Fireside chat template

40 questions by phase of the conversation, a session brief and a 30 minute run sheet

How to use this template

A fireside chat feels relaxed on stage because the host and the guest prepared it together. This template gives you the three documents that preparation needs: a one page brief, a run sheet for the slot and a question bank.

Fill in the session brief first and share it with the host and the guest before the briefing call, two to three weeks before the event. For a 30 minute slot, the host picks 10 to 14 questions from part 3; the rest are backups. Replace everything in [square brackets] with your own details.

Part 1: Session brief

One page for host and guest. Agree it in the briefing call and send the final version one week before the event.

Item	Your details
Event	[Event name, date, city]
Stage and slot	[Main stage or breakout room], [start time] to [end time]
Guest	[Name, role, organisation]
Host	[Name, role, why this person knows the audience]
Audience	[Who is in the room and what they already know]
The one audience question	[The question attendees would ask the guest if they had five minutes with them]
Arc of three topics	1. [Context] 2. [The hard question] 3. [What the audience can take away]
Off limits	[Topics the guest will not discuss, agreed in advance]
Audience questions	[Tool or channel], opens at minute 0, sorted by [name]
Recording and streaming	[Yes or no], guest consent confirmed on [date]
After the session	[Meeting block with the guest], [question export], [written answers by date]

Part 2: Run sheet for a 30 minute slot

Open the question channel at minute 0, not minute 20. Early questions can be woven into the conversation, and the host sees which topics the room cares about.

Minute	What happens	Who	Notes
0 to 3	The host introduces the guest in two sentences and names the question of the session	Host	[Notes]
3 to 10	Topic 1: context and the guest's path	Host, guest	[Notes]
10 to 20	Topic 2: the hard question, decisions and lessons	Host, guest	[Notes]
20 to 29	Audience questions, collected since minute 0 and sorted by the host	Host	[Notes]
29 to 30	Closing question and handover to the next session or the meeting window	Host	[Notes]

Shorter slot of 18 to 20 minutes: cut topic 1 to three minutes and keep at least six minutes for the audience.
Longer slot of 45 minutes: add a third topic block and a second round of audience questions.

Preparation timeline

When	What to do
4 weeks before	Confirm guest, host and slot. Ask the guest for 45 minutes after the session for short one to one meetings.
2 to 3 weeks before	Briefing call of 30 minutes with host and guest: audience, arc of three topics, boundaries, clock.
1 week before	Send the final brief. Confirm the topics that are off limits and the recording consent.
Day before	Sound check with both microphones, chairs, side table and the host monitor.
30 minutes before	Open the question channel and test the monitor that shows incoming questions to the host.
Within 2 days after	Export all questions, collect the guest's written answers and send them to attendees.

Part 3: 40 questions by phase of the conversation

Good questions ask for decisions and stories, not opinions on trends. Mark the 10 to 14 you will use and agree the order with the guest. If the guest has answered a question many times in earlier interviews, ask for a specific example or for what has changed since.

Phase 1: Opening

1. What are you spending most of your time on right now?
2. How would you explain your job to someone outside our industry?
3. What brought you into this field in the first place?
4. What has changed most in your work over the last twelve months?
5. What would this audience be surprised to learn about your organisation?

Phase 2: Context and background

6. Which moment in your career shaped how you make decisions today?
7. What did your organisation look like when you joined, and what does it look like now?
8. Who taught you the most, and what exactly did they teach you?
9. Which trend in our market do you think is overrated?
10. And which one is underrated?
11. What do people outside your company most often get wrong about it?
12. How do you decide what not to do?

Phase 3: Decisions and lessons

13. What did you believe about this market two years ago that turned out to be wrong?
14. Which decision in the last year would you make differently today, and why?
15. Tell us about a project you stopped. How did you know it was time?
16. How do you decide when the data is incomplete?
17. What is the most expensive mistake you have learned from?
18. When did a customer change your mind?
19. What do you look for in the first ten minutes of a meeting with a founder or a supplier?
20. Which piece of advice did you ignore, and were you right to?

Phase 4: The hard question

21. Where does everyone in this room overestimate the opportunity?
22. Which risk in your business worries you most at the moment?
23. What would your toughest critic say about your strategy, and what would you answer?
24. Which part of our industry will look very different in five years?
25. Which widely held view in our industry do you disagree with?
26. If your budget were cut by a third next year, what would you protect first?
27. Which question do you hope nobody asks today? (Use only if agreed in the briefing call.)

Phase 5: Practical takeaways

28. What would you do in the first 90 days if you were starting in our industry today?
29. Which skill should people in this room build over the next year?
30. Which habit saves you the most time?
31. Which number do you look at first every Monday?

32. How do you find the right partners, and how do you approach them?
33. What should a smaller organisation copy from you, and what should it ignore?
34. Which book, tool or person would you recommend to this audience, and why?

Phase 6: Bridging to audience questions

35. Several people in the room asked about [topic]. What is your short answer?
36. A question from the audience: [question]. Can you give us a concrete example?
37. One more on [topic]: what would you add for those who are just starting?

Phase 7: Closing

38. What should the audience do differently next week?
39. Where can people continue this conversation with you after the session?
40. Which question should I have asked you, and what is the answer?

Part 4: Stage and technology checklist

☐ Two armchairs, slightly angled towards each other so host and guest can keep eye contact

☐ Low side table with water for both

☐ Two lapel or headset microphones, plus one spare

☐ A way for the audience to ask: question tool, roaming microphone or both

☐ Small monitor at the front of the stage that shows incoming questions to the host

☐ No lectern and no slides; one title slide with both names if the room needs it

☐ Countdown clock visible to the host

☐ Light checked on both faces from the back row

☐ Recording consent from the guest confirmed in writing

Part 5: After the session

☐ Export every audience question, sorted by topic

☐ Ask the guest for short written answers to the five most common questions

☐ Send the answers to all attendees by [date]

☐ Offer the guest's meeting block to attendees whose questions the stage could not answer

☐ Introduce attendees who asked similar questions to each other

☐ Note what worked and what did not for the next brief

About this template

This template was created by Converve and is free to use, copy and adapt for your own events.

A good fireside chat often creates more demand for conversations than the stage can hold. Converve schedules the one to one meetings that follow your programme through a rule based meeting matrix: https://www.converve.com/platform/b2bmatchmaking