Creating the
perfect hiring sequence

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Introduction

When candidates are 38% more likely to accept a job offer from a positive candidate experience, a well-thought-out hiring sequence can be the difference between hiring the talent your business needs or missing out on candidates entirely.

The cause? "Candidates think hiring managers are twice as likely to slow down the hiring process than a recruiter," according to HR analyst Ben Eubanks. "I've talked to hiring managers over the years that say, 'I'm willing to put up with the stress my team is under right now more so than the risk of hiring the wrong person.'"

However, by putting in place a simple hiring process, a positive candidate experience becomes less like guesswork and more of a sure thing. What's more, you'll be in pole position to identify the best candidates, eliminate any wasted time spent on unnecessary work and disorganization, and save a pretty penny on recruitment costs.

To give you a helping hand, we've created a comprehensive guide to determine the important steps to include in a perfect hiring sequence. There's a lot to unpack, so let's not waste any more time!

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Identify the gap(s) you need to fill

To ensure that you're hiring to fill a real need, it's essential that you take a skills-first approach to hiring.

"Businesses need to start with a blank piece of paper and honestly ask themselves: what are the skills that this position needs to be successful in the next 18 months? Those are the skills that you either hire for directly or hire for the potentiality—that's your ability to train them," says President and Editor-at-Large of RecruitingDaily, William Tincup.

When you know the gaps you need to fill, writing a job description, assessing potential applicants, and hiring the right person becomes a lot easier. **Here's what you need to do to get started:**

Do a skills-gap analysis

A skills gap analysis is a great way to quickly identify the skills and experience you need to fuel future business growth. It can help you determine what gaps exist between your current employees and the skills your organization needs to move forward.

Done right, a skills gap analysis helps you:

- Move forward with strategic workforce planning
- Get an overview of the entire organization
- Optimize your long-term recruitment strategy

To undertake a skill gap analysis, ask yourself:

Long term goals

- How does this role fit into your growth plans over the next 1, 3, 5 years?
- How fast are you trying to grow your business?
- Is there enough work to justify a new role?

Skills needed for the future

- How is technology going to impact your work moving forward?
- What kinds of new skills will you need to hire in the future?
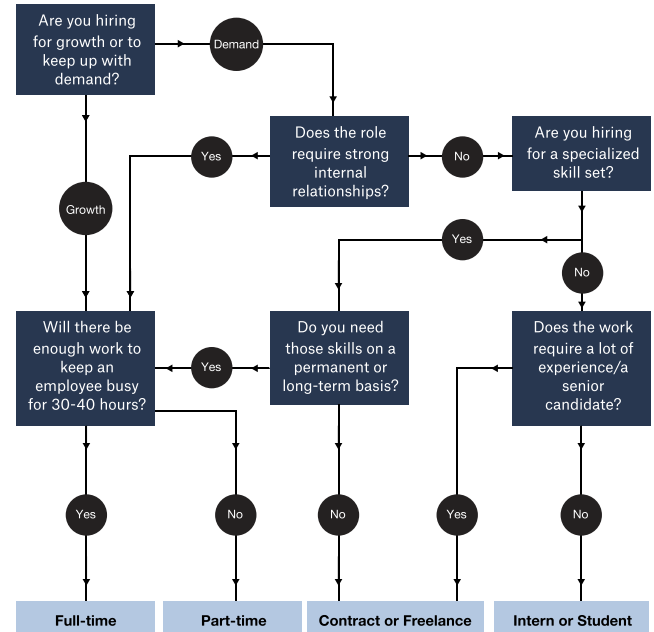
Current team's skillset

- Where are the gaps in your team's skills and abilities?
- Where can team members upskill vs. where do you need to hire for new skills?

Figure out which employment type is the one for you

Is full-time, part-time, or contract employment the right choice? Take some time to assess the findings from your skills gap analysis and see what will suit your business. Still struggling? Follow our handy flowchart to help you identify the best fit for you.

Choose the job title that best fits your needs

Once you know what skills you need, you can fit your job title and responsibilities accordingly. Working backward like this helps to improve the candidate hiring experience, as prospective employees will know what's required of them and how they'll fit into your business.

Are you hiring for growth or to keep up with demand?

Demand

Growth

Does the role require strong internal relationships?

Yes

No

Are you hiring for a specialized skill set?

Yes

No

Will there be enough work to keep an employee busy for 30-40 hours?

Do you need those skills on a permanent or long-term basis?

Yes

Does the work require a lot of experience/a senior candidate?

