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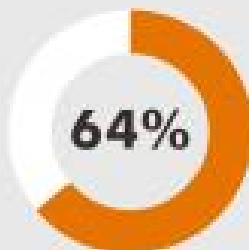
**PAYROLL**

## 4 Tips to Overcome Hiring Challenges & Keep Your Best Staff

Should you become more flexible in the candidates you consider? Or would that be tantamount to lowering standards and settling for mediocrity? The answers are yes to the first question and no to the second.

Paul McDonald • May. 10, 2019

### HIRING FACTS REVEALED



of senior managers say it's common for a candidate not to live up to expectations when interviewed.

#### SENIOR MANAGERS WERE ASKED:

"On average, how many resumes do you receive for an open position?"



40 resumes for one advertised position



**“Approximately how much time do you spend screening each resume for an advertised position?”**



12 minutes per resume



**“On average, how many candidates do you interview for an open position?”**



7 candidates for one position



**Approximately how much time do you spend interviewing each job candidate for an advertised position?**



41 minutes per interview



Source: Robert Half survey of more than 300 senior managers in the U.S. working at companies with more than 20 employees.

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With busy season over, now is an opportune time to take a fresh look at your staff and hiring practices. A new hire who doesn't work out is a drag on budgets, morale and accounting managers' time. That's why supervisors often include on the job description and posting an extensive checklist of must-have skills and experiences. Yet in today's climate of extremely low unemployment among accounting and audit professionals, it's risky to hold out for an applicant who ticks every single box.

Should you become more flexible in the candidates you consider? Or would that be tantamount to lowering standards and settling for mediocrity? The answers are yes to the first question and no to the second. These days, relaxing your hiring criteria and offering training to fill in a candidate's gaps is likely necessary, not "settling." If you don't take such steps, you're fishing from a candidate pool that doesn't really exist.

Recent research shows many organizations are already flexible with their hiring demands. In a [Robert Half survey](#), 84 percent of human resources managers said they are at least somewhat open to hiring and training an employee who doesn't meet the skills requirements for a position. Meanwhile, [62 percent of workers](#) reported they have been offered a job when they didn't meet all the hiring criteria.

To help you land the skilled talent you need, here are ways to adjust your practices.

- **Get back to the basics.** You want the best person for the job, but a long and involved set of requirements could put off excellent candidates. Focus on the core role and determine which criteria are genuine must-haves and which are nice-to-haves. For example, you can train on new financial systems and new regulatory compliance mandates but not work ethic.
- **Prioritize interpersonal abilities.** Client relations can make the difference between a thriving and lackluster firm. While it makes sense to relax certain criteria when hiring staff, soft skills like communication, leadership, intellectual curiosity and business acumen should not be among them. Nontechnical abilities are much more difficult to train for.
- **Emphasize organizational culture fit.** No matter how talented accountants and auditors are, they can't thrive for your firm if they don't fit the workplace culture.

This is not to say every new hire should possess the same attributes and not pose a threat to the status quo. On the contrary, each employee should bring unique perspectives and help disrupt the modus operandi for their position and team as needed. However, all employees must complement the [firm culture](#) and contribute to a positive workplace.

## Overcoming hiring challenges

Tweaking your hiring criteria will result in a deeper applicant pool, but there are additional ways to meet your firm's talent needs:

1. **Speed up the hiring process.** In today's hot job market, skilled job seekers move quickly. When you come across candidates who meets most of your requirements, act fast. This means staying in close communication with them throughout the hiring process, and making an offer sooner rather than later — contingent upon a [reference check](#), of course.
2. **Pay well.** Your salaries should be in line with market and competitive trends or, ideally, above them. Focus on the entire package, however. [Benefits and perks](#), such as telecommuting options, can ultimately be what tips the scale in favor of your firm.
3. **Work with interim professionals.** Using a temporary-to-hire strategy allows managers to evaluate potential employees firsthand before extending a full-time job offer. Project professionals and consultants also can help address workload peaks and [support special projects](#) that don't necessitate an ongoing staffing need.
4. **Train existing employees.** Sometimes it's more efficient to upskill members of your current team than to hire for specific technical abilities. This approach benefits your firm in two main ways: You develop the skills you need, and your recruitment and retention rates can rise since talented professionals value continuing education.

