White Paper

How to Increase the Quality of Your Candidate Pool

INTRO
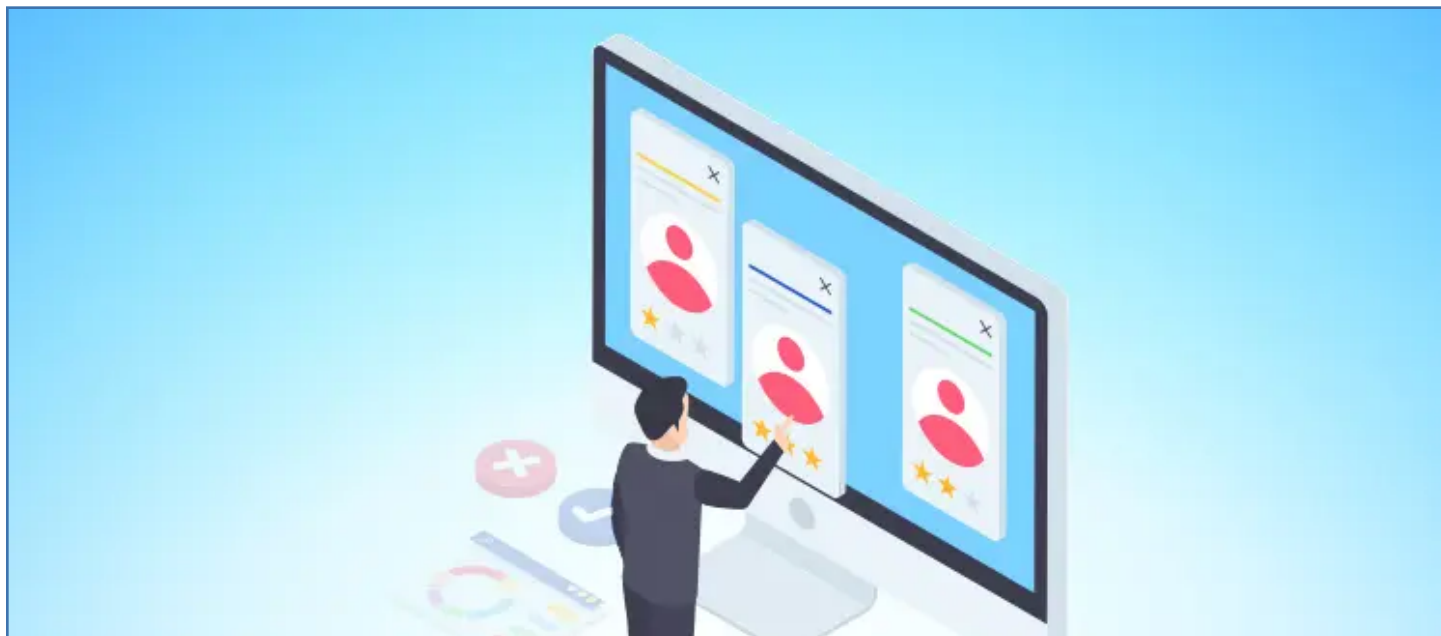
The candidate has great references, their resume is full of applicable skills, and they know all the right things to say in the interview. They're curious and engaged, they ask the right questions, and they're consistently interested in the job. On paper, they look perfect.

Then once they start, it's as if they're a different person. Their performance is average at best, they aren't engaged with their role, and they lack the drive that brought them to your attention in the first place. It happens time and again.

Finding the right person for a job isn't easy. Finding someone who lives up to their application and their interview is even harder.

There's no shortage of applicants. Finding people to fill the job is easy; finding the right person is hard. Modern hiring practices are missing something. Something that doesn't just bring more people to the table; it brings better people to the table.

> Accurately measuring the quality of the candidate means creating a new type of hiring process. A process designed to attract the best, not just weed out the weak from a mediocre pool.

Here are nine ways you can improve on your hiring process, to attract the best candidates and avoid making a hiring decision you'll regret.