Yes

No

No

Yes

No

Full-time

Part-time

Contract or Freelance

Intern or Student

Write a clear job description

Job descriptions should outline the necessary skills, training, and education needed for a given role. A confusing job description can frustrate potential candidates—so it needs a sufficient level of detail and to be as clear as possible.

What you need to include

In its most basic form, the job description will need to include:

- Job title
- Job description
- Duties and core responsibilities
- Required education, experience, and skills
- Salary and benefits

Remember the purpose of your job description

Ultimately, the goal of your job description is so someone can quickly understand what's required for the role and whether their skills and experience are aligned with your expectations. As William Tincup explains, "The goal of a great job description is equal parts attraction and disqualification. You want just as many people to be repelled from a job description as you want to attract, because you want them to be able to read it, consume it, and make a good decision fast."

You want to persuade the right people to apply and set them up for success in future interviews by clearly laying out your expectations. So, the clearer you are with your requirements, the better odds you'll have that candidates can demonstrate what you're looking for, and the higher likelihood that you'll find an applicant that sticks.

Use simple and effective language

Keep things simple, and don't be tempted to throw in overused phrases like passionate, determined, or team-player—as they don't add anything meaningful. It's important to think about the candidates, and how to make them excited when they read it. Will your job description make them confused, bored, or put off? Writing with your candidates in mind can help keep you honest where you may otherwise be tempted to make descriptions too dense, throw in over-used phrases, or focus too much on what you need—as opposed to simple, straightforward language that gets the point across and makes the candidate excited to learn more and apply.

Be concise with your requirements

It's often much more effective to keep things short and list your requirements as "must-haves" instead of "nice to haves" or trying to include every possible duty or project that they might complete. Long lists only serve to turn off potential candidates, who might disqualify themselves if they don't meet every single thing you're looking for. To make your requirements concise, consider using bullet points in your job description to help draw the reader's eye and reduce the word count.

Add some (authentic) flair to make it stand out

Grab the reader's attention with a catchy first line, offer a glimpse into the company culture, growth opportunities, unique benefits—anything that will spark interest in a potential hire.
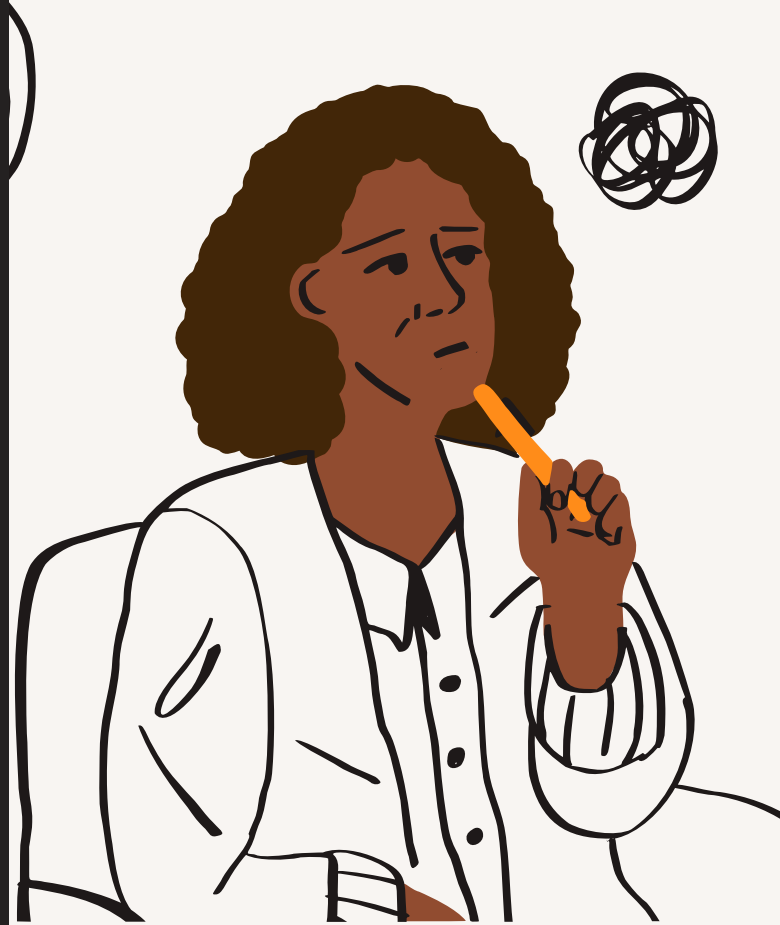
Sourcing and reviewing applications

In order to get your job out in front of as many candidates as possible, you'll probably need to go beyond just posting it on your website. Here are the main ways to get the word out, so you can source the right talent and start sifting through their applications.

