

6 Steps for Hiring the Best Every Time

by [Lou Adler](#)

Over the past 30-plus years, I've been involved in thousands of searches, worked with hundreds of hiring managers, trained 3,000 to 4,000 recruiters, and worked closely with dozens of major companies. Following are some of the common threads among the best techniques, processes, and tools that I have seen and used.

Collectively they add up to a business process for hiring top people. While [Performance-based Hiring](#) provides a simplified high-level summary of these, it's in the details and execution that will ultimately determine your personal success.

Following are the six core aspects of hiring top talent. A couple of key themes stand out. First, offer and recruit the best people based on career growth if you want to attract the best on a consistent basis. Second, allow people to just look and explore, rather than require them to apply for a job. This prevents them from opting out before you even see them.

If you can address these two issues, you are well on your way to hiring top people every time.

Six Steps for Hiring the Best People Every Time

1. **Offer WOW! jobs.** Traditional job descriptions listing skills, qualifications, and experience are not marketing tools or predictors of job success. These lists must be diminished in importance. In their place, job descriptions must emphasize what the person will do, learn, and become. As part of this, clearly describe the impact the person can make. From a marketing standpoint, don't use internal, non-descriptive titles. "Not-for Profit CEO – Back to the Future" was a title we used to find the head of a major charity. In the ad, we described the five-year impact the person would have on the inner city. For bank tellers to fill a mid-day shift we added the tagline "Are You a Desperate Housewife?"
2. **Make it about careers, not compensation.** The ad copy must clearly emphasize the challenges in the job, the impact the person can make on the company, and some of the growth opportunities. For example, "Help us launch a new Blue Tooth line" is far more compelling than "Must have five years of product marketing experience." When recruiters first contact candidates – whether they're active or passive – the emphasis must clearly be on getting the candidate to evaluate your opportunities as career moves, not just as another job for more money or one closer to home. This will help ease the negotiating process and minimize the threat of counter-offers and competitive offers.
3. **Implement an early-bird sourcing strategy.** It's a Web 2.0 world and this means a complete understanding of search engine marketing techniques. Part of this is writing compelling jobs ads that are easily found. From a more advanced perspective, recognize that top performers don't enter the job-hunting market ready to hunt and peck for a job that matches their skills and experience. Instead, they tip-toe into the market, first contacting former associates and doing some top-down industry and company research. If

this is fruitless, they then expand their search efforts through aggressive networking and Googling for jobs. Sourcing programs need to target these early entrants by positioning ads in the right places and proactively expanding employee referral programs to ensure that the best people contact your employees first.

4. **Provide candidates multiple opportunities to “just look” rather than buy.** Most company hiring processes and career websites are designed based on the premise that candidates are ready to apply for a specific job. This is a flawed premise. The best people, especially the early entrants, are just looking and comparing options. To accommodate these people, recruiters must not push the process too fast, managers must be willing to talk or meet with candidates on an exploratory basis, and career websites need to allow candidates to chat with a recruiter in real time and look at groups of jobs, rather than specific requisitions.
5. **Make the interview your secret weapon.** Here’s something that will shock you - the primary purpose of the interview is to recruit the candidate, not assess competency! However, done properly you’ll more accurately assess candidate competency and motivation than ever before, but this is a secondary effect. Part of this means using the interview to [look for voids and gaps in the candidate’s background](#), with the expectation that your job will fulfill them. For example, if the candidate hasn’t managed as large a team, or handled a comparable project, or had the exposure your job provides, these voids become learning opportunities and more important than compensation as reasons to accept your position. Obviously, if the gaps are too big, the candidate is unqualified for the job, and if the gaps aren’t sufficient, the job isn’t a worthy move.
6. **Use a multi-factor decision tool to negotiate the offer, fight off the competition and prevent counter-offers.** Recruiting is not something done at the end of the interview, it starts with first contact. Part of this is suggesting to the candidate on first contact that she should evaluate your opportunity as a career move. During the interview this is reinforced by presenting voids in the candidate’s background as potential learning experiences. While it’s important for companies to judge candidates across multiple factors, it’s equally important for candidates to [evaluate different job opportunities across multiple factors](#) as well. Some of these include learning, growth opportunities, compensation, quality of the hiring manager and the team, job match, visibility, cultural fit and work/life balance. This can be formalized by sending the candidate a [multi-factor decision form](#) comparing your job with all others he’s considering, including his current position. As long as your job represents a positive long term career move, your job will often win out without compensation being the dominant criteria.

Of course, there are more steps to the process than what’s mentioned here. Regardless, the key to making the end-to-end process work is to step back and understand the unique needs of top performers. This high-level view also allows the integration between the steps to be designed into the process at the beginning rather than as after-thoughts.

While converting the hiring process into a scalable business process is no easy task, it’s not nearly as hard as implementing any major companywide business initiative. If hiring the best is a company’s number-one strategic objective, then nothing is more important.