

**weirdly**

# Recruiting 101 for Startups

A practical guide to help you hire superstars for your startup.



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How to:

# Decide what roles are important.

Working out what roles are vital to fill in your startup can be a bit tricky. Resources are always tight – especially in the early stages. Here are a few questions that'll help you decide which ones are vital now, and which ones you can hold out for a bit longer on.



How to decide what roles are important.

APPROX TIME: 15 MINS

1. What is the focus of your company right now? What are the three big goals you need to achieve in the next 3-6months?

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2a. What are the top jobs/tasks that need to be done to achieve these goals?

2b. What are the skills and experience you already have in your team? E.g. Javascript skills, sales, people and project management.

1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	5

3. What are the skills and experience that we are lacking? Looking at the key tasks you need to complete and the skills you currently have in your team, where are the obvious skills or experience gaps? This may not mean you have to hire people – these might be skills you can get yourself, or you could find software solutions.

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4. Which of these skills are going to become more required in the next 6-12months? E.g. If you're all terrible writers and the thought of building pitch decks, or writing sales and marketing material fills you with dread, your requirement for a salesy-marketing-admin type skill set is going to become urgent, really fast.

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Consider:

Am I better to get someone who is a rough diamond with heaps of potential to grow with our business? These guys take a while to start to be effective and productive but they're usually lots cheaper.

**Or**

Should I get someone who has tons of experience? These guys can hit the ground running and start to make a difference really quickly, but they're expensive and are more likely to want a stake in the company.

How to:

# Define your company culture

A big part of hiring is helping potential new team members understand your culture – that way they can assess whether you're a fit for them while you're assessing the same thing.

It's a mutual check-out fest – like puppies working out if you're from the same pack, but without all the bum sniffing.



Your culture will shift and evolve as your team and business grows, but these are some questions that will help you clarify what defines you and makes you different today.

Note: This makes a really awesome “over beers and pizza” session with your team. Plus, getting them to help define the culture they’re creating is a great way to bond.

### Stage 1: Defining your brand

- 1. Imagine your company is a person at a party, who would they be? Describe them.

Thought starters: What kind of party would they be at? Are they a boy or a girl? What are they wearing? What are they doing - dancing wildly? Discussing politics in the kitchen? Smoking a joint in the back garden? Are they loud or quiet? What kind of music would they put on the stereo?

Three horizontal lines for writing answers to question 1.

- 2. Describe your product and then your brand in three words each.

Thought starters: Coke’s product would be Refreshing, Sweet, Beverage. Their brand is Youthful, Fun, Summer. Your product is what you do. Your brand is what you feel like for people who are interacting with you.

PRODUCT	BRAND
1	1
2	2
3	3

- 3. What’s your big mission? What change is your company trying to create in the world?

Thought starters: Facebook is trying to create a more connected world. Helping people become more open and connected. That’s their big mission. How they do that (building a platform aimed at a specific audience) are unnecessary details for this exercise.

Three horizontal lines for writing answers to question 3.

4. What values does your brand stand for? Circle the 5 key values that you feel best define your brand.

Pro-tip: Take some time on this one – it’s not as easy as it seems at first glance. The best way to is use a pencil to cross out the ones that definitely don’t fit. Then steadily whittle the remaining options down until you have your top 5. Make sure you’ve really challenged these – are they really values you hold and live by? How are they integral to every part of your business and brand?

abundance	compassion	empathy	honesty	perseverance	silence
acceptance	composure	endurance	humility	philanthropy	simplicity
accomplishment	concentration	energy	humor	playfulness	sincerity
accuracy	consciousness	enthusiasm	hygiene	pleasantness	skillfulness
achievement	consistency	excellence	imagination	pleasure	solitude
acknowledgment	contribution	excitement	independence	power	spirituality
activeness	control	experience	insightfulness	practicality	spontaneity
adaptability	coolness	expertise	inspiration	pragmatism	stability
adventure	cooperation	expressiveness	integrity	precision	strength
agility	correctness	fairness	intelligence	preparedness	success
altruism	courage	faith	intuition	privacy	support
ambition	creativity	fame	joy	professionalism	sympathy
appreciation	credibility	family	justice	prosperity	teamwork
assertiveness	curiosity	fearlessness	kindness	realism	temperance
availability	customer-first	fidelity	knowledge	reason	traditionalism
awareness	daring	fitness	leadership	recognition	timeliness
balance	decisiveness	flexibility	learning	relaxation	tranquillity
beauty being	dependability	focus	liberty	reliability	trustworthiness
the best	determination	freedom	logic	resilience	truth
belonging	dignity	friendliness	love	resourcefulness	understanding
boldness	diligence	frugality	loyalty	respect	uniqueness
bravery	diplomacy	fun	making a difference	restraint	victory
brilliance	discipline	generosity	mastery	sacrifice	virtue
calmness	discovery	giving	mindfulness	satisfaction	vision
celebration	diversity	gratitude	motivation	security	warmth
challenge	drive	growth	open-mindedness	self-control	winning
charity	duty	happiness	optimism	selflessness	wisdom
clarity	education	harmony	originality	self-reliance	
collaboration	effectiveness	health	passion	serenity	
comfort	efficiency	helpfulness	peace	service	
commitment	elegance	heroism	perfection	significance	