Table of Contents

1. Optimize Your Job Description

How many candidates have read your job posting and simply moved on, seeing nothing to interest them? Carefully crafting a job description will help to attract the best possible people for the job, because it makes your posting stand out from the rest.
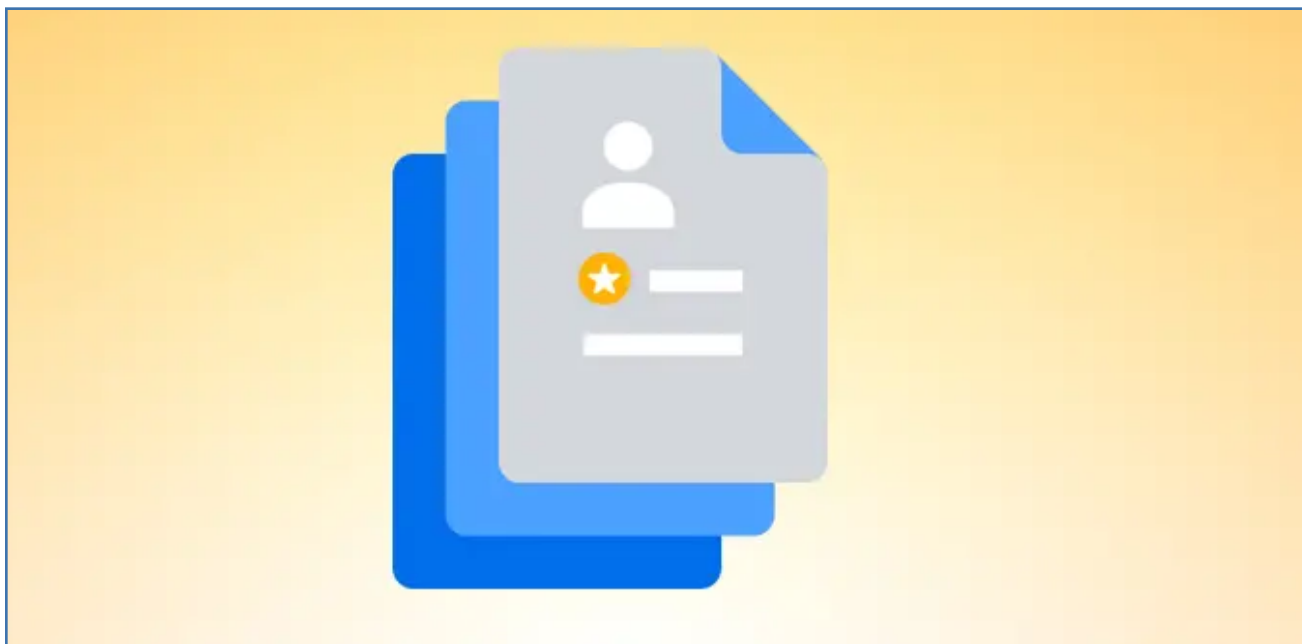

Ask yourself a few key questions.

- **What kind of person is the best fit for this job?** Not just in terms of their schooling, their skills, or their knowledge, but in terms of their personality, culture, and background.

- **What will the average day look like for the person who fills this role?** What are their typical duties, what access do they have to leisure activity on their breaks, and what are their overarching goals?

- **What sort of long-term performance objectives should the candidate be able to meet?** Are they going to be in charge of overall smooth operation, a reduction in customer complaints, a successful new product launch?

> Answering these questions will allow you to craft a job posting with a "job story" rather than a simple list of requirements. This helps attract people who are looking for more than just a job; they're looking for a lifestyle and a role where they can contribute to something greater than themselves.

