an apprentice rate while I train you, and it climbs as you take clients. Does all of that still work for you?"

LISTEN FOR

A clean, easy yes to all three. She's licensed or has a real date, weekends aren't a problem, and the apprentice rate doesn't make her flinch because she's here for the training. Watch for a soft "I think I can do Saturdays," or pushback on pay before she's even seen the place. Those don't always end it, but they tell you where her head is, and it's far better to know now than after she's driven out and you've both spent the afternoon.

Seven questions to hear how she handles people.

Reading energy is most of this job, so this is the part that matters. Each one asks her to tell you about a real moment. How she's handled hard things, coworkers, clients, herself. You're not grading the story. You're listening to how she tells it.

SD1

"Tell me about a coworker or boss you genuinely clicked with. What made it work?"

LISTEN FOR

Whether she can name the specific things a person did. "She always asked before she assumed." Specific is emotional intelligence. Vague, "she was just really nice," is a guess.

SD2

"Now the other side. Someone you didn't click with. What was it, specifically?"

LISTEN FOR

How she handles friction. The right one tells you what happened and owns her part of it. The flag is character assassination. "She was crazy." "He was toxic." Heavy on adjectives, light on what actually happened.

SD3

"Tell me about a time someone gave you feedback you didn't agree with. What did you actually do?"

LISTEN FOR

This one carries the whole apprenticeship. The right answer sat with it, asked a question, maybe came back a day later. She engaged with it. Watch both ends. Defended herself on the spot, or "I just nodded and ignored it."

SD4

"What's something a coworker or boss taught you in the last six months? Be specific."

LISTEN FOR

Whether she really believes she can learn from anyone, or just says it. A small, specific lesson with a name attached is a great sign. "Honestly, I mostly teach myself," or a long blank pause, is the know-it-all energy that's hard to coach.

SD5

"Tell me about a time a client wasn't happy, or a service didn't go the way you planned. What did you do?"

LISTEN FOR

Whether she stays calm and owns it, or quietly makes it the client's fault. The right one fixed what she could, kept her composure, and didn't fall apart or get defensive. This chair comes with real people having real reactions, and you need someone who can hold that without you rescuing her every time. "I've never really had an unhappy client" usually means she hasn't been doing it long, or she isn't being straight with you.

SD6

"Tell me about a time a coworker was having a rough day and you stepped in. What did you do?"

LISTEN FOR

Whether she reads the room and moves without being asked. That quiet pitch-in is what you need on a slammed day. A small, real thing is perfect. No example at all, or a story that's really about someone leaning on her, is a different signal.

SD7

"When you're tired or stressed, how do you take care of your own energy? And what kind of room or workplace drains you?"

LISTEN FOR

Whether she can carry her own weather. You want real, concrete strategies, and a calm description of what doesn't work for her that doesn't trash old bosses. "I just push through," or a long list of complaints, are both flags. So is "nothing drains me," which usually means she hasn't looked yet.

This is the stage that answers the fear.

Everything above narrows the field. This is where you actually see her. Two days minimum. Don't perform. Be your normal self and let her be hers, and watch these quietly without telling her you're watching.

First five minutes. Does she ask real questions about the day, or fill the silence with herself?

Her phone. Does it disappear on its own, or live on the counter?

First client. Eye contact, warmth, uses the client's name?

Downtime. Does she find something to do, restock, sweep, organize, or stand and wait to be told?

"Try it." When you hand her something new, does she jump in, or need you to show her three times first?

Small mistakes. Does she own it in one sentence and move on, or over-apologize and stall the whole floor?

The stressed moment. Let her catch you genuinely behind and frustrated. Does she give you room and pick up a task, or add to it by asking "are you okay?" five times?

End of day. Does she ask for feedback, and is it the real question or the easy one?

Day two, on time? Early, on time, or already slipping.

Day two, did it stick? Does she remember what you taught her, or ask the same things over.

THE HANDS-ON MOMENT

Each day, hand her one real task and watch her do it. A thorough shampoo and scalp, a blow-dry, mixing a toner, a section of foils on a mannequin. **You're not grading the result, she isn't trained yet.** You're watching three things. Does she have a natural feel for it in her hands, does she take a correction and apply it right then instead of repeating the same miss, and does she go careful and steady or rush to look impressive. How she takes the correction tells you more than the foils ever will.

STAGE 4 · BEFORE THE OFFER

Three questions, then the clean yes.

Ask these out loud, in person if you can, and watch her face while she answers. This is the last gate. It's the one your last hire couldn't quite get through.

CT1

**"If you got this, what would you be most excited about?
Be specific with me."**

LISTEN FOR

The right things. The mentorship, learning the craft, the clients, the calm of the studio, finally doing the work she's been watching from the outside. The flag is "getting my own following," "growing my book," "eventually doing my own thing here."

CT2

"And what's the one thing you'd be most worried about?"

LISTEN FOR

Honesty without the spiral. "I've never done extensions and I'm scared I'll be slow at first" is exactly right. Real, and self-aware. Watch both ends. "Nothing, I'm totally ready," or a list of worries that makes the job sound impossible.

CT3

"Before I make you an offer, I want to ask you plainly, out loud. Are you committing to being here, in this role, for one year? Yes or no."

LISTEN FOR

A clean, calm yes. One clarifying question about what the year looks like is fine. The hesitation is the answer. "I think so." "Probably." "Let me think about it." A long pause. That's where you stop. Your last hire couldn't get to a clean yes. The right one will.

The one thing to hold onto: The fear that you'll get it wrong again is the same fear that wants a guarantee before she starts, and that guarantee doesn't exist for anyone. Watch her closely on a real day and tell yourself the truth about what you see. People show you who they are once they think the test is over, so trust that more than anything she says sitting across from you. You're not choosing blind. You're choosing with enough.