### Stage 2: Defining your culture

**Exercise 1.** How do you bring your brand values to life in your team interactions? List 5 ways (using any/all of your brand values).

Thought starters: If “celebration” is one of your core values, how does that manifest in your team? Do you have any rituals when someone achieves something awesome? It could be as simple as high fives or posting something on the company Slack.

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1

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2

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3

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4

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5

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**Exercise 2.** Thinking about the way your team interacts with each other, do all the brand values you defined in Stage 1 apply as “team values”? Are there any you would add? Using the same list on page 8, pick up to 6 values you would use to describe your current team interactions.

Pro-tip: These values can be used to describe your current team culture.

<hr/> <p>1</p> <hr/>	<hr/> <p>4</p> <hr/>
<hr/> <p>2</p> <hr/>	<hr/> <p>5</p> <hr/>
<hr/> <p>3</p> <hr/>	<hr/> <p>6</p> <hr/>

**Exercise 3.** Now write down 6 values you would use to describe the team culture you aspire to build in the future (think like, 12months down the track).

<hr/> <p>1</p> <hr/>	<hr/> <p>4</p> <hr/>
<hr/> <p>2</p> <hr/>	<hr/> <p>5</p> <hr/>
<hr/> <p>3</p> <hr/>	<hr/> <p>6</p> <hr/>

Exercise 4. What would a team displaying your aspirational values feel like?

What kind of stuff would you see, watching the team over the course of a typical week? Jot down three ideas.

Thought starters: How would they bring those values to life? What would the office space look like – buzzy and lively? Quiet and determined? What would celebrations look like?

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1

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2

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3

Awesome! You've defined the values that form the foundation of your current culture, and the culture you're aspiring to build.

Exercise 5: The way you bring those values to life is what makes your culture unique. So how do you describe it?

Try using this sentence as a starting point (mad-libs style):

Our team is full of great people, working together to <insert your mission here>. Our workplace is <insert your values here eg. lively, fun, as silent as a crypt>. And when we're not <what you do eg. smashing out code, chiselling tombstones>, we like <insert more values eg. keeping fit with team boxing, upskilling in our own e-learning centre>.

Hurrah –

congrats on your newly defined culture.

Now, when hiring a new team member, keep this stuff in mind. Think about how they will fit with your culture today, and what they'll be able to contribute toward achieving your big aspirational culture goals.

# Key attributes for a tech start-up

There are a whole range of attributes that are uniquely suited to startups, but it can be hard for founders who are hiring teams (and people hunting for jobs) to know what those are. So we've smooched together our recruiting AND startup running experience and made a list of the top 8 attributes we've found to be the most valuable:



**Passion, enthusiasm, motivation for what you're doing.**

They must buy into your vision and your big "Why" – what it is you're trying to do or create in the world. They've gotta care about the problem you're trying to solve, otherwise it'll be hard to stay motivated.



**Curiosity.**

They've got to love the process of finding better ways to do things – especially when it comes to challenging assumptions about the only way to build products. Being curious about why you're doing this, who it's for and how they're going to use it is vital across all roles in a startup too.



**Pace.**

They've got to be great at making decisions and acting on them quickly. The old adage of succeed quickly or fail fast is the day-to-day life of a start up. You need people who thrive and are excited by this.



**Fearless/Audacity.**

Try the impossible, challenge more than just the status quo, be prepared to push the boundaries, limits of what we believe.



**Grit - /resilience.**

Your resilience will be consistently tested and challenged in a startup. That thing you just spent a month working on? It's not working, we need to abandon it and try something else. The reality is that it will not be a smooth ride. People who have made it through a few tough life experiences, who have demonstrated Grit, are more likely to survive.



**Hunger and willingness to sacrifice.**

Founding a startup requires sacrifice. So does working in one. You're going to get chunked in the deep end often. You're going to be asked to work longer hours, more often. It's a high pressure job so you've got to be hungry and prepared to make sacrifices.



