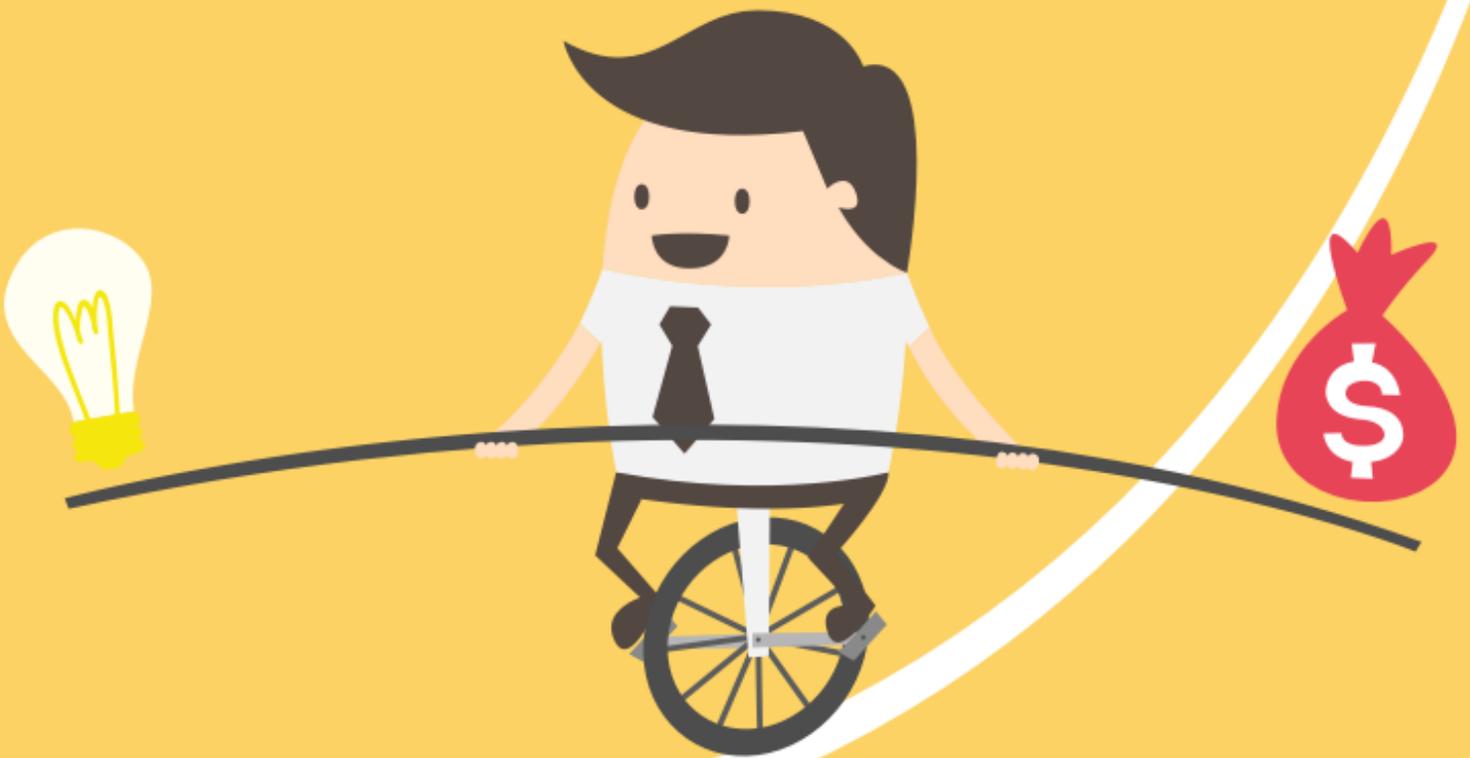


19 Mistakes Startups Make Hiring



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19 Start Up Company Recruitment Strategy Mistakes:

As a startup implementing creative recruiting strategies will help get your jobs seen by candidates who are looking for a new role. It will also make it faster to hire great candidates, more consistently, and with significantly less effort.

