

The Definitive Guide to Building an Expert Mobile App Development Team



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1.

Introduction



1. Introduction

“Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.”

→ **Henry Ford**

You’ve got an idea for a great mobile app. One that will change the world and make everyone’s lives better.

Awesome. But how do you turn your idea into reality?

One of the most common ways is to build your own expert mobile app development team, professionals from different fields to shepherd your app through every stage of development and fulfill your vision.

As you start bringing everyone together, always remember: you’re forming a team, not a collection of individuals. Team members support each other and work toward a goal; they are individual parts of a larger entity.

Software development, and particularly mobile app development often falls into the “guru” trap, where one personality in one field dominates the development process and dictates elements not under their direct control.

When forming your team, **DO NOT** fall prey to this notion. Your team is a team. It’s not one big bright shining star everyone else rotates around.

Mobile app development team member vetting and hiring process is so important, yet so underrated. It's not talked about nearly as much as it should be.

That's why we've put this ebook together, so that people just like you who aren't experts at building development teams have a place to start, understand the challenges you will face, and know how to overcome them when they occur.

If you take nothing away from this guide, just remember one thing above all else:

Take your time to find the right members for your team. Your investment in quality will pay off immense dividends during your app development process.

That said, first thing you need to do is determine the qualities your team needs to bring your idea to life. So let's get started!

2.

Critical Team Qualities



2. Critical Team Qualities

Not every team is created equal, but that's okay, because they don't need to be. Not all apps require the same set of skills or experience to build.

There are, however, certain universal critical qualities that all teams should have, regardless of size or scope of the app. They are:

- Disciplined Management and Development Practices
- Streamlined Communication
- Excellent Reputation
- “Big Picture” Thinkers
- Comprehensive Support Services
- Clearly Defined Goals
- Clearly Defined Roles

2.1. Disciplined Management and Development Practices

Organization is the key to success in life and in mobile app development. However, the secret to organization is having the discipline to always follow the guidelines and procedures.

When deadlines loom, and document start piling up, it can be very tempting to abandon process and simply dive into the work that needs to be done. A team that does this will waste your time and money and ultimately not deliver on their promises.

Discipline, adherence to procedure, and dedication to the final goal are the most primary quality your team needs.

2.2. Streamlined Communication

Communication is one of the most critical parts of any mobile app development team. Most teams work on multiple elements simultaneously, and without constant oversight and coordination a project can easily derail into unexpected directions.

A transparent development team will constantly communicate with you to ensure they are hitting all the development milestones outlined in your app roadmap, and will provide you status updates that detail their progress and potential issues.

2.3. Excellent Reputation

Perhaps the most basic qualification is for the people who make up your team have a good professional reputation. Positive testimonials are a great start, but recommendations from previous clients are truly the most effective way of gauging the quality of a potential team.

Vet your team members carefully, and don't take anything at face value. Ask questions, ask for samples. This is your time and your money you're spending (or the money of your company and investors), so you don't want to waste it on shoddy candidates.

2.4. "Big Picture" Thinkers

If you're extremely lucky, the members of your team will all share in your same vision of what your app could be, rather than just focusing on their specific parts. That way they can envision how each other role fits into the big picture, and can truly articulate the BENEFITS of your app, rather than just the results.

2.5. Comprehensive Support Services

Very few people consider what happens to their app after they finish developing it. They mostly think their app is just launched, published, and downloaded by all their devoted users.

And that's true, for the most part. But what most people, even parts of an app building team, fail to understand the first time out is that a mobile app is not static and unchanging, never to be touched again when it escapes into the wild.

That's okay, especially if this is the first time building an app. It's just one of those things you never consider when you focus all your time and your energy just building your app.

However, a truly great development team knows a mobile app life-cycle involves review and testing and refining, which in turn requires constant and regular maintenance and support. A team that can provide this “soup-to-nuts” approach is absolutely critical in a competitive world.

2.6. Clearly Defined Goals

Goals are what separate the professional from the amateur. Regardless of the role or position of the team member, they have to know what they are doing, how to get there, and know when to stop. They need to take initiative, but they also need to follow orders and stick to the plan.