2. Make Your Listing More Interesting
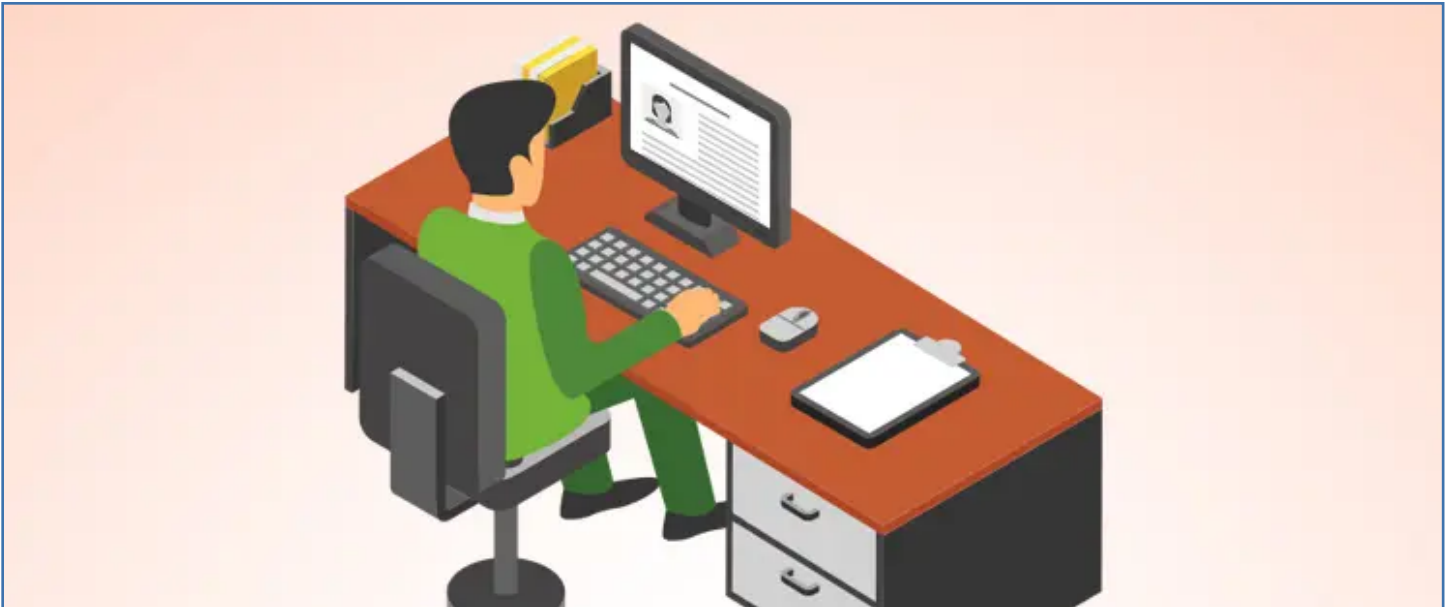
When it comes time to actually write a job posting, you should always strive to **make it as interesting as you can,** without getting in the way of the core details of the listing. Avoid gimmicks like over-using all-capital letters or exclamation points. Avoid using contradictory selling points, such as looking for someone who is "looking for a great salary" while also being "not motivated by money."

Start with an **emotive introduction;** something that tells the candidate what the job is, what the industry is, and what the most exciting part of the role will be. Sometimes it can be difficult to find that exciting, but there's always something there if you dig.

Tell your company story, particularly with attention paid to the job story you crafted above. Where does this job story fit with the company overall?

Consider adding in **selling points** beyond just the job itself. Think about, for example, the location. What are the benefits of living in that area? How is the commute, on average? Is there a thriving art scene, plenty to do after hours, or any unique culture worth mentioning? These can be selling points to candidates outside of the area.

Finally, of course, make sure your listing has a clear **call to action.** Any interested candidate should know immediately what they need to do to apply.

3. Don't Focus Solely on Job Postings

There's more to finding high-quality candidates than just posting jobs. You should also take steps to consider the place the job listings are hosted and other factors surrounding the post.

The audience that you find on a site like Monster or Indeed is different than the audience on an industry-specific hiring portal, which will be different from the audience in a paid-access hiring portal, which will be different from the group of people checking the job listings on your website. A unique job posting can be tailored to each group of people, to attract the best candidates from each location.

Every listing should include the core information, like your job story, the essential requirements for an applicant, any necessary experience, certifications, or other flags. From there, each can be expanded to suit the group of people who will be seeing it.

> Don't forget other means of attracting attention to your job postings. Your ideal candidates might not be actively seeking a new position, but if they see a social media post – or ad – they might be interested enough to check the posting.

![ContractRecruiter.com logo]

4. Discuss Company Culture

More and more, company **culture** is becoming a primary consideration for job seekers. It doesn't necessarily matter if the job has great pay or great benefits; the average young employee only stays at a job around 3-5 years.

In a world where keeping employees around is increasingly difficult, company culture can make all the difference. If an employee fits in well, enjoys their time on their job, has made friends with their coworkers, and isn't otherwise pressured to leave, they'll be more likely to stay.

