Hiring tactics at 5 top companies

> *"There is something that is much … rarer than ability. It is the ability to recognize ability." -Robert Half*

More often than not, successful leaders are obsessed with hiring. Coincidence? Not at all. Hiring well is among the most important — and most difficult — tasks managers face. So how can you do it well? These revealing, and in some cases surprising, tactics from some of today's hottest companies could point you toward a better hiring process the next time you need to find a new team member.

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"Upon further review of your resume, I'm sorry I wasted my time."

1. The 'bar-raisers' at Amazon.

Most companies leave the screening to HR and those in the relevant hiring departments. Not Amazon. It has a cadre of employees from across the company dubbed "bar raisers," who — in addition to their regular jobs — screen as many as 10 candidates per week, spending two or three hours evaluating each one. They have the authority to nix anyone who doesn't seem like a good culture fit, regardless of whether they know anything about the person's particular area of expertise.

Tip: Even if your company doesn't have a formal panel of bar raisers, consider looking for colleagues who have a reputation for making great hires, or who are great culture fits in your organization, and loop them into your hiring process. If that's not possible, you can at least ask them for some pointers!

2. The niceness test at Zappos.

It's all about what job candidates say when they interview, right? Not necessarily. Zappos also keeps close tabs on what people do — specifically, how they treat those who *aren't* interviewing them. After all, interviewees are focused on impressing their interviewers, but more likely to just act as they normally do with others. This is why, when out-of-town candidates fly in and take a shuttle to the Zappos headquarters, their treatment of the shuttle driver can make or break them.

Learn more about how Zappos hires in [this article](#). There's also a four-week training period that all new hires go through — and that can result in someone never making it to his or her first day.

Tip: Receptionists, administrative assistants and others who come into contact with job candidates in an informal way are also great sources of feedback. Most candidates will be on their best behavior in front of the people interviewing them; a much better test of character is their treatment of the people they aren't necessarily trying to impress.

3. The no-resume rule at 37signals.

At web app company 37signals, co-founder Jason Fried completely ignores resumes. Here's what he reads instead: cover letters, which he says are a better gauge to tell how much someone wants the job. Anyone who's really interested will take the time to tailor his or her cover letter.

Fried also recommends "test-driving" people with projects before hiring them and analyzing the types of questions they ask ("why" questions are good, he claims, but "how" questions can indicate that someone isn't a problem-solver). Read [his whole article](#) for more pointers.

Tip: When you're assessing cover letters, be wary of form letters that could be sent to just about anyone, anywhere. Someone who takes the time to tailor his or her cover letter to meet the specific needs described in your job posting — and, better yet, has done some research on you or your company — probably wants the job a lot more.

4. The values assessment at Netflix.

At some companies, nobody is quite sure how to define the culture there, never mind screen for it. At others, it's been defined but doesn't reflect reality.

Streaming media giant Netflix has a better handle on things. Its presentation on culture clearly lays out nine behaviors and skills that the company evaluates people on when hiring and promoting. For example, the first is *judgment*, which Netflix defines this way: "You make wise decisions (people, technical, business, creative) despite ambiguity"; "You identify root causes, and get beyond treating symptoms"; "You think strategically, and can articulate what you are, and are not trying to do"; and "You smartly separate what must be done now, and what can be improved later."

Once you have clear definitions like this, it gets a lot easier to ask questions that will help you evaluate candidates on culture. For example, to screen candidates for judgment, you could ask something like this: "Tell me about a time when you had to make a difficult decision at work. How did you go about making the decision, and what were the results?"

Check out Netflix's terrific culture slideshow for more ideas on defining values.

Tip: If your company doesn't have clearly defined company values, think carefully about what qualities differentiate colleagues in the office who love and excel at their jobs. What are some examples of these qualities in action, and what questions could you ask to unearth similar (or dissimilar!) behaviors in job candidates' histories?

5. The peer-to-peer chat at GitHub.

At most companies, the hiring process typically starts with a document-based screening or an interview conducted by the hiring manager or HR. Not at GitHub, a social network and open-source code repository for programmers. According to one employee, Coby Chapple, GitHub is more likely to kick things off with a low-key Skype chat between jobseekers and potential peers — people at the company who do the same type of work, and therefore may be better equipped to tell which candidates have the right skills.

Read Chapple's complete blog post for more juicy details about his first GitHub interview.

Tip: Include team members with the same (or similar) roles in the hiring process. They know the job requirements better than anyone — including you.

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