Ultimately, your team needs a goal to work towards, and that goal should be the SUCCESS of your app, not just the COMPLETION of your app.

That said, it's **your job** to articulate that goal, motivate your team, and ensure they reach the finish line and beyond.

2.7. Clearly Defined Roles

That's why the most important thing you need to do is identify what skill sets you'll need. Otherwise, you'll end up wasting money on someone who doesn't bring the proper skills.

Everyone needs to know their place. That's why the next thing you need to do is define the actual jobs you need to actually build your app.

3.

Define Jobs and Roles



3. Define Jobs and Roles

Once you know the qualities that you want in your team, only then you can truly fill the roles you need to build your team.

Defining jobs and roles increases productivity and prevents confusion over duties and responsibilities. For example, let's say you hire three people all with similar experience, and each knows how to write code, craft designs, and manage projects.

If you don't tell them who is to do what and simply telling them to "get to work" without a clear set of roles and guidelines, you'll create a huge mess.

You need to guide and direct them, and without clear boundaries and divisions of labor you will confuse and frustrate them, and could lead to a power struggle and tension amongst your team.

Or even worse, two of those people may end up performing the same task or doing the same job, which is both expensive and wasteful. That's why everyone needs a clearly defined job and role.

Even you.

ESPECIALLY you.

3.1. Chief Executive Officer

The first job you need to define is **YOURS**.

You are the chief executive officer (CEO) of your app. You are the one ultimately in charge of everything, the one who has the final say on EVERY decision.

Not a role to be taken lightly. You need to be confident and decisive.

But really, are you up to the challenge?

It's unfair, but you don't have much time to figure it out, because every second you delay you're wasting time and losing money.

Since it's your app, you don't really have much choice, so take a deep breath and dive right in!

But while you're thinking over all your managerial and administrative experience, don't forget to evaluate your technical skills too.

If you are a coder, developer, designer, or engineer, you can save an enormous amount of money early on by taking these roles yourself instead of paying someone to do it for you.

However, even if you discover that your talents fall in more towards the administrative or operational sides of your

business, you can really contribute during the hiring of specialized technical roles because you share the skills that your candidates possess.

The more you can do, the less you need to hire. That said, don't bite off more than you can chew. Everyone on your team needs to have clearly defined roles, including you.

If you don't have much technical experience, that's fine too, but you're definitely going to need lots of help. There's nothing wrong with being the guy with the idea and the checkbook.

Bringing in people to help with this process shouldn't scare you. In fact, studies show that startup founders with larger teams typically have higher annual salaries.

Take the time to find the right people with the skills that you don't have. And then once you hire them, let them do their jobs, and don't interfere.

That will free up your time so you can focus on other aspects of your business such as putting together a marketing plan, securing funds, and hiring a team.

Before you can start hiring a team, who is that team going to be?

And even before you ask yourself that, you need to make one of the most critical decisions: are you going to use employees or contractors?

3.1.1. Employees or Contractors?

Whether you use employees or contractors really depends on your project and how you're planning to scale your company and app.



Consider carefully, because there are pros and cons to each:

- If your app idea is simple, a few independent contractors may be sufficient.
- If your app requires lots of maintenance and updates after launch, you might consider hiring actual employees.
- Contractors work on multiple projects, so you won't have their focused attention.
- Employees focus only on what you tell them to and work constantly to improve your app.
- Employees are usually more expensive, but are more invested in how their individual contributions benefit the long term success of the project.
- Contractors cost less about long term goals because they aren't as directly invested in your project, and focus only on the success of their task.

3.1.2. Partners for Profit?

Contractors or regular employees aren't your only options, however. Strategic partners are a type of equity investor that takes shares of company ownership instead of salary until a specified condition is met, such as the first profitable quarter.

Using an equity partner reduces your share, but if you have cash flow or revenue challenges strategic partners might be the immediate solution to several problems.

Common strategic partners often bring specific high-level skill sets to an app development team. Technical, creative, or managerial professionals may be willing to trade their labor for a piece of the company, and tend to stay motivated to contribute their best effort because they are literally invested in the success of the company.

