

HIRING · CHECKLIST

Hiring Foundations Checklist

The two hours of thinking before you post a job ad that decide who applies and who you end up hiring.

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This is not legal advice.

This is practical hiring guidance, not legal advice. For pay, contracts and compliance, see the New Hire Compliