



Selling the Candidate: How To Get Your Ideal Candidate to Join Your Team

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Plenty of articles are devoted to tips for finding a job. Even a cursory web search turns up a wealth of information on resume writing, effective interviewing, and how to suck up without slobbering. On the other hand, there is a dearth of information for companies doing the hiring. The game industry is a competitive one, and quality talent is vital to success. How do you get your ideal candidate to work for your company? You have found the perfect person you want to hire. Now, how do you sell that candidate on joining your team? In this article, we will address closing tips for hiring candidates, devising and extending offers, and addressing counter offer risks.

Closing Tips for Hiring Candidates

Starting Off On the Right Foot: No management function is more critical than hiring. Yet, surprisingly, many companies pay little regard to the importance of an organized and professional hiring process. Selling the candidate on your company begins with the very first interaction. From the first phone screen to the final offer, the persons conducting the hiring process represent the entire company. The way in which these company representatives conduct themselves can make or break a candidate's decision as to whether he (for purposes of this article "he" will represent candidates of all genders) will accept the position. The entire process from beginning to end should be handled in a well-organized and professional manner. Companies should approach each candidate contact with a sense of purpose.

Effective Interviewing

Overview: Beginning with the phone screen, approach the interviewing process with the same respect you would expect from the candidate. If you think this candidate has got what it takes, don't run him off before you get a chance for a face-to-face. If you scheduled the phone screen for a particular time, be ready. Give yourself enough time for an uninterrupted interview. Don't do anything else during the interview. Nothing is more irritating than the clickety-clack of computer keys while someone is trying to engage in an important conversation. Don't take other calls during the interview. The phone screen should last a mere 20 - 30 minutes. Whatever the other calls are about, they can wait half an hour.

Assuming all goes well with the phone screen, the next step is the office interview. Again, approach the interview with the same respect you would expect from the candidate. A disjointed and chaotic interviewing climate translates in the candidate's mind to a disjointed and chaotic working environment. Do not approach the interview as if it were a casual "getting to know each other conversation." This is someone you want to work for your company. Keep in mind that the candidate is also interviewing you and your staff. Be enthusiastic. Be professional. Be organized.

The Interviewing Process: Before the interviews begin, the candidate should start the day with a representative from HR. Your HR rep should sit the candidate down and provide him with a brief synopsis of company benefits, stock options, and perks such as health club memberships. The candidate should also be provided an attractive, well-organized packet of information on the company that includes, for example, information on the company's history, recent company news, and company product list. And, ideally, before the candidate ever arrives at your office, you have also provided an interview schedule that looks something like this:



Friday, November 12, 1999

Interview Schedule for Joe Interviewee - Producer Position

10:00am John Smith

11:00am Mike Jones

12:00pm Leave for Lunch

12:30pm Lunch

2:00pm Kris Johnson

3:00pm Terry Lee

Seeing the schedule before the day of the interview alleviates some of the candidate's anxiety as to what will transpire that day. Before the candidate ever sets foot in your building, your company already looks organized and professional. A schedule also helps keep the interviewing process on time and on track, as each of the interviewers should have their own copy of the schedule. They will know when to wrap up the interview and where the candidate should be taken next.

After the HR rep has briefed the candidate, HR should take him on an enthusiastic tour of your facility. At the end of the tour, HR should drop the candidate off at the first interview. At this point, you've already made great strides in making the candidate feel welcome and presenting your company in a positive light.

Before we take the candidate inside the office for the first interview, we need to discuss one of the most common reasons a candidate turns down a job --- no one took the spouse into consideration.

The Candidate's Personal Life: While it can feel like all of your days and nights are spent at the office, and that may be what you expect from your new employee, the fact is that everyone has a personal life. From a hiring perspective, all of the pieces may fit: the hire is in the budget, the candidate has the skill set, the phone interview is a dream, the candidate flies out and meets everyone. You like him and he likes you. You put together a salary and bonus offer he can't refuse and (muffled gasp) he turns you down. What went wrong? Job offers that require relocation to a new town frequently blow up in a company's face at the very last minute and no one seems to know why. Usually, these sorts of fall-outs are directly attributable to a failure to factor in a candidate's spouse or partner. That partner has probably never seen the new town, has no clue about housing, no friends, and no job. No one asked. And she (for purposes of this article "she" will refer to a candidate's spouse or partner of all genders) isn't moving. Period.