1. Not treating great applicants like great customers.

Treat your recruitment strategy like you do your marketing and sales funnel. If you receive a high-quality lead, would you wait 3 days to call that lead? Then don't do that to a high-quality candidate. You should move heaven and earth to accommodate that candidate, impress them and treat them to a great hiring experience.

2. Failing to understand the cost/benefit of a new employee before you hire.

Before you hire, you need to know what the potential costs and benefits are. This is considered to be part of best practices for recruiting employees. When figuring out the potential cost, be thorough and include everything so you have the full picture.

The biggest mistakes I see start-ups making is hiring people without a clear sense of how their work will justify the cost of hiring them.

If you are hiring based on anticipated growth, you should be able to calculate the ROI on the person you are hiring. If you can't quantify how this person will definitely increase the earnings so their salary and benefits are covered, then you are just putting yourself in a negative cash flow situation.

Yes, employees need to be trained and require a ramp up period. But, if within that time you aren't able to then confirm the ROI is there, you shouldn't keep them on.

I have personally made this mistake in the past and it reinforced for me how important it is to A) only hire top performers, and B) only hire when you know the ROI is greater than the hiring cost.

A lot of the experts stress taking your time when you hire, which is hard for startups to do - they're used to moving fast.

Oftentimes, startup environments are running in overdrive and they don't put enough thought or effort into the type of role they need for the company.

It is easy to just hire a resource. However, the person needs to be able to add value in the organization. Especially when a company is small and growing it is important to bring in resources that can deliver the right value for the company in a timeframe that makes sense.

Hiring takes time.

While it shouldn't take an inordinate amount of time (like months), it can take weeks. A good job description, interview process, and decision-making should be well planned to avoid making costly mistakes.

3. Hiring a full-time employee when you only need a contractor.

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Sometimes math just isn't on your side, but you still have a job that needs to be done. In fact, you may want to consider freelancers even if you can afford a regular employee.

Many contractors will jump at the opportunity to join a fast growing startup in the early days, and you get the chance to see how they work and how well you work together.

Lack of clarity. Startups need to be sure they have real clarity around exactly what function(s) they need to fill. Then they need to decide if it's something that requires an employee or an outsourced solution. Too many startups decide to hire when their need could be met with a contractor.

4. Not hiring employees that thrive at each stage of the company lifecycle.

You'll need the kind of people that can navigate a fast-changing landscape with little oversight and guidance, and quickly learn new tasks as they become necessary.

Not sure if an employee can "hack" the startup environment? Try freelancing first, as we mentioned earlier, or do what companies like Automattic do - figure it out by having potential employees do real (paid) tasks with the team before making it official.

Startups can often hire a good person but at the wrong stage of the company's life. In the early days, you need to optimize for those comfortable with uncertainty, change, less structure and a flat hierarchy. A star hire from a brand-name company might not be turn out as expected. Make sure you also a good mix of tech to non-tech talent.

The single biggest mistake is not building their team correctly. They tend to do 1 of 2 things. Either they think too mono-talented, meaning finding that expert Java guy but that is all they can do.

Or they think too cross-job-talented, meaning they want a Java expert who is also a networking expert, and a Tech writer, those are 3 different jobs and skill sets.

What they should be thinking is cross-talented. Meaning you need a Java developer, get a good java developer that can also develop in other languages as well. Startups get caught between the expert developer and the robot who can do many things besides develop when what they want is a "swiss army knife" who can develop cross-platform in many languages.

As your company grows, you'll want to start thinking about specialists that know a particular area inside and out. For example, you may find that Google Adwords is key to your growth strategy, and your budget justifies hiring a full-time PPC manager.

As a startup evolves, we need employees who can evolve with it.

Firstly I have seen business owners reluctant to delegate key tasks to staff - and so have constrained the growth of the business by not hiring soon enough. You can't be driving every project and be responsible for every decision in the business or your startup will simply lose momentum.

