

How to hire engineers, by an engineer

May 6, 2022

It has been a few years since I have been part of the recruitment process. Still, I did reasonably go through the hiring process when looking for a new job so that I will mix a bit from both sides for this article, so you get both some experience from hires and what worked and experience from the other side of the table and what caused my not to consider a company, because spoiler alert: Engineers are contacted a lot!

So first I need to introduce a hard truth as this will be underpinning a lot of my points and is most likely the most important take away from this: Your company is not unique

Unless your tech brand is among the X highest regarded in the world, your company alone isn't a selling point. I have been contacted by so many companies which thought because they were leader in their field or had a "great product" that makes candidates come banging at their door. If I could disclose all those messages it would be really easy to see that except for the order of information all says almost the same thing, and chances are you job listing is the same. Sorry. The take away from this is that if everything is equal any misstep in your hiring process can cost you that candidate, so if you are not amongst the strongest of tech brands you need to be extremely aware or you will NOT fill the position

Okay after that slap in the face we can take a second to look at something...

A lot of people focuses on skills when hiring, and of course the candidate should have the skills for the position, but I will make a case to put less focus on the hard skills and more focus on passion.

Usually screening skills through an interview is hard and techniques like code challenges has their own issues, but more on that later. Screening for passion is easier, usually you can get a good feeling if a candidate is passionate about a specific topic, and passionate people want to learn! So even if the candidate has limited skills, if they have passion they will learn and they will outgrow a candidate with experience but no passion. Filling a team with technically skills can solve an immediate requirement, but companies, teams and products change, your requirements will change along with it. Building a passionate team will adjust and evolve along where a product where a team consisting of skilled people but without passion will stay where they where when you hired them.

Another issue I see in many job postings is requiring a long list of skills. It would be awesome to find someone skilled in everything and who could solve all tasks. In the real world, when ever you add another skill to that list you are limiting the list of candidates that would fit so chances are you are not going to find anyone or the actual skills of any candidate in that very narrow list will be way lower than in a wider pool. A better way is to just add the most important skills, and learn the candidate any less important skills at the job. If you hired passionate people this should be possible (remember to screen for passion about learning new things)

While we are on the expected skill list: A lot of companies has this list of "it would be really nice if you had these skills". Well those could definitely be framed as learning experiences instead. If you have recruited passionate people, seeing that you

will learn new cool skills count as a plus and any candidate who already have the skill will see it and think "awesome, I am already uniquely suited for the job!"

I promised to talk a bit about code challenges: They can be useful to screen a candidates ability to just go in and start to work from day one, and if done correctly can help a manager organise their process to best suit the teams unique skills but... Hiring at the moment is hard! And as stated pretty much any job listing I have seen are identical, so as in a competitive job market where a small outlier on your resumé lands you in the pile never read through, as likely is it in a competitive hiring market that your listing never gets acted upon. Engineers are contacted a lot by recruiters and speaking to all would require a lot of work so if a company has a prolonged process it quickly gets sorted out, especially by the best candidates whom most likely get contacted the most and most likely have a full time job so time is a scarce resource. So be aware that if you use time consuming processes such as the code challenge you might miss out on the best candidates.

Please just disclose the salary range. From being connected to a few hundred recruiters here on LinkedIn I can see that this isn't just me but a general issue. As mentioned before, it takes very little to have your listings ignored and most likely most of your strongest potential candidates already has full time jobs, and would not want to move to a position paying less unless the position where absolutely unique (which again, yours most likely isn't). Therefore if you choose not to disclose the salary range be aware that you miss out on most of the best candidates. A company will get an immediate no from me if not disclosing the salary range.

Lastly, I have spend a lot of words telling your that your company or position isn't unique, and well we both know that is not accurate, your company most likely has something unique to offer! Be that soft values or hard benefits. Be sure to put them in your job listing, to bring out this uniqueness, it is what is going to set you apart from the other listing. There are lot of other companies with the same tech stack, using an agile approach, with a high degree of autonomy, with a great team... But what can you offer that no one else can? Get it front and center... Recruiting is marketing and good copy writing