Recruiter, employee referrals, and hiring platform: Pros and cons

Today, there are three main options for hiring: using a recruiter, posting on a hiring platform like Indeed, LinkedIn, Talent, or Greenhouse, or employee referrals. Let's explore the pros and cons of each, so you can figure out which ones are best for your candidate search.

Recruitment agency	Hiring platforms	Employee referrals
Recruitment agencies are external companies that find suitable candidates for employers. As a recruiter, it's their job to identify and approach viable candidates and line them up for your consideration.	Hiring platforms are where you can post jobs, search for candidates, and advertise your open positions. They can be a great way to reach a large pool of talent at a relatively low cost and often offer tools for small businesses to start hiring at scale.	If you have happy employees already working for you, what better way to find new hires than through your current staff? After all, referral hires stay 70% longer than non-referrals, and companies see higher retention rates compared to those who applied through other channels. Not to mention, referral schemes can save up to $7,500 in productivity and sourcing costs
Pros:	**Pros:**	**Pros:**
• Fast hiring • Higher quality of candidates • Specialist knowledge	• Low cost • Broad reach • Simple and accessible • Room for personalization	• Highly recommended candidates • Higher retention rate • Good for culture fit • Lower cost
Cons:	**Cons:**	**Cons:**
• Higher cost • Less knowledgeable about culture fit • Lack of employer branding	• Can attract unsuitable candidates • Lots of competition • Time-consuming	• Narrow reach • Possible lack of a diverse talent pool • Managing dissatisfaction when referrals aren't hired
Verdict: Ultimately, the success of a recruiter hinges on how good they are at their job. While some recruiters will focus on churning out a high volume of candidates, the best recruiters will hand-pick the best of the bunch.	**Verdict:** Hiring platforms are an inexpensive way to get your job ad out to a wide assortment of applicants. They're simple to use and allow you to personalize your job ads with your own unique personality and branding. However, this can result in a large volume of applications, which can be time-consuming to sort through. To this end, industry or community job boards are a more targeted, less expensive alternative. These boards won't have as much reach as the larger hiring platforms but they can be a great way to get your job out in front of the right people, for a low cost.	**Verdict:** Employee referrals are a great way to leverage your existing talent and find a good cultural fit at an extremely low cost (usually a small referral bonus). However, if you rely solely on referrals from staff, you'll be limiting your reach and this might result in a lack of diversity in terms of talent.

What to consider when reviewing applications

Stay true to the job ad and criteria

When assessing potential applicants and narrowing down suitable candidates for interview, it's best to stick as close to the job ad as possible. You've spent time making it as simple and specific as possible, so don't deviate away from it when picking your prospective interviewees.

Rolling interviews vs. closed interviews

Are you going to conduct rolling interviews until you find the right candidate or close off applications once you've got a suitable pool of interviewees to draw from?

There is no right or wrong interview process, explains William Tincup, but it is important to be upfront with candidates. "When it comes to rolling versus closed or rolling versus a deadline, I'm always more in favour of just being honest about what you're trying to achieve. The employer has a responsibility to set and manage expectations. "

"If you have a strict deadline to hire, say so, or you're going to put them into a talent pool. Again, that's not a bad thing. Those aren't bad words. But they're bad words when we use the job openings as a mechanism to do that without the candidate's expectations being managed, correctly" says William Tincup.

A short interview window can be good if you're against a tight schedule, but they often don't allow you to capture a diverse pool of potential candidates. With rolling interviews, you can keep your options open and continue interviewing new candidates until you find one that ticks all the boxes.

Follow up on all responses

A great way to make the hiring experience that much more memorable for candidates is by following up with them every step of the way. To keep candidates engaged, be sure to:

- Send a follow-up once the application has been received
- Send rejection emails and interview invites promptly
- Message candidates from a human email address

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Structure the right interview and assessment sequence

So you've narrowed down your applications to a select, lucky few. Now it's time to interview them and see what they're made of. **Here's how you can undertake a successful interview process:**

Think about how many interviews you need

Today, it's common for businesses to conduct anywhere from 1 to 4 interviews as part of the hiring process. Depending on the role you're hiring for, it can be useful to use subsequent interviews to bring in different staff members, or further assess their skills.

Each interview you take should have its own specific purpose. For example, the first interview is usually used to screen applicants and determine if they're qualified for the job. Further down the line, you might have a team or manager interview to further probe the candidate on specifics and see if they'd be a cultural fit with your current employees.