Recruiter Melanie Cambron recommends that "from the very start, all other factors in the candidate's life should be taken into account and included in the interviewing process. From the initial conversation with HR, that HR rep should be finding out about the candidate's family, why the candidate really wants to leave his current job (if that's the case), and whether the candidate and his partner have talked specifically about moving to a new town."

If you want this candidate and the job entails a move to a new town, you need to pony up the money and fly the partner out as well. While the candidate is interviewing, she should be set up with a friendly (but not pushy) real estate agent that is well-informed about the city, its job opportunities, schools, crime rate, etc. The spouse should also have lunch, dinner, or coffee with



people at the company at some point. The candidate's better half needs to be acknowledged so they feel a part of the process. And, quite frankly, they ARE a part of the process.

The Office Interview

Now, back to the office interview. Before HR drops the candidate off for the first interview, the interviewer needs to be prepared. Even if you don't have the luxury of an organized HR department that has provided you with a schedule, you need to take the initiative and set aside a reasonable amount of time for the interview. Do not allow any distractions during this time. Do not take any phone calls and do not allow any interruptions. Your attention needs to be focused on the candidate. I know this sounds obvious, but as a recruiter I hear the interviewing horror stories from candidates. For example, there is a Creative Director at a very large development and publishing company who is notorious for taking phone calls and, believe it or not, reading and responding to emails during interviews. Not phone interviews. Face-to-face interviews where candidates have been flown in just to talk to him and there he sits in front of his computer reading and writing emails. And he wonders why ideal candidates turn down his job offers. Don't do that.

Be sure you have the information you need in front of you including a scratch pad for notes, your business card, an outline of questions you want to ask the candidate, and a copy of the candidate's resume that you have highlighted to show those specific areas you want to ask about. Interviews can be stressful; a little preparation can go a long way toward reducing that stress for both parties. However, be sure to stay loose and flexible, too. A welcoming approach and brief small talk will help establish rapport and ease tension. Outline for the candidate what the interview is meant to accomplish and describe the job in detail. State why the candidate is interviewing and what kind of information you need from the candidate. And, above all else, listen to the candidate.

The Questions: Candidates want to feel that they are walking into an organized environment. Having a prepared outline of questions help in that regard. However, simply copying down a list of questions that you gathered from some hiring book years ago and now read off the page will not help. The kinds of questions you ask and the way you ask those questions can go a long way to selling a candidate on your company. For example, an exceptional animator recently interviewed with a new game company. Before the interview, he was unsure as to whether he wanted to make the switch. After the interview he called his recruiter and told her that he had been particularly impressed with the questions that had been asked. Rather than asking those same, tired, overly general questions like "where do you see yourself in ten years," his interviewers had asked him the following questions: -

- What kinds of animation do you like?
- What kinds of games do you see yourself playing in ten years?
- What kinds of animation do you like to do?

This series of questions gave the animator the chance to really talk about the games he liked to make versus the games he liked to play and where he thought games would be in the next decade. He felt like the company had actually given some thought to interviewing him and, therefore, was really giving some thought to him.

On the other side of the proverbial coin another animator was phone interviewing with another company. In this case, the interviewer, in an uninspired and monotonous tone, read a list of stereotypical questions. At the end of the interview, he asked the animator to send in some samples. Later, when this animator spoke with his recruiter, he said he felt it was pretty clear the guy interviewing him was not interested. The candidate felt like it would just be a waste of his time



to send in any samples. The recruiter had received this same feedback about this particular interviewer from other candidates. The fact was, despite the uninspired questioning, the company was very interested in this animator.

The questions posed to a candidate during the interview can be a turning point. Every company should spend some time working on the kinds of questions they ask candidates. The right questions, and the way, in which those questions are delivered, can bring out the best in both the candidate and the company.

At the End of the Day

Once the candidate has made it through the interviewing process, the company should have the candidate close with HR. During the course of the day and the interviews, questions will have percolated in the candidate's mind and he will appreciate the chance to ask questions and get answers before being on his merry way. After answering the candidate's wrap-up questions, HR should let the candidate know that the company will talk and get back to the candidate by a specific day. And, here's the clincher, if you tell the candidate you'll be back to him with a decision by Tuesday, then be back to him with a decision by Tuesday! Again, give the candidate the same respect you would expect of him. If this is someone you know you want, chances are others want him, too, and the longer you wait, the more time he has to take other interviews and consider other offers.