**Sense Of Humour.**

You've got to be able to laugh and realise that tomorrow is another day. The sun will set, the sun will rise. Late nights, too much pizza and endless bug squashing is only bearable if it's also fun. You want to be able to laugh with the people you sit next to.



**Flexibility.**

The only constant is change. Get ready to develop skills you don't have. Although you may be employed for a specific role, the nature of start up means that everyone leans in the direction that the business needs to be focused on at that time. If its sales this month – then get ready to help out in that area. Anyone who defaults to "that's not in my job description" isn't suited to a startup life.

# Pre-hiring checklist

Do you know:



What specific role and tasks you need filled?

What exact skills they need (for the role and to complement your current team), who they'll be working with, who they'll be reporting to.



What makes a good alignment with your team?

A la the "How Do You Define Your Company Culture" section of this guide.



Where they will sit and who will on-board them?

It sounds simple, but you'd be surprised how often these two important things get overlooked!



Whether you need someone full, part-time or contract?

Plot out some scenarios. If you get a full timer, how will it work, what will it cost and what will you achieve? Now do this for part-time and contract.



Exactly what this person will be doing?

Jot down a list of day-to-day tasks and projects they will be responsible for. This will help form the basis of your job description.

## Do you have prepared:

TICK

<input type="checkbox"/>	A Job description
<input type="checkbox"/>	The remuneration package
<input type="checkbox"/>	An employment agreement
<input type="checkbox"/>	Your team – do they know you're hiring? Do they know who and why?
<input type="checkbox"/>	The application process – each step defined, progress and decline email templates
<input type="checkbox"/>	Job board ads
<input type="checkbox"/>	Social media posts linking to the application or your career site
<input type="checkbox"/>	An email/message for your team to forward on to any friends they have that might be perfect for the role (don't forget to include a link to the job/quiz)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Interview process and questions – who's going to be involved in interviews from your end?

# How to write a job description

Job descriptions are an awesome place to show off your culture – whether you're all fixies and moustaches or more of a sock-with-sandals kind of vibe. But it still has to do the job of clearly defining the scope of the job. So don't let quiriness get in the way of communicating your expectations clearly. It's important to get the basics right.

## 1. The Job Title

### Do's

✓	Accurately convey what that job does – Applicants use key word searches when looking for jobs. Think about what your ideal person is probably searching – PHP? Ruby? Coffee guy?
✓	Keep it simple – the basics are all you need. E.g. If you're looking for a Team Leader then use those words. Not Captain of the clan. Call your job what it is and let your personality shine in the body copy.
✓	Be gender neutral – pretty obvious but it still happens.

### Don'ts

✗	Don't create crazy job titles. – E.g. Ruler of the Universe. What does that even mean? CEO would do here. The only exception to this is if your brand is so big and famous, everyone knows what to expect. Because then they're searching for a job with your company, not just a job title.
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## How to write a job description

### 2. Short overview of the role

This should only be a few sentences that outline the job's core overall function. This gives your person context – you want to leave them feeling like “yes! This totally sounds like me” or “nope. This role is not my bag”.

### 3. Outcomes, tasks, responsibilities

This should have no more than 4–5 short bullet points. A brief description of the responsibility and then a sentence or two explaining how this will be achieved, and what the outcome will be.

### 4. Experience, skills, values

These are the prerequisites or preferred requirements for the role. Number of years experience, what skills you're looking for.

This is also where you can talk a little bit about your own culture and values. Keep it short and sweet though – this isn't a dissertation.

### 5. Remuneration and reward

This should be included in your employment agreement (see page 15). It needs to outline what you're offering your new team member – this includes salary or commission/bonus rates, and also non-cash things like car, laptop, phone, holidays, and carparks.

You can add in other valuable benefits too like insurances, superannuation schemes – just make sure you add that they are Company Benefits (this means they can be subject to change).

Try to keep any company-wide Special Benefits separate from this document. These are things like birthdays off, voluntary days. Basically be cautious with anything that could be considered discretionary. There can be times when companies need to change their company special benefits and so you don't want to face issues with everyone's job descriptions if you do.

# The employment contract

This is the heavy-duty, legal contract. That means it's smart to keep it really clear, concise and pretty free of fluffy stuff. We've included an example you can use.

This template was built with NZ employment law in mind. Some things might be a bit different in your country so, like with anything legally binding, run it past your own lawyer before you use it for your own hiring.

## Individual Employment Agreement

1. The Parties The Position Trial Period

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2. Your General Responsibilities Our

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3. General Responsibilities Hours of

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4. Work Place of Work Remuneration

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5. Employee Share Ownership Scheme

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6.

