



TALENT ACQUISITION, DEVELOPMENT AND RETENTION: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Building a company is hard. The hours are grueling, the decision-making endless, and the tasks often fall outside your area of expertise. As you grow, and your company's needs change and expand, hiring the right talent becomes critical. Indeed, ask any mentor or investor in Connecticut Innovations' extensive network, and he or she will tell you that human resources is one of the most frequently requested areas in which startup CEOs request assistance. With that in mind, CI asked HR expert **Beth Skrzyniarz, SPHR, SHRM-SCP**, a fellow veteran of the startup world, to answer a few of your frequently asked questions. Read on for her advice.

HIRING

CI: Entrepreneurs rarely have the expertise or the money they need to find skilled employees. How can they find the talent they need to grow on a budget?

BS: First, small or large, your company needs to have an online presence. LinkedIn is a great place to start. It requires just a small investment, relatively speaking, and you can easily recruit there. If you don't have the time or knowledge to find skilled employees, though, because this is such a critical function, it's better to contract a recruiter or HR professional to do the heavy lifting for you. That way, you get to focus on your business, while he or she can focus on finding qualified candidates who can help you succeed.

CI: Where are the best places to advertise open positions?

BS: It depends on the role. LinkedIn is great for reaching professionals, but not for connecting with developers and some technology roles. [Looking for tech talent? See

sidebar.] Active job seekers still go to websites such as Careerbuilder, Monster and Indeed.com. If you're looking for passive talent, go where they go to keep their skills sharp. For instance, HR professionals go to the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), finance professionals go to the Financial Executives Networking Group (FENG) and so on.

CI: How many times should you bring a candidate in for an interview?

BS: That depends. There are many successful recruiting models, and I'm not locked in to a certain number of times you need to bring a candidate in. Whether two visits or five, your startup needs to remember that the candidate is interviewing your company just as they are being interviewed. Both sides need to be selling and making a positive impression.

CI: What about those logic or math tests? Are they worthwhile?

BS: Again, it depends. If you're hiring analysts, they're very helpful.

If you're hiring a receptionist, don't waste your time. The role of the receptionist typically does not require a strong background in math.

CI: What's illegal to ask during the hiring process?

BS: This question would require pages to answer, but, simply put, don't ask anything about the candidate's personal life or the impact of their personal life on their ability to do the job.

CI: Are references worthless, since most won't talk?

BS: I find that most will talk, actually, but keep in mind that candidates can typically find three people in their network who will say great things about them. Reference checks should be confined to direct managers only. It's critical to perform background checks on everybody, though.



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DEVELOPING

CI: How important is it to develop your talent?

BS: This depends on the stage of the company's development. A brand new startup is focused on growth, finding clients, sales and product development. Talent development is typically not a priority at this stage. As the company gains traction, becomes profitable and increases its headcount you need to look inward and begin to have those conversations with your employees. Don't assume that because you're in startup mode your employees aren't thinking about their development. Those conversations are important. Then think about how much time and how many resources you can devote to talent development, which is dependent on your company's own growth.

CI: What can a small company do to develop talent, particularly if there aren't roles to grow into?

BS: I learned from large, global organizations that they single out talented employees to lead projects that will expose them to different teams and expand their skills. This works well in small companies also. Don't box your employees into their roles—let them try new things.

RETAINING

CI: What's the best way to retain talent? Is it always about salary?

BS: Salary is always important to your employees, but it's typically not the reason they leave. Think about it: You negotiate your salary before you join a company. It's what happens after you are a member of the organization that will determine your tenure—things like company culture; work/life balance, if that's important to you; whether you're valued; your relationship with your manager; etc. You should have regular conversations with your employees so you can learn what's important to them and how you're delivering on those things from their perspective.

CI: What are employees looking for today in the way of perks?

BS: Work/life balance is critical. There are more millennials in the workforce now than workers of any other generation. In general, they want collaboration, transparency and work/life balance.

CI: Any other advice for entrepreneurs?

BS: Since your employees are so important to your success, I always advise bringing on a human resources consultant either full-time or part-time right away.



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In Need of Tech Talent? The Head of HR for One Tech Company Tells You How She Does It (and How to Keep Techies Happy)

There is no one best place to find tech talent, unfortunately, but with a variety of strategies you can find some great hires. We're in Charleston, SC, the so-called Silicon Harbor. With so many startups here, we're all fighting for the same talent, which means we have to look outside Charleston as well as locally. We use LinkedIn, Indeed, Glassdoor—all the usual places to see what's out there. Beyond that, we have many team members who are involved in the tech community, which makes a big difference when you're looking to spread the word about open positions.

That said, the best way to find tech talent, or any talent for that matter, is by having a good reputation in the industry as well as in your community.

Technical people are a creative group of people, so they need an environment that is conducive to that, meaning freedom, flexibility, ways to reduce stress, and fun. They also do better with a collaborative team atmosphere so they can get immediate feedback.

Blue Acorn also encourages its employees to get involved in code camps. It's a strategic move to help us find talent, but it also allows our developers to have extra income while helping others develop their skills doing something they love. Our instructors see the best of the best. They see first-hand who has the passion, the aptitude and determination to succeed. We've found many great employees that way.

If you're looking for tech talent, the most important factor is to develop an environment and culture that people are drawn to, one that has an inviting reputation for fun, growth and development. Second is to have a marketing department that helps spread the word across digital media. Third is to build relationships with area colleges, tech scenes and conferences.

Finally, retention is key, but in the tech world it can be very limiting. It's of the utmost importance to treat your team members well, give them the opportunity to grow and to have a voice to effect change.

Tommye Priest is director of human resources at Blue Acorn, an award-winning eCommerce agency and Magento's 2015 North American Partner of the Year. Blue Acorn employs more than 127 people, most of them developers, and is heralded as one of the fastest-growing and best places to work in South Carolina.

WHAT THE HECK IS EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, AND WHY SHOULD I CARE?

According to *Psychology Today*, emotional intelligence (EQ) is the ability to identify and manage your own emotions and the emotions of others. It is generally said to include three skills:

1. **Emotional awareness**, including the ability to identify your own emotions and those of others;
2. **The ability to harness** emotions and apply them to tasks like thinking and problem solving;
3. **The ability to manage emotions**, including the ability to regulate your own emotions, and the ability to cheer up or calm down another person.

Having a high degree of emotional intelligence is critical to being a good leader, and it's what you want to look for when you're hiring for key managerial positions in your company (or filling board seats or advisory roles).

The good news for startups is that you can gauge someone's emotional intelligence before you're stuck with them. "There are two ways to use EQ in the hiring process," says [Joshua Freedman](#), an author, trainer and leading expert on developing emotional intelligence. "You can use your own EQ as a barometer, and you can use metrics."

Freedman, who leads the world's most extensive network of emotional intelligence practitioners and researchers and works with FedEx, the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps, the Make-A-Wish Foundation, Microsoft and numerous educational, governmental and social service organizations, recommends both. "Develop your emotional insight to read between the lines, and use a [well-validated assessment](#) to structure the discussion and bring EQ data into the interview," he advises.

Freedman recommends (and publishes) a tool called the [Brain Discovery Profile](#). At only \$12, it won't break the bank for even the leanest startup.



What's next starts here.