However, regardless of whether someone is a regular, contract, or strategic worker there are certain roles that every mobile app development team needs:

3.2. Project Manager

The Project Manager is the single individual that is responsible for ensuring that all elements of the project are working towards the scheduled goals.

3.3. Designers

The graphic, user experience (UX) and user interface (UI) designers are the visually creative parts of the team, the ones who determine and fulfill the look and feel of the app.

3.4. Developers

The developers are the programmers, engineers, and coders that actually build the app itself.

3.5. Quality Assurance

Quality Assurance professionals are the unsung heroes of mobile app development, because they ensure that your final product is bug-free and ready for publication, and are the last line of defense that separates a bad app from your potential customers.

3.6. But don't forget...

Although technically not part of the development team, the communications professionals like marketing, public relations, and writers involved with your app are critical components. Also, it can't hurt to have dedicated legal representation to protect your products and enforce your rights.

4.

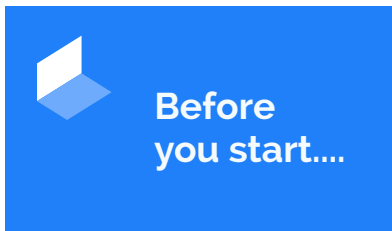
Find Your Team



4. Find Your Team

You've determined who you need to build your app, and how you're going to qualify them, you've got everything you need.

Everything you need except your team, that is. Where do you start looking?



As with everything that deals with hiring people, take your time. A little bit of time invested on the front end can save you on the back end.

You may not be able to hire everyone right away, but don't worry.

Finding the right people takes time, so don't be alarmed if you don't have every position filled the first day you start building your app.

But, if you clearly define the jobs and roles your app requires before you start hiring, it's much easier for you to know what you still need when you don't have it.

So how do you find your team?

4.1. Advertise on Your Website

The most basic way to find your team is to advertise the positions on your website, if you have one. This strategy involves a certain level of logistical and administrative support, and established companies can support this level of engagement much easier than a single person.

If you don't have a system to organize and coordinate hiring your team, you probably aren't ready to have a team. Gotta crawl before you walk.

4.2. Always Keep Your Eyes Open for Talent

Even though you might not be actively hiring, it's wise to set aside 30 to 60 minutes each week to collect resumes and take interviews.

Why?

Because life happens. Team members quit. They move away, have children, and any number of good or bad situations pop up during a project.

To put this in perspective, it takes about 23 days to hire someone in the United States. If you're up against a deadline, and your main programmer drops out, your app is going to crash and burn if you don't have a few people to call if you need help.

Keep your eyes (and options) open, just in case.

4.3. To Recruit or Not Recruit, that is the Question...

Many CEOs of app development teams would rather pay someone to screen applications and recruit candidates because they think it expedites the hiring process.

A great idea in theory, but sadly is not always true in practice. Here's why.

Nearly 100% of recruiters use LinkedIn as a reference, and of those 64% ONLY use LinkedIn. What's this mean?

It means all they are doing is basically screening profiles, resumes, and applications for keywords. So if a candidate has a matching keyword, they'll forward you the information.

Just because someone has a keyword on their LinkedIn profile or resume doesn't necessarily mean that they're qualified for the positions you're looking for.

Because of that, after the recruiter forwards you the resume you'll still have to review them to narrow them down further. So, you're basically paying someone to do work that you'll eventually have to do yourself.

As if that's not enough, recruiters generally charge 15% to 25% of the new hire's annual first year salary. Can you afford to pay someone to do a job that you could basically do yourself?

Do yourself a favor: save your money, save your time, and hire your own candidates.

4.4. Network with Friends and Colleagues

Another great way to find talent is reaching out to friends and colleagues of current employees. Chances are the people you know and work with also know people in the same field, and they might have the skills your team needs.

However, as with everything personnel-related, there are pros and cons to this method.

On one hand, these prospective candidates already have established a rapport with team member(s), which can foster a happy and productive working environment.

But on the other hand, personalities may clash between them and other members of your team, and conflicts may arise if they are used to doing things differently than the way you operate.

So, take those factors into consideration as you go through the networking process.