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7.

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8.

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9.

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10. Expenses 11. Deductions 12. Holidays

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and Leave 13. Termination 14. Force

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Majeure 15. Property 16. Conflict of

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Interest 17. Restraint of Trade 18.

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Employment Relationship Problems 19.

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Complete Agreement 20.

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Acknowledgements

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# Asking questions in an interview

These are just some basic, startup-specific questions you should ask in interviews. It's a good idea to add role-based questions on top of these to check out someone's skills and knowledge.





### If they haven't worked in a startup before

1. What do you expect it'll be like, working in a startup like ours?

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2. How do you think that'll be different from working in an established business?

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3. What sounds fun to you about working in startups? What's attracting you to this kind of business?

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### If they have worked in a startup before

1. When did you start working in your last startup (i.e. how big was the startup when you started working for them?)

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2. What do you think the key differences are between working in a super-early stage startup (eg. under 5-10 people) vs a growth stage startup ( funded with over 15-30 people)?

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3. What do you love about working in startup businesses vs established, more traditional businesses?

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What are you looking for? You're checking that these people have a realistic expectation about what it's like to work in a startup – the hours they'll be expected to do, the extra effort that's required to get things shipped. They'll be expected to work outside their comfort zone and try new things. You're making sure it's not all pool tables and La Croix in their minds.

### 4. What do you know about our business?

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### 5. How would you explain what we do to your Mum or Dad?

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What are you looking for? If a candidate hasn't done their homework on you first - researched you, asked around, read your website - then they aren't the person you're looking for. In a start-up you need people who are hungry and really want the job, they should know more about your business or market than you expect.

### 6. What 2 companies do you admire and why?

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What are you looking for? This can be a really revealing question. The lazy answer is Google, Apple or Uber. That can be fine if they follow it up with a really thoughtful "why", but if you have someone with a mind of their own they will surprise you with something awesome you weren't expecting. You need people who think outside the box.

### 7. What motivates you, what gets you out of bed in the morning?

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What are you looking for? The answers to this test how well they fit your culture, as well as give you clues about how good they'll be in a role. If it's a Sales role they need to be money or winning motivated. If it's an engineering role you want to hear something about solving problems or building clever solutions. Most important is that they have a clear answer. Being self aware enough to know what drives you is vital in startup, and knowing what inspires them to get in and get stuff shipped will help you get the most potential out of them.

# How to collect references (that are actually useful)

As a startup you don't have time to get it wrong. A bad hire can cost you heaps of time and money. Checking references can be a good way to get to know a bit more about your potential new team members.



## How to collect references (that are actually useful)

### What to look out for:

Get two references from people your applicant directly reported to. Colleagues won't cut the mustard in this case. You need to get a clear picture on work performance from the people who set and signed off on their work.

Go-go-gadget sleuthing - wherever possible, verify that the people are real and actually work at the company your candidate said they did.

LinkedIn is pretty good for this but nothing beats picking up the phone and calling the business itself.

Probe on anything vague, if you don't feel like you're getting a straight answer then probe further and make sure you get what you came for.

Always speak to the person, and don't accept written references.

These are really easy to falsify. You know the deal - we've all been there, "Hey man, will you write me a reference?" "Sure dude, just jot down whatever you want it to say and I'll sign it". Not worth the time it takes to read them.

### What to ask:

**Verify your candidate did what they said they did, ask what their job title was.**

It sounds obvious but you'd be surprised how many people exercise artistic license when it comes to their job title.

**When did they work there?**

You need to make sure there are no unexplained gaps in the CV that are being covered up with an extended employment period.

**What did THEY do to help deliver on a key project (not what the team did but the candidate)?**

People often lump a project team into one when talking about achievements or specific projects etc. Probe on what your candidate actually delivered themselves, what role did they play?

**What's their work ethic like?**

Do they drop everything at 5pm on the dot or do they do whatever it takes to get the job done?

**What kind of time off did the person need over the period they were working at the job?**

Are they sick every other week or can they be relied upon. We all get sick every now and again but do they call in sick with every little cough or sniffle?

**How do they get on with their colleagues?**

Both management and peers. You need to know how well they tend to play with others. If there are major issues here, try to dig into the causes.

**How good are they at their job? Do they perform?**

It never hurts to just be straight-up with this question.

**Do they do what they set out to do, do they always hit targets and meet project deadlines?**

**Most importantly - Would they hire them again?**

Always end by asking if there's anything else they want to say about the person.

You may not have covered it all off and they may want to make you aware of a secret superpower (or kryptonite).