> These people, as job candidates, are looking for this kind of stability. Whether they consciously look for it or not, providing them with information about your company culture can go a long way towards making a prospective hire motivated to apply.

Think about potential fringe benefits that wouldn't go into hiring negotiation. Are hours flexible? Is there plenty of vacation time and flexibility? Is management generally laid-back? Does your company provide in-house benefits, like how every silicon valley tech giant seems to have a recreation center these days? These can all be benefits to a potential candidate.

5. Monitor Networks and Referrals

When you're building a candidate pool, you should look for candidates through more than just your applications. One of your best resources is already available to you: your existing employees. Employees, particularly those in the department or even specific role that you're hiring for, know your culture, story, and requirements better than your upper management likely will.


Let it be known amongst your employees that you're looking to hire for a given position. Allow internal applications, and provide an avenue for employees to refer their friends for the position. Trust them to know if the people they know would be a good fit for the job.

Of course, your employees are not your hiring team. While they can do the first step, of building the candidate pool, you still need to filter and analyze those applicants.

![ContractRecruiter.com logo]

6. Filter Incomplete Applications

As your candidate pool grows, it's worthwhile to filter out applicants you know won't make it. Incomplete applications are one of the biggest signs that a candidate won't work for a role. How can you consider their performance when they can't even follow the instructions for the application?
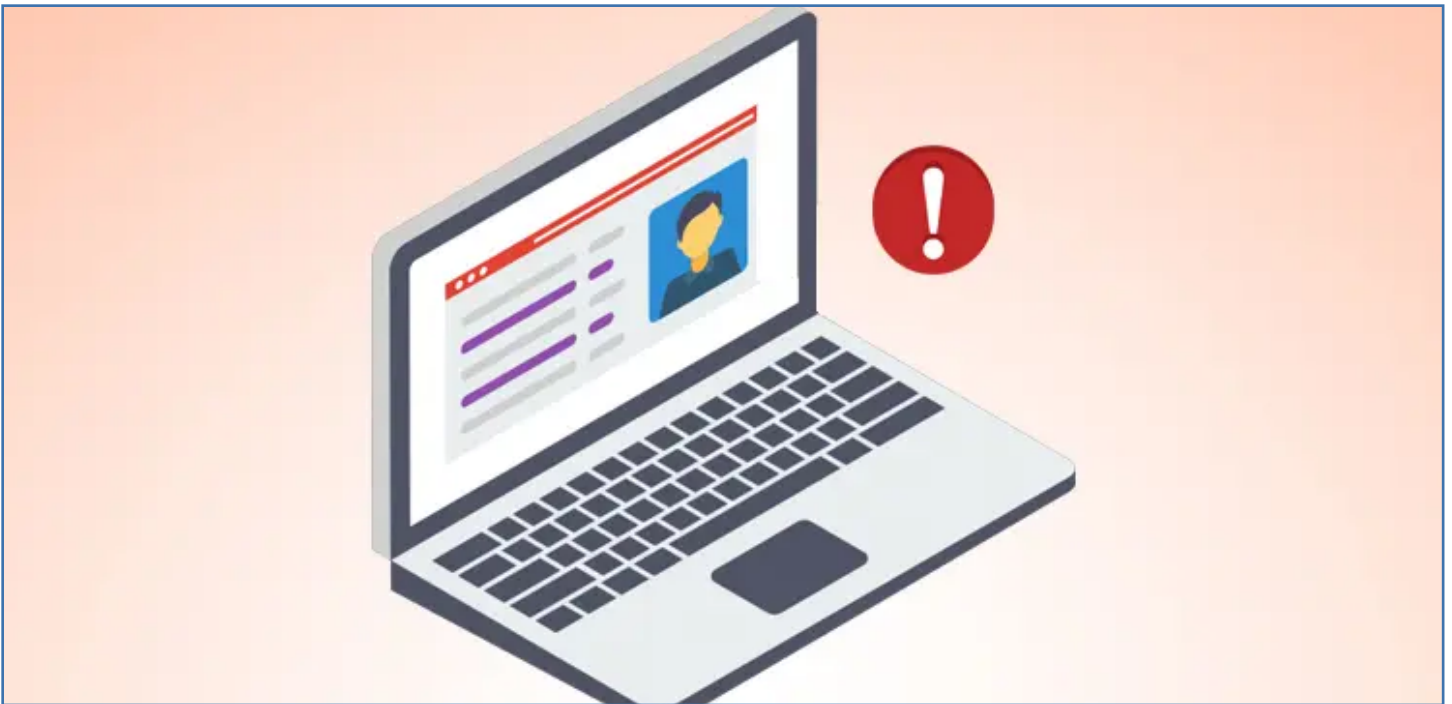
Conversely, you should avoid filtering for specific requirements unless those requirements are absolutely essential. For example, many job listings have "minimum bachelor's degree" listed. There are many, many candidates who may not have gotten a degree, but who nevertheless are well acquainted with the prospective job and would do well.