So hire early.

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A second mistake I've seen is for owners to get hung up on the exact qualifications and experience that you want your first hires to have. Ask most seasoned business owners about their companies and you will invariably hear that the business changed significantly in its first years.

So the most important attributes for your first employees are that they are enthusiastic, eager to learn and capable of fulfilling a variety of roles within the company – that way their contribution to the business can evolve as the business itself evolves.

Evolution, iteration, change... that's what startups are all about, right? Rodolphe Dutel has some additional recruitment ideas for quick wins for hiring as your startup evolves.



Startups usually hire someone for their skills (what they can do today) or their potential (what they may be able to do once they ramp up). It's important to decide ahead of time which of those two routes startups want to explore: Understanding how immediate your need is, and whether you have time/resources to mentor someone to grow into a role is key.

A typical example is for sales, you may get a seasoned sales person to build a team around them, or hire one/two junior sales people and mentor them.

5. Failing to strengthen your employer brand with content marketing.

Business leaders are convinced that branding to acquire talent is critical to staying competitive.

Employer Branding Is Becoming Strategically More Important

These days you don't need to run an ad during the Super Bowl to get the word out there. The internet has made publishing inexpensive and doable for any business, and content marketing is a great way to raise awareness about your brand.

One of the key components to content marketing is sharing your knowledge to attract customers. Each member of your team probably has an area of expertise. Help them find ways of sharing this in a variety of places, whether it's writing a short article on Medium or your company blog, tweeting tidbits of wisdom, or answering questions on Quora.

6. Not embracing a coaching culture to attract millennials.

If you're not working to attract millennials to your company, then your recruiting strategy is heading nowhere. Not sure about that? Consider this.

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In just a few short years, millennials will make up nearly half the workforce. By 2030, they'll be 75 percent of it. Start strategizing now and working on some creative recruiting techniques if you want the best of this generation.

Millennials In The Workforce

Office Space- Millennials Want To Work In

7. Not having an office space millennials want to work in.



Want to attract millennials to your startup? How you design your workspace should be part of your recruiting plan. Open office plans are much more popular among millennials than the rat mazes of yesteryear.

Beyond open spaces, the office is also becoming a destination for millennials - a place where they work, exercise, eat and even sleep. Think about what you can offer employees that will make the office a destination.

A startup or small business recruiting strategy should offer the candidate an emotional investment. Since a startup or small business is focused on its core business, they sometimes overlook the work/life balance and long-term stability aspects. Offering a salary and office perks isn't enough. Candidates want to know how they will make a difference at work and in the community.

8. Not using data to optimize your hiring time.

When we talked to the experts about recruitment strategies, another issue that came up over and over again was timing. Hire too slow, and you'll be bringing on employees to help mitigate disasters. Hire too quickly, and you won't get the best people.

To help you gauge if you're getting the timing right, you'll want to start measuring your time to hire. Knowing this will help your company determine how much lead time you need for effective recruitment.

Hiring too slowly. To date we've only hired people when it's become critical already. One piece of advice I received recently was just assume everything is going to go to plan and hire early for that expansion. Time will tell if that's good advice but we've changed our mind set and are now hiring for growth rather than hiring to fight fires.

The biggest hiring mistake that I've made repeatedly is being too desperate. Desperation takes on many forms. Sometimes we think that the person in front of us is the greatest person ever. And we don't establish the right relationship with them from the beginning because we're just too eager to hire them.

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Sometimes desperation makes us hire somebody even though we don't think they're the right person, but we feel we HAVE to fill the position right away. Regardless of how it shows up, we can't let desperation creep into the hiring process.

One of the biggest mistakes startups make in hiring is that they tend to hire too fast! Things move pretty fast in a startup environment so it's natural for them to hire fast as well, but this usually is where their problems begin to happen.

It's so tough to have patience in this type of environment, but it's critical to the success of what you're trying to do. In big organizations, you can miss on some hires and no one will really notice. In a startup environment, if you miss on one hire, it sticks out in a big way!