Your team is going to be working together for a long time, under great stress and constant pressure. They don't all need to be best friends, but they do need to get along.

One way to solve this problem is to [work with a team of professionals](#) who already know each other, trust each other, and have the confidence to see your app through all the way from concept to completion to publication and maintenance.

4.5. Outsourcing: You Get What You Pay For...

You might be tempted to outsource your team roles to developers around the world. Not to say that you can't find quality workers in other countries, time, language, and cultural differences can make maintaining schedules and timelines challenging.

Finding foreign people who will work on your schedule, deliver quality work, and are reliable are almost as expensive as hiring local talent. If you cheap out and try to cut a corner with less expensive and qualified workers, you will absolutely get what you pay for. Think it over.

4.6. Go to Where the Talent Is

A very simple but often overlooked way to find the team members you need is to go where they hang out and network with them. There are probably* multiple local industry groups you can join, and working your way into these spots can help you establish the credibility you need to really build a stellar team.

*However... this is easier said than done. If you don't live in an area with a heavy tech presence remote workers might be your only choice. But, if you have a university or college in

your town, you might try asking around the computer science or art departments to find students (or even instructors!) who might be able to contribute to your project.

4.7. The Interview

Once you've found someone you think would make a great member of your team, you need to be sure they possess the required skills, talent, and experience to develop your mobile app.

When it comes to the actual hiring process, here are some of the industry best practices that ensure you can get a quality candidate

- Schedule multiple interviews on the same day so it's easier to compare candidates. Then you'll be able to determine who you liked the most, especially if they're applying for the same position.
- Start with basic questions, then get more complicated. Throw a couple of curve balls in there as well. Don't intentionally deceive the applicant, but let them know that you'll be mixing things up. Doing this will give you a better understanding of how the candidate thinks and attacks problems. You'll be able to see if their problem solving skills are adequate.
- For a developer, ask them to write some simple code to make sure they're familiar with the basics. Within the first five or ten minutes, you'll know if the candidate is comfortable or not.

DON'T FORGET: It's OK to be flexible. Always remember that just because a candidate isn't quite the right fit for the position they interview for doesn't mean that they can't apply their skills and experience somewhere else.

For example, a developer who isn't great at coding on your preferred platform but excels at organizing engineers might be better as a project manager.

The point is, when you're assembling a team, you need to keep your mind and your eyes open, and tell your interviewees to do the same.

There are lots of people out there looking for jobs on your mobile app development, but how do you determine if they are the experts you really need?

Just ask them!

There are two sets of questions to use: **General Questions** that you can ask anyone, and **Technical Questions** you need to ask professionals like developers or QA engineers.

4.7.1. General Questions

These questions apply equally to all members of your team, regardless of their role or technical experience.

Can you Provide Samples?

Every potential member of your team should have previous work that they can show you, except for the ones protected under a Non Disclosure Agreement (NDA).

If they don't have any samples they can show you, that's a big red flag. They're probably not a good fit for the job.

Can you Provide References?

Ask your candidates to provide you information about their current and previous clients to determine the quality of deliverables and ensure they actually developed the apps they claim to.

One of the best ways to get an honest opinion of a candidate's quality is to check out a member candidates' linkedin profile. That way if you by chance have a mutual connection then you can get an honest opinion of what the person is actually like, rather than simply relying on their hand-picked references that may only give good opinions of their work product.

How do you Charge?

This question is less important if you're using regular employees, because you pay them directly for their work and own their product.

However, if you are using freelance contractors to build your app, you need to clearly establish the ownership of any work they create. It might seem obvious that you would own the product that you pay someone to build for you, but this is NOT the case.

Get in writing EXACTLY who owns the work, and how much you are going to pay for it. The best thing to do is define your deliverables for each development milestone, and pay after reaching the predetermined goal.

Do you Subcontract?

Another question to ask if you plan on using outsourced workers or freelance talent is if they are planning on doing the work themselves, or if they are going to subcontract it out to other workers.

Don't hire someone who subcontracts their work. All of the hassles you experience trying to find your own workers is magnified 100 times by having the work once again outsourced.

