A Guide to:
Hiring Best Practices

Patriot Software, Inc.

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So, you’re ready to hire. *(now what?)*

Thank you for downloading this free resource from Patriot Software. With “Hiring Best Practices,” you can learn hiring basics:

- Creating a job ad
- Searching for an employee
- Setting a salary
- Interviewing tips
- Sample interview questions
- Evaluation tools
- Background checks
- Extending an offer

This overview will help you hire employees who can move your business forward!

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Determine your requirements.

Of course you want to hire a hard worker who is punctual, dependable, and ethical. You also probably want an employee who is goal-oriented and a good fit for your company.

But before you place an ad for a new employee, spend some time thinking. Are you trying to *exactly* fill the shoes of the last person who held the job, or do you want someone who can bring a new ingredient to the position?

Do you need someone who isn’t afraid to make cold calls, who will do whatever it takes to get the job done, or who can lead others? Only you can decide what qualities will make the new hire a valuable part of your team.

*What are non-negotiable items?* Decide the absolute must-haves: Specific experience or skills, a bachelor’s degree or advanced degree, practical experience. Once you figure it out, write it down. Then, determine the qualities that would be nice to have in your new employee, and write those down too.

*Determine a salary range.* Consider your company budget, as well as what you paid the last employee. If this is a new position, research salaries at comparable companies, or visit the Bureau of Labor Statistics website.

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Begin your search.

Create the job description. Where do you see your company headed and how will this employee play a role in getting there? Be specific in the job requirements and duties.

Compose your job ad. Once you’ve figured out what you want, write a clean, concise job ad that will attract the most qualified field of candidates. Include the following essentials:

- Job title: Social Media Manager
- Employer name: XYZ Company
- Location of job: Canton, Ohio
- Concise description of business. "Leading manufacturer of widgets."
- Description of role in company. "The Social Media Manager will play a pivotal role in expanding current marketing campaigns and exploring social media opportunities for XYZ Company."
- Profile of desired candidate. "Candidate will be outgoing and confident with all avenues of social media and have a desire to explore new communication opportunities for XYZ Company."
- Required qualifications and experience. Include the top 4-5 skills you feel are essential. "Bachelor’s degree in marketing or related field required. At least three years of marketing experience. Must have working knowledge of Google Analytics and all social media channels."
- Salary information (optional)
- Instructions on how to apply. "Email resume as attachment to info@xyzco.com."
- Contact information. Include your name or the name of the hiring manager, your website address, your email, and phone.

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Remember: this is your opportunity to “sell” the position to the best candidate! Mention perks such as paid vacations, health insurance, 401(k), flexible working hours, or travel opportunities.

Advertise the job the right way. Placing an ad in just your local newspaper may not give you the best field of candidates, and continued newspaper advertising may be costly. Luckily, the Internet gives you more opportunities for advertising your job openings.

With a job board or an Internet job posting service, you can target a certain location or niche for job-seekers: marketing professionals, engineers, customer service representatives, etc. Conducting your search using this targeted method will:

- Appeal directly to the qualified candidates you want to reach.
- Narrow your focus to candidates with the technical know-how to apply online.
- Help eliminate candidates who apply for everything under the sun (whether they’re qualified or not.)
- Allow you to write one ad and distribute to multiple channels.

Stay organized. Even if job candidates are applying online, it can be tricky to remember who is who, and keep track of all the incoming resumes and attachments. With an applicant tracking system, you can attach resumes or notes to the candidate record, keep track of your correspondence and scheduled interviews, and highlight your best candidates.

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Get Ready to Interview.

Plan the interview format. Do you plan to be the only interviewer, or will you call on other associates to interview candidates as well? Will there be one single interview or a series of meetings?

Consider the image your company conveys. The job candidates will be on their best behavior when they meet you face to face. In a sense, they will also be interviewing you -- to see if they actually want to work for you! Choose a welcoming interview space, with a comfortable room temperature and seating. Make sure the staff knows you’re conducting interviews so you aren’t interrupted. Silence your cell phone. Be ready to meet the candidate upon arrival, and offer coffee or water to put them at ease.

Don’t wing it. Write down your questions ahead of time so you don’t forget them. If you get sidelined by chit-chat in the interview, your list will help you maintain composure and get back on track. Save room to write down the candidate’s answers, which will make it easier to compare to other candidates.

Keep track of the time. Keep a clock or a watch handy, and make sure you start with major areas such as education and experience so that you don’t run out of time.

Watch out for questions that can backfire. Don’t ask discriminatory questions such as “What nationality are you?” Even seemingly innocent questions like “Where do you live?” or “How many kids do you have?” or “When did you graduate?” can land you in hot water.
Ask open-ended questions. A question starting with “Tell me about a time when...” will help you discover the candidate’s motivation for action, and require them to come up with answers that go beyond a simple yes or no. Here are some more starter questions:

- Tell me what you know about this company.
- Why are you applying for this position?
- Why do you want to leave your current job?
- If I called your boss, what would he say about you?
- Tell me about your biggest achievement in your career.
- Where do you see yourself in five years?
- What would you do in your first 30 days on the job?
- Describe a time when you were faced with a challenge at work.
- In your current position, what tasks are most satisfying to you?
- What are your biggest strengths?
- Where do you need to improve?
- What do you do when you make a mistake?
- Why should I hire you?

For more great tips, read the article "Preparing for a Candidate Interview."
Research the Candidate.

You’ve found a candidate who really seems right for the job. But before you extend an offer, remember: A substantial percentage of resumes contain a lie. Don’t skip the all-important steps of thoroughly checking out the job candidate, including their background, skills, and work history.

Measure their skills. Does the candidate claim to type 60 words per minute? Do you require basic math calculations as part of the job, or fantastic phone skills? Give them a test or a project to complete, and measure the results.

Check their references. When you make the calls to references, don’t just listen to their words, but how they’re saying them. Their tone may convey more than they’re willing to say. Ask for more references from the candidate if you need more information on their experience or work habits.

Conduct a background check and drug testing. Performing a pre-hire background check and a substance screen can help you protect your employees and your business. (If you need help setting up a drug-free workplace, consult the Dept. of Labor’s Drug-Free Workplace Advisor. Be sure you follow the steps in the Fair Credit Reporting Act before conducting a background check, including asking the candidate to sign a release form. For more information, see the article Following the Fair Credit Reporting Act.)

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Wrap up the hiring process.

Keep communication lines open. While you’re still interviewing, check in with candidates to tell them they’re still under consideration. A simple email or phone call notifying candidates of their status is also a nice courtesy.

Make your offer quickly. Remember that a job-seeker may be in demand and may have several offers to consider besides yours.

Be prepared for negotiation. If the candidate accepts your first offer without hesitation, great! However, if the candidate needs more time to think it over, that’s just prudent on their part. While they’re mulling over your offer, consider your next move. Revisit your salary range, considering the experience and skills of the potential hire as well as the responsibilities of the position.

Seal the deal in writing. When you do come to an agreement, compose an offer letter detailing the specifics of the job and agreed-upon salary, as well as the start date and terms of employment.

Once you hire your new employee, take special care that your new hire has the tools for the job. Having their work space prepared for them will help them feel welcome, making it easier to get up to speed and meet their potential.

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