

No matter how strong your idea is, the fate of your startup ultimately rests on your team being able to work well to execute it. But how can you be certain that you've assembled the right team to drive success? Here are five steps to use when building your startup's dream team:

### Identify positions

The most important members of your team are the founders. Before hiring anyone else, you and your co-founder should settle on how decisions will be made at the startup. For example, are you the technical expert and the other person a wiz with marketing? If so, that should inform the structure of your startup.

I recommend putting everything in writing and having both co-founders sign the document. Then there will be no misconceptions about what's required of whom. I made this mistake when I formed Pixloo. The company had so much potential but ultimately didn't pan out because arguments arose when the organization really started to make money. Put agreements in place to avoid this scenario.

Once arriving at an agreement, identify the positions needed to complete the team (such as sales and marketing, programming and account management posts or project leaders). Be sure to prioritize (figure out which position to fill first) plus balance out the hiring. It doesn't make sense to hire five project managers and not a single programmer. Be sure to have enough money or customers to pay for staffers before you start hiring them

### Weigh hiring a staffer or tapping an advisor or consultant

When starting a company, you may not need hire full-time employees. You might attend an industry event or scour leading industry blog to locate talented advisors (a market or domain expert, say, or a connector type, industry celebrity, personal coach or a technical expert). Or might partner with a design firm, for example. Or it's possible to find skilled contractors to tackle other roles.

Instead of hiring full-time employees, you might opt for part-timers who are excellent at what they do. That might end up being safer than taking a chance on a full-time employee who may not deliver. I have done this for every company I have started. This makes it 10 times easier to figure out who should be with the firm over the long term and who doesn't make the cut.

### Pick candidates

The following considerations may inform your filling of positions: The job seeker has experience in an area that other team members do not. The candidate can be vouched for. The job seeker can start at a limited salary or will work partly for a stake in the startup. The person is an ecstatic fans of your product.

If you can find people who meet all the above criteria, then you have a great chance of putting together a winning team.

## Interview

Once you've found qualified candidates, it's time for the interviews. The Wall Street Journal has a nifty little guide that can be helpful for managers who have never conducted an interview. Advance preparation is crucial. The Journal advises that your questions should dig out the facts about the candidate's background and assess creative thinking, problem solving and behavior attributes. Create an agenda for the interview and look for nonverbal clues during the meeting, the Journal says.

Following the interview, do more checking up on the candidate. For certain types of positions, testing may be appropriate. Start off giving the candidate a smaller project and then build up to larger tasks. See how the candidate handles pressure, communicates with other team members and if he or she can actually get the job done.

One interview method I now use for all my hiring is I pick two to three people that I favor and let the rest of my team as a group interview them. Perhaps I've determined that one person would be a good fit but the members of the team decide what would work the best for them. I prefer this method as it short-circuits no more playing the blame game. No hire is made if everyone in the company hates that person. This process has weeded out a lot of potential bad hires.

## Bring the new hire on board with the right care

Let's say a candidate has passed all tests with flying colors and has now joined the team. Does that mean the hiring process has now been completed? Not so fast. You may wish to do some post-hire assessment. Plus develop methods for training, promotion and career development. All of these will serve as incentives for your team members to excel.