It's also worth considering a skills-based interview to get a handle on what your interviewee can do. This could involve setting them a task and getting them to discuss it or giving them a chance to give a presentation on your chosen topic.

Ultimately, the number of interviews you do will mostly be determined by the role you're hiring for. More technical roles may likely require an in-depth skills assessment but fewer interviews. On the other hand, if you're hiring for a senior director, finding the right match often involves a lot more interviews, presentations, and informal visits and chats.

Remote vs. in-person interviews

Video and phone interviews are popular ways to screen potential employees and assess whether they'll be a fit for your business.

But as William Tincup explains, flexibility is the secret to an effective hiring process. "It's a two-way street. We're trying to find a match where both of us thrive and both of us are successful. On the employment side, you have to come to a mutual understanding and do your interview wherever both sides feel most comfortable."

So while many hiring decisions can be made remotely, depending on your company culture, budget, location, or the role you're hiring for, in-person interviews are still valuable if they can be conducted safely.

Decide who to include in the interview process

If you've got a small team, the right person to conduct an interview might just be a department head. Ideally, you'll want someone with similar skills to the person you're hiring and with knowledge of the role, so they can probe effectively and ask the right questions.

If you're planning a multi-staged interview process, you'll have to decide who to include at each stage. Panel interviews can be effective, but they can be overwhelming for candidates if there are more than two interviewers at once. These interviews may also require more of your staff to give up time in their day to attend.

However, if you're hiring for a senior role, they can be a good way to give all relevant parties the chance to ask questions from the get-go. Regardless of who you pick to take your interviews, make sure they're fully briefed beforehand and know exactly what skills, knowledge, and experience to look out for.
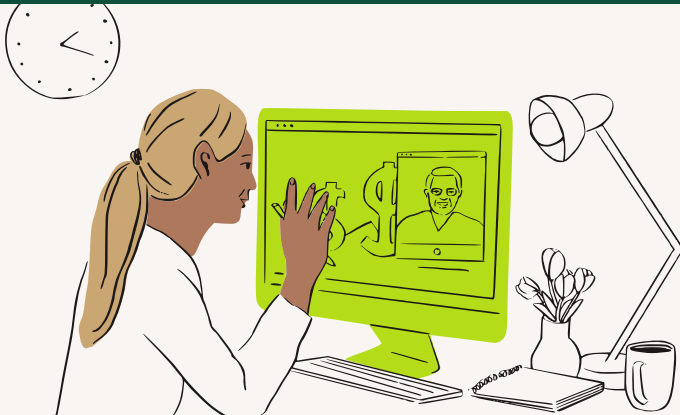
Assess your candidates' skills

As part of a hiring sequence, it's common for businesses to assess a candidate's skills with a task, assignment, or exercise as part of the interview process. It's a great way to let your potential hire put their skills to the test—so here's some ideas on what you can do.

Presentations

A presentation can be a great final step in helping you make a decision if you're stuck between 2-3 finalists. They give each applicant a chance to take the floor, present on a chosen topic, talk through a task, discuss their interests, and everything in between.

Exercises or sample assignments

Sample assignments can give you a solid idea of what your potential hire can do. It's a chance for your interviewee to show off their skills and demonstrate the value they can bring to your business. Ideally, any exercise or assignment will come after an initial interview, somewhere in the middle of the interview process, when both parties are invested. Depending on the job role, a written assignment, coding test, or skills questionnaire can all be useful ways to see what a candidate can do—and will quickly give you an idea of whether their skills are fit for the role they've applied for. Your sample exercise should be something that demonstrates skill but is abstracted enough from actual work output that it isn't something you as an employer would use in place of paid work.

Speculative work

Compared to a sample assignment, spec work is a lot closer to the type of work a prospective employee will actually complete when they're employed. While you might think this is a ticket for a free lunch, be wary. Great candidates may produce work with enough polish that it can be tempting to use or publish it. But equally, spec work is incredibly time-consuming for candidates, so if you're asking for spec work, it's often best practice to pay them. You don't want a prospective hire to find their ideas in the wild later on if you've not given them fair compensation for their time.

Putting it all together

You may not be able to perfectly predict how good of a fit a new hire will be, but having a solid hiring process in place can help you more effectively vet potential candidates. While hiring for specific positions and skills may require specific steps, here are some generic hiring sequences for some general roles:

Entry-level finance admin hiring sequence

1. Hiring Manager sends a screening questionnaire to assess suitable candidates.
2. Hiring Manager conducts 15–30 minute phone calls with pool of suitable candidates to find the best few.
3. Finance Lead and team/stakeholders conduct a 30–60 minute in-person or video interview to ask questions about candidate's skillset and provide more information about the role.
4. Finance Lead selects the best candidate and Hiring Manager calls or emails the candidate to extend a job offer.

