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3 ways to hire well for your startup

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If you're hiring for your startup, you need to understand one thing: ***This is arguably one of the worst times to be looking for talent.***

While inflation continues to skyrocket and the Fed pumps up interest rates, consumer confidence remains unchanged and unemployment sits at a historical low. The business and market financial outlook is grim, but companies are still at the mercy of their employees, who seem to have endless choices for jobs. Big Tech might have released some 10% of the talent back into the market, but those were generally not employees executing core businesses.

How, then, can early-stage founders compete with larger, better-funded companies in this war for talent?

View talent through a product-market fit lens

Most startups simply do not have the means to compete on the basis of capital, especially when it comes to talent.

Your early employees (your first 20-25 people) join you because they are seeking something that bigger companies with money cannot offer them. Your job is to figure out what that something is and make it available.

Approaching early-stage recruitment through a product-market fit lens is great way to do this. Think of your candidates as your customers, and get to know them in person, understand their career path and learn what their gaps are.

Whenever possible, it is far better to slowly integrate a great candidate in as an adviser or part-time contractor and let things play out.



Their gaps are your problems and the role you have to offer is your product. The two have to fit together – otherwise, it's not a good hire. When you figure this out, explain how they can get what they want from working with you and why they cannot get it from other companies.

But don't assume you got it right immediately. Iterate, and check in twice a week, or at least monthly. Things change quickly at the early stages, so you have to keep iterating to make sure there is still a fit.

Do unto your team as you would to your customers, and you'll build a team as loyal as your ideal customer base.

Hire for balance, not brevity

I cannot stress how many times I have seen companies bring in junior sales executives only to have growth stall once it's time to scale.

Why does this happen? It is not because the junior sales execs do not perform. The problem comes once you bring on a head of sales because none of your sales reps are qualified to be promoted. The head of sales is arguably one of the most important roles you can hire for after your company has established product-market fit. It is like a non-technical CEO finding his or her technical co-founder all over again. This role makes or breaks scaling.

A hundred things can go wrong here. The head of sales may not like their sales team or they may not jive well with the approach. Moreover, it is incredibly difficult to vet someone's sales skills as they apply to your specific products and customers during the interview process.

It is far better to bring a head of sales in early, build the sales process and funnel with them, and let them recruit their own team. If that does not work, the next best option is to bring in someone who might be qualified to become a head of sales – or at least an account manager – and promote them once they have proven themselves.

If you have an unbalanced team of extremely senior and junior people, you risk slowing down your growth as your sales team tries to figure out how to balance their collective experience out. Remember, you're only going to be an early-stage startup for a short period of time. If you don't **consider the balance needed for long-term growth**, you're



not going to make valuable long-term hires.

Approach your recruitment process like dating

Some positions are more important than others. Or, it might simply take a long time to tell whether a new recruit will work out.

For these roles, begin your recruitment early and treat it like a dating process. When Mark Zuckerberg hired Sheryl Sandburg, the two spoke every weekend for eight months before Sandburg officially joined then-Facebook as its COO. In other words, Zuckerberg didn't make it "Facebook official" until he was absolutely certain Sandburg was The One.

While you can generally tell from resumes and interviews if a candidate would have the right skills and experiences for such roles, it is very challenging to assess how well they'll actually perform. It takes time to see whether someone's values align with the company's, and it typically manifests when the person is forced to make difficult decisions with certain trade-offs.

Whenever possible, it is far better to slowly integrate a great candidate in as an adviser or part-time contractor and let things play out. Just as a customer pilots the product, companies should pilot their most important hires whenever possible.