Devising and Extending Offers

Once the candidate has been through the interview process and you still know that this is the candidate for you, the time has come to devise and extend the job offer. You said you would get back to him by Tuesday and so you shall. And when you do get back to the candidate, you will present him with an offer that makes him feel like your company is taking care of him. You want that initial offer feeling to be a good one. Every aspect of the offer needs to be right-on. Even if you nailed it on initial base salary and signing bonus, if you miss the mark on relocation, for example, it will lessen the candidate's enthusiasm for your company. When you have to go back and start renegotiating in bits and pieces, things can quickly go downhill. As in the interviewing process, organization is key.

Furthermore, if the job offer entails relocation and a significant other, if you took the right steps early in the process and included the candidate's personal life in the equation, you've significantly reduced the odds of your deal falling apart.

Staying up to date on salary and bonus information: HR should be in an ongoing process of staying up to date on comparable salaries and bonuses in your area. There are a variety of readily available resources. Working with a recruiter can be particularly valuable in this area as recruiting firms have ready access to information on salaries being paid by comparable companies. For example, recruiting firms like Virtual Search, in conjunction with companies like the Miller Freeman Game Group, conduct annual game developer salary surveys. Also, if the job entails a move be sure to take into account the salary impact of cost of living considerations - you can be sure that the candidate will be taking it into consideration. For example, Homefair.com offers a free salary calculator. According to the Homefair.com calculator, a homeowner making \$50,000 in Los Angeles would need to make \$36,743 in Austin.

Relocation expenses: If the job requires relocation, you need to carefully consider the relocation portion of your offer. Relocating is more than throwing some furniture in a truck and hauling it across the state or country. It is a wise idea to work with a good relocation company to be able to



devise an accurate relocation offer. In many situations it's a good idea to have the relocation company speak directly with the candidate to get an even better idea of what will be entailed in the move. The relocation company can then provide you with a more accurate amount for your offer.

Outlining all of the benefits: When making your offer, make sure you clearly outline all of the benefits your company offers. This reinforces to the candidate what your company is willing to do for him. And definitely do not assume that the candidate knows the benefits - list all of them. It is far better to overwhelm the candidate with good news than create a situation where the candidate has to come back and ask for more information. .

Going the extra mile: I cannot overstate the importance of including the candidate's personal life in the hiring process. Job offers that were, by all accounts, merely a formality, have fallen completely apart because a spouse didn't want to move. If your job offer entails relocation, you are not just asking the candidate to move; you are asking him to move his entire life and that life frequently includes a spouse and/or family. At this point, you should have already included the candidate's family in the process. With the offer, you need to go the extra mile by providing additional information for the spouse such as housing and job information, a list of recruiters in the area, as well as a list of websites that can direct the candidate and his family to even more information about the area.

And, again, if you told the candidate you would get back to him by Tuesday. You better get back to him by Tuesday.

Addressing Counter Offer Risks

If you are trying to snag a candidate from another company, you run the risk of the counter offer. Once you've extended your job offer, there is a good chance the candidate will go back to his current employer and let them know that another company has offered him a better deal. The best way to deal with the counter offer is to address it before it happens. It is during this phase that working with a recruiter holds an advantage. You don't want to look like your bashing the candidate's current employer - the recruiter does the dirty work. But whether you do it or your recruiter does it, the following points should be addressed with the candidate to diffuse the counter offer situation.

If they had really wanted the candidate: Let the candidate know that you are aware that if he goes to his current employer to discuss your job offer, chances are good that they will counter offer with an equal amount or, possibly, something greater. However, if that happens, the candidate should take into consideration the fact that it took the threat of leaving to prompt his current employer to cough up the money. The current employer should have been paying the candidate his real market value all along. If they have the money now, they've probably had it all along.

The candidate would still be gone: In my years of experience working as a recruiter, I have noticed one particular constant: if someone is looking for a job, there is a reason. Once a candidate accepts a job interview with a new employer, at least in his mind, he has already left his current employer. Even if the candidate takes the current employer's counter offer, odds are he will be back on the market within six months. Be sure to talk to the candidate about why he is leaving his current job. Give the candidate the chance to talk through the reasons he interviewed with your company in the first place.

Selling the Person



In short, how do you convince the candidate you want to join your company? You've got to show him the same respect you would expect from him. Be organized, professional, and attentive. Candidates notice when you read your emails during an interview. They also notice when you read a set of stereotypical questions off a sheet of paper. And, they listen to their spouses. Your ideal candidate may be the most meticulous programmer you've ever seen. But that candidate is also a person. You're not selling a machine on your company, you're selling a person. With just a little thought, effort, and organization, you can get your ideal candidate to join your team.