Managing director hiring sequence

1. Hiring manager chats with pool of candidates via 30-minute calls or over video to get an initial feel.
2. CEO and executive team conduct 60-minute in-person interviews with 2-3 ideal candidates to discuss the company's goals and the candidates' experience.
3. Each candidate creates and delivers a presentation to the CEO and executive team about their expertise, ideas, and direction for the company.
4. CEO and executive team meet to select a candidate.
5. CEO calls the candidate to officially offer the job.

Senior software developer hiring sequence

1. Hiring Manager chats with a pool of candidates via phone or video to learn more about their experience and skills.
2. Hiring Manager sends over a 2–4 hour long coding test to gauge developer's skills.
3. Head of Development conducts a 60-minute video interview with candidates and 1–2 team members to discuss the position further and gauge whether or not the candidate will be a good fit.
4. Hiring Manager presents offer to top candidate over email or phone.

Freelance designer hiring sequence

1. Marketing Manager reviews the designer's portfolio to get a taste for the candidate's skills and style.
2. Marketing Manager conducts a 30–60 minute video or in-person interview to learn more about the designer's experience, give an overview of the project(s), and discuss terms like rates and timelines.
3. Leading candidate completes a spec assignment that assesses the way they approach projects.
4. Marketing Manager emails the designer to offer the project and offers a contract with agreed-upon terms.

Don't overload yourself

While it might seem like a good idea to book back-to-back interviews, it's a proven way to induce burnout. Take the time to properly schedule so you and your candidates don't feel rushed or hard-pressed for time. Equally, you don't want to overload other interviewers, so think hard about how many candidates you send through to subsequent stages.

Prepare your job offer

Once you've interviewed your potential hires and arrived at a decision, it's time to prepare your job offer. This is an incredibly important part of your hiring sequence, as any bottlenecks can slow down the time to hire. Additionally, a process that's too long or convoluted, can turn people away from your business.

"When it comes to candidate ghosting, two of the top three reasons that candidates tell us they apply for a job and then disappear come down to speed. One reason is the application process took too long and the other is because the candidate took another job. In both cases, someone else beat you to the punch," says Ben Eubanks.

Good candidates are in demand, so if you're enthusiastic about a prospective employee, make them an offer and make it snappy.

What you need to include

A comprehensive job offer will outline exactly what a candidate will receive and what is expected of them once they start their new role. We recommend consulting an employment lawyer on the baseline components and specific terms.

But as a starting guide, you'll need to include:

- The new employee's name
- The job title in full
- The compensation on offer
- The date from when employment will commence
- Terms and conditions (contract/temporary/permanent)
- Benefits and other compensations

Deploy eSignatures to keep things moving

So you've found your dream candidate—great! Now you need to make it as easy as possible to close the deal. eSignatures are an excellent way to speed up the contract signing process. They let your candidates sign from anywhere at the click of a button. This eliminates any unnecessary back-and-forth and time spent waiting for documents to arrive.

Use templates for offer letters and contracts

If you've got lots of open positions, then creating bespoke document templates for different contracts, offer letters, and rejection letters is a no-brainer. Here are a few examples we've put together to get you started.

Example Offer Templates →

Be open to giving and receiving feedback

Feedback—good or bad—helps you improve your hiring sequence. It's always a good idea to collect feedback from candidates, even if you don't end up eventually hiring them.

Give feedback to rejected candidates

Candidates will appreciate any feedback about their application, resume, interview, and everything in between. It shows that you care, and giving them actionable things to improve on for the future lets them walk away with a positive perception of your company.

Ask for feedback with a follow-up survey

It's always a good idea to collect feedback from candidates, regardless of whether you end up hiring them or not. It can help you tweak and improve your processes in the future, which is always useful, especially if you're operating in a small business. Sending out a survey is a quick, easy way to ask key questions.

Put their words into action

Feedback is next to useless if you don't actually act on it. So, it's important to take all thoughts into consideration, so you can use them to refine your processes and make tweaks and improvements in the future.

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Now you've got everything you need to create a great hiring sequence for both you and your candidates. But the work doesn't stop there. Every new hire you make gives you the opportunity to refine and improve your process.

Dropbox Sign makes it easy to get agreements signed online with legally binding signatures and robust security features, so that small businesses can spend less time on admin tasks and more time on growing their business.

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