To thrive in today's challenging hiring market, accounting firms need to be willing to flex and adapt. Loosen a few of your hiring criteria, and you could see a sharp improvement in your hiring success rate.

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## 10 Ways to Improve Employee Retention

Every area of the employer-employee relationship in your organization deserves your attention. Embrace these key strategies to improve your organization's employee retention and boost employee satisfaction:

1. **Onboarding and orientation** — Every new hire should be set up for success from the very start, from the first day of work to the first week and beyond. The job orientation is just one component of onboarding, which can last for weeks or months, depending on your organization. Aim to develop an [onboarding process](#) where new staff members not only learn about the job but also the company

culture and how they can contribute and thrive, with ongoing discussions, goals and opportunities to address questions and issues as they arrive.

2. **Mentorship programs** — Pairing a new employee with a mentor is a great idea for onboarding. New team members can learn the ropes from a veteran with a wealth of resources, and the new hire offers a fresh viewpoint to experienced staff. Mentors shouldn't be work supervisors, but they can offer guidance and be a sounding board for newcomers, welcoming them into the company culture.
3. **Employee compensation** — It's absolutely essential in this competitive labor market for companies to offer attractive compensation packages. That includes [salaries](#), of course, but also bonuses, paid time off, health benefits, retirement plans and all the other perks that can distinguish one workplace from another. Every employee should have a full understanding of all the benefits they receive from your organization.
4. **Recognition and rewards systems** — Every person wants to feel appreciated for what they do. Make it a habit to thank your direct reports when they go the extra mile, whether it's with a sincere email, a gift card or an extra day off. Show your employees you appreciate them, and share how their hard work helps the organization. Some companies set up rewards systems that incentivize great ideas and innovation, but you can institute recognition programs even on a small team with a small budget.
5. **Work-life balance** — What message is your company culture sending? If staff are expected to regularly work long hours and be at your beck and call, you'll likely run into issues with employee retention. Burnout is real. A healthy work-life balance is essential, and people need to know that management understands its importance. Encourage staff to take vacation time, and if late nights are necessary to wrap up a project, see if you can offer late arrivals or an extra day off to compensate and increase job satisfaction. Many companies offer telecommuting or flexible schedules to improve work-life balance for their employees.
6. **Training and development** — In any position and industry, professionals want the possibility for advancement. Smart managers invest in their workers' [professional development](#) and seek opportunities for them to grow. Ask each of your direct reports about their short- and long-term goals to determine how you can help achieve them. Some companies pay for employees to attend conferences or industry events each year, or provide tuition reimbursement or continuing education training.
7. **Communication and feedback** — Keeping open lines of communication is essential for employee retention. Your direct reports should feel that they can come to you with ideas, questions and concerns, and likewise, they expect you to be

honest and open with them about improvements they need to make in their own performance. Make sure you connect with each staff member on a regular basis — don't let issues build up for the annual review.

8. **Dealing with change** — Every workplace has to deal with unpleasant changes occasionally, and the staff looks to leadership for reassurance. If your organization is going through a merger, layoffs or other big changes, keep your staff informed as much as you can to avoid feeding the rumor mill. Make big announcements face to face, and make sure you allow time for their questions.
9. **Fostering teamwork** — When people work together, they can achieve more than they would have individually. Foster a culture of collaboration that accommodates individuals' working styles and lets their talents shine. Do this by clarifying team objectives, business goals and roles, and encouraging everyone to contribute ideas and solutions.
10. **Team celebration** — Celebrate major milestones for individuals and for the team. Whether the team just finished that huge quarterly project under budget or an employee brought home a new baby, seize the chance to celebrate together with a shared meal or group excursion.

**A final tip:** Remember to assess your employee retention strategies at least once a year. You'll want to stay current on market salary rates and benefits, and best practices in developing workplace culture and manager-employee relations. Doing so will help you keep staff morale high and turnover low while guaranteeing your organization's success.

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*Paul McDonald is senior executive director at [Robert Half](#), the world's first and largest specialized staffing firm. He writes and speaks frequently on hiring, workplace and career-management topics. Over the course of more than 30 years in the recruiting field, McDonald has advised thousands of company leaders and job seekers on how to hire and get hired.*

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