Which Operating System does your Phone Use?

This might seem to be a silly question, but it can actually provide some of the most insightful information. If you plan on developing an app for iOS, and the candidates for your team only use Android, you might want to take a step back and think about them.

It's not a non-starter if someone doesn't use the platform you want to build upon, but it may indicate that they might not be as experienced with the operating system as you'd like. It could take them longer to get up to speed, they might not be as familiar with the quirks of the system, and so on.

However, as Progressive Web Apps (PWAs) and hybrid apps which operate on multiple systems simultaneously gain popularity, the operating system someone personally uses is becoming less of an important distinction.

But, if they are a developer or engineer, asking what phone operating system they use is a great chance to launch into the next round of technical questions.

4.7.2. Technical Questions

These questions are more technical in nature, and might not be appropriate to ask candidates for your project managers or designers.

Which Platform(s) Are You Comfortable Developing For?

Again, as cross-platform apps become more prevalent, this question might not be as critical as in years past.

However, if you're developing a native app for a specific operating system, this question is **ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL**. Don't hire someone that has no comfort level with your intended platform.

Do you have GitHub?

Many developers use GitHub to version control the code they work on, and over time it becomes a showcase for their best bits of code, and is also shareable between other developers and employers.

One great way to determine the quality of a developer is if:
A) they have a GitHub account, and B) if they are willing to share it.

If they don't or won't, then that might be a sign of inexperience or of shoddy skill sets.

Do You Provide Documentation?

Documentation is one of the most important but often overlooked parts of app development. Unless you have a clear roadmap and description of the processes used and bugs encountered, the app you build will be stuck in arrested development.

Without documentation, no one who comes after the initial build will be able to do anything with it because they will have to take the whole thing apart to figure out how it works and how to make it grow.

Developers and other technical professionals are often notoriously lax when it comes to documenting their work. Plus, after they deliver the app, you might be at a loss to understand how to operate it, so be sure they provide documentation even for how to use the app.

How Long does it take to add Google Analytics to my App?

It's good to keep your candidates on their toes with a trick question or two, and this is a very basic one. If the candidate says one week, one month, or anything longer, they probably aren't as skilled as you'd like because Analytics shouldn't take more than 30-45 minutes to add to an app.

Do you have a Developer Account?

The true test of quality of a potential developer is if they have a developer account in the Google Play Store or Apple's App Store.

Submitting an app for approval can be a long and tedious process, and can often involve revising or redeveloping an app on the fly. It takes skill and patience to successfully get an app published.

If your would-be developer doesn't have a developer account they might not be familiar with the process, and you'd have to factor that into your involvement with them.

WARNING: It might seem obvious, but NEVER use your developer's account to publish your app. EVER. You always need to control the distribution and oversight processes of your app, and using their private account introduces elements of uncertainty that you DO NOT need.

5.

Final Thoughts



5. Final Thoughts

It takes time and experience to build the team that will build your app. Let's review the major points of what you need to do:

- Start off by analyzing yourself to determine the skills you have and recruit for talents you don't have.
- Once you bring people on board, make sure that everyone has a clearly defined role.
- Establish a clear management structure.
- Hold daily meetings to emphasize the importance of communications and project transparency.
- Always review resumes, even if you're not actively hiring. That way you'll be prepared if you need additional or immediate resources.
- Don't go through a recruiter. Screen all of the applicants yourself.
- Outsourcing positions might be a cost-effective short term solution, but hiring employees helps you scale your app and business in the long run.
- Find the places and organizations where potential team members gather, and go there and join them.

Building your own mobile app development team is a complicated process. Even if you do everything right, find the best people, and give them clear direction you're not guaranteed success, especially if you've never done anything like that before or have no technical experience.

One way to hedge your bets is to [consult a team of professionals](#) who have leveraged their team of expert mobile app developers to build more than 10,000 apps for companies like Wiener Schnitzel, Praxair, Ohio State University, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

BuildFire's Mobile App Geniuses will put their experience to work for your app, no matter what your goals are, or even if you don't have a goal yet to help you identify opportunities for improvement and help turn your mobile app idea into reality.