That said, though, that only applies to soft requirements. Hard requirements – *for example, needing a law license to work in a particular law firm position* – are non-negotiable. Depending on the position you're filling and the past experiences with the shortcomings of previous candidates, you may also implement additional filters.

Just because you filter a candidate from one position doesn't mean they should be removed from your candidate pool entirely, however. Someone who doesn't fit in one role might be perfect for another, so keeping their resume around can be a good idea.

![ContractRecruiter.com logo]

7. Screen Candidates for High Achievers

Once you've built your initial candidate pool, you need to s**tart filtering** it to find the highest achievers. Keeping your standards high is good, but keeping those standards tuned to the specific job and to an ideal applicant is even better.

Look for keywords in applications that indicate achievement. Candidates are generally likely to embellish their successes to look better, so look for specific numbers, statistics, and tangible results. Forget *"increased sales volume"*, look for *"increased sales volume by 14% year over year."*

Compare past positions and work history. Look for candidates that have improved their role, showing ambition and career growth on an upward trajectory. With a large candidate pool, you'll be able to see the average length of time a candidate stays in a role; look for the ones that are promoted faster than their peers.

> Check for keywords that indicate success above and beyond the basic duties of a job. Candidates with keywords like Award, Honor, Leader, Fellowship, Speaker, and Coach likely strive to exceed the average in their given position and can be great candidates to act on.

For candidates that look promising, verify the validity of any awards they've earned. Awards, certificates, and accolades that come from recognizable organizations are better than those with no provenance behind them.

8. Automate Background Checks

Any candidate that gets far enough in the process to be considered for hiring typically needs to pass a background check. These checks are essential to determine if there is fraud involved in the person's identity, if they have a criminal record, and even to verify particulars for contact information. While this may seem like an overkill for low-level employees, it's essential for skilled positions and C-level hires.

Background checks can be a tedious and time-consuming process, though, and it is often put off until the end of the process. That said, there are a number of systems available to automate background checks.

> **Automated background checks** aren't necessarily always the best option. In some cases, a system might give you data without the appropriate context, and some data might not be validated very far back. Some background checks also prove unreliable in areas where record-keeping is a hybrid of both digital and physical systems.

Even so, automating your background checks has the potential to save you time and money, while improving efficiency and turnaround time.

9. Test Your Candidates

When you've found a promising candidate, how can you verify that they're the right person for the job? Even with all of these improvements to the hiring process, you still end up with someone who looks good on paper and in an interview. This is where a test comes in.

Consider assigning your candidate a **test project.** This project should be something relevant to their position, something that can be completed in a reasonable amount of time, and something that mimics the requirements and pressures of your work environment. It should be aimed at testing the applicable skills the candidate needs to thrive in their position. It's the ultimate way to find out if a candidate is as good as they seem, or if they're just good at bluffing.

> As they take this test, look for more than just whether or not they succeeded. Look to see how they react to problems they encounter, and how they solve them. Look to see if they have enthusiasm for the task. Look to see if they admit when something stymies them, or if they try to hide it. This can tell you a lot about how the candidate will perform in their position.

Determining the Best

By improving your hiring process from listing to signing, you can finally hire the best person for the job. Improving listings and listening for referrals raises the quality of your candidate pool. Improving filtering and background checks help you pick the cream of the crop to interview. Finally, presenting a test and watching carefully for more than just the results helps you hire the perfect person for any job.