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managers must move away from the idea of a new hire having a perfect resume. Instead, focus on identifying promising candidates who you can develop and who fit your ...

Paul McDonald • Nov. 15, 2019



With more job openings than people looking for work, talented accounting professionals are challenging to find. The overall national unemployment rate sits at just 3.5%, and it's even lower, 2.0%, for accountants and auditors, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Savvy employers have taken notice and adjusted their hiring practices. [In a Robert](#)

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your firm.

Characteristics of promising hires

When looking outside the resume and the exact requirements in your job description, consider the following factors:

- **Soft skills** — While workers can usually be trained on an organization's accounting processes, it's often difficult to find applicants with the right soft skills for a position. Look for individuals with the nontechnical abilities needed for your vacancy, such as a collaborative mindset and strong communication skills. Gauge soft skills by asking behavioral interview questions, looking for examples of problem-solving and communication abilities on application materials, and speaking with references.
- **Transferrable skills** — A [Robert Half Finance & Accounting survey](https://bit.ly/32dDSaw) (<https://bit.ly/32dDSaw>) found technology expertise is the hardest-to-find attribute in candidates for accounting and finance jobs. This difficulty frequently comes into play when businesses seek experience with specific systems. Keep an eye out for individuals proficient in cloud-based systems and reporting software. Even if their experience doesn't match the platforms for your opening, it can help prepare new hires to learn the tools you and your clients use.
- **Fit with your firm's work environment** — A match with your [organizational culture](#) often can be the difference in whether new hires succeed at your firm. Assess candidates via open- and closed-ended questions and nonverbal cues in interviews, as well as with reference checks, to see how well they'll flourish at your firm.

How to develop needed skills

Once you've identified and hired promising candidates, it's time to turn your

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development allow you to maintain control of what the training emphasizes. In addition, they won't cut into employees' personal time, which helps your staff maintain healthy work-life balance.

- **Mentorships and cross-training** — Hands-on learners benefit from the ability to perform tasks with supervision. One approach is mentoring, in which trainees are guided through processes and decisions by more experienced staff members. Cross-training allows new hires to gain insight into the firm as a whole while learning how to perform different roles. This process can also help you determine how an employee's strengths could best be used and potential career path
- **Project work** — An excellent way to train new hires without sacrificing productivity is to incorporate learning into their workloads. For example, if you want employees to develop proficiency with a specific software, assign them a project that involves pulling historical reports from that tool. Afterward, review the outcome to see what they've learned and answer any questions.
- **Financial support** — For staff members working toward obtaining certifications or advanced education, consider offering fee and tuition match or reimbursement, as well as a fixed amount of paid study time. Along with employee development, executives associate paying for professional certifications with improved productivity and [retention](#), according to [separate research](#) from our company.
- **Interim staff** — In addition to supporting high-priority initiatives and addressing workload fluctuations, project professionals can help train full-time employees, including on technology, processes and compliance mandates. Consultants also can engage in knowledge-sharing with your team when they transition off an initiative.

To succeed with recruitment during the current talent shortage, hiring managers must be flexible. Think outside the box and be willing to train promising individuals, and you can cultivate a team that keeps your firm thriving for years to come.

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