Ok, so timing is important, but how do you know who the good new hires are? And how do you measure their performance once they're on board?

Serial entrepreneur Mitchell Harper offers a practical approach to hiring that will help you understand it from the inside out. Literally.

The biggest mistake I see is startups not knowing enough about the job they're hiring for.

9. Not having a strategy to attract the best cultural fits.

Great companies are honest about their culture. They don't want everyone to apply for their jobs, and you don't either. Who wants to pick through a mountain of resumes full of potential new hires that aren't going to work out?

The biggest mistake startups make when recruiting is that they often don't consider the candidate's cultural fit into the organization. Especially in today's startup norm fast-paced hiring, skills seem to be the only measuring stick of an employee, but an employee who doesn't fit into the company from a culture, ethics, even energy perspective will drag down not only their team but possibly an entire department.

That individual may be the best mobile app developer in the state, but if he can't take direction, is abusive towards teammates, or is an HR report waiting to happen, it may be advisable to settle for the second-best mobile app developer. In the end, they will contribute to a better, happier workplace. Happy recruiting.

We heard this more than once - hiring the best doesn't just mean the person that is most technically proficient. It also means the person who will provide the best fit for your team.

The biggest mistake is hiring purely on technical talent, rather than personality. Personality, especially in a small team, is vitally important to the culture and mood of your startup - hire a technically brilliant but socially devoid person, and you'll have trouble keeping a cohesive team, all focussed on the same mission.

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Ignoring cultural fit. Achieving a cohesive culture that is built on a clear and shared mission is integral to your success. Evaluate candidates based on their cultural fit as much as their skills and experience.

Each hire should exhibit the company values and congruence with your mission. Hiring someone who does not fit the culture will result in toxicity that holds everyone back.

10. Ignoring passive candidates.

Do you know where the biggest untapped source of potential candidates is? It's in the 75 percent of people who aren't even looking for a new job but would consider an offer if it came their way.

Try recruiting with social media as one of your sourcing methods in recruitment. The best passive talent may not be checking out job boards, but they probably have accounts on Twitter, Facebook, and other social media. We've written up some great social recruiting tips that will help you get a jumpstart.

11. Not using niche job boards.

Job posting sites should be part of every recruitment strategy. They help you get the word out to scores of people that weren't possible to reach before the Internet.



Be sure to look for niche job boards, the boards that focus directly on the type of jobs you're hiring for. Hiring writers? Try [JournalismJobs.com](#). Software developers? Visit [GitHub Jobs](#). Sales? Go to [SalesHeads.com](#). Renewable energy workers? Here you go.

Here are lists of job boards you can check out in some of the most in-demand niches:

[Accounting job posting sites.](#)

[Construction job posting sites.](#)

[Dental job posting sites.](#)

[Engineering job posting sites.](#)

[Healthcare job posting sites.](#)

[Marketing job posting sites.](#)

[Optometry job posting sites.](#)

[Pharmacy job posting sites.](#)

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Veterans job posting sites.

Veterinary job posting sites.

Restaurant job posting sites.

When you're ready to post, we've got a great job advertising guide to help.

12. Not addressing candidate pain points in your job post.

You need to create job posts that get into your candidate's head and talk about the specific things that make your job better than the one they already have.

If the candidate has a negative experience of the recruitment process, this is bad for the company's reputation, especially with reviews on Glassdoor that prospective candidates often read.

It is also important to operate fast - good candidates don't stay on the market forever and there are no excuses for waiting a month before the first and second interview.

Social recruiting expert Jim Stroud offers up more useful advice below for taking your job posts from boring to awesome. Pay attention to this one, it's an easy and inexpensive win in the recruiting world.

I think the single biggest hiring mistake startups make when recruiting is not treating their job descriptions like marketing pieces. More often than not, you remove the company name and location and I would wager that the job description the startup is using is the same as any other company seeking talent with the same job title. As a result, the startup is not noticed because they look like everyone else.

Rather than doing what everyone else is doing, startups should do something different by making their job descriptions remarkable. Instead of text, why not use infographics on your employer website? When posting to job boards, use a short tweet style description of what you want then, link to a video (or audio message) where you can capture the imagination of the job seeker. Moreover, look beyond the same talent pools everyone else does.

For example, Snapchat has 150 million daily active users. Would someone out of those 150 million be a fit for your needs? (Not knowing how to recruit on Snapchat is not an excuse.) Since millennials are the largest generation in the US workforce, why not leverage trends popular with that demographic to get their attention?

The way you present your jobs to the public can also have more than the desired effect. Not only could it help you source the talent you want, but it also promotes your company as innovative and could garner media attention.

Think about it! Free publicity about your company, the attention of hard to find passive talent as well as incoming traffic from active jobseekers; there is a lot riding on your job description.

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Don't mess it up by being bland. Everybody else does that.

13. Not using video as a key part of your hiring process.

According to some estimates, video content will make up 80 percent of internet traffic in a few years. Which means video needs to become part of an effective recruitment strategy.

You can start by creating a company culture video, accepting video applications, or performing video interviews.

14. Not having a mobile-friendly candidate process.

We know about the importance of responsive sites and a mobile-friendly experience for customers. And with at least 45 percent of job seekers using mobile devices for their search, we need to have it in mind for recruiting as well.

15. Not leveraging employee referrals.

Your best source for finding new employees is most often your existing team. If you've done your job and hired great people to begin with, then this has a network effect.

If your current employees are happy, working on great stuff with a great team and making customers happy, then they're inclined to refer their friends and colleagues to join them.

The biggest mistake is not involving the team. Your current hires are your best source of information about who is open to joining the company. In addition, whoever you hire, success will be based on team fit. So best to involve the whole team.

16. Failing to nurture your talent pool with drip email marketing.

Once you've made the decision to hire for a position, put the rest of the promising candidates into a campaign that sends a drip email 2-3 times per year.

Keep the emails simple. Remind people who you and your company are, ask them how they're doing, and make it easy for them to check out your careers page and connect with your company on social media if they want more info.

17. Using interviewers with poor interview skills.

Just being familiar with common interview questions and the best phone interviewing techniques is not enough to nail your interview process.

Consider letting one person partner with each candidate. They can leverage this relationship at the offer stage and flag issues with hiring managers who are turning off good candidates.

The most painful and counterproductive mistake I see startups make in hiring has to be over-selling and failing to interview the candidate thoroughly.

This almost guarantees you end up with a bad team.

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The weak candidates pass through too easily, but more importantly, the strong ones walk away--they don't want to work with a mediocre team, and they are estimating the quality of your team based on how rigorous your process is.

Part of being able to interview well is being clear on exactly what the position will require, and doing your research to make sure you can vet well. As Wendy Maynard told us below, it's worth the effort to avoid a bad apple hire.

Know who you want:

Most leaders of startups are so busy, they don't want to take the time to get clarity on the position, with a very clear job description that includes roles and responsibilities.

This should be followed by a methodical interview process that thoroughly vets candidates. Hiring is one of the most important decisions they will make – one that can catapult a startup forward at great speeds when done right. Or, destroy its progress because they've brought on the wrong person.

18. Ignoring rehires and alumni.



Keep up with former employees if they performed well and left under positive circumstances. After all, they already know your company culture, and you know them.

Turning rehires into a source of employees is easy as well. First of all, make sure that they're treated with respect when they exit, and that you do a great job with communication as they go.

19. Not profiling your best employees.

Look at the performance of your best employee to date. What makes that person special? Is it domain expertise? Is it hunger and drive? Is it raw intellectual horsepower? Maybe it's the will to learn and try new things?

Whatever it is about that person, use it as a gauge to create your core values, and then hire for those values. Imagine a company where your entire team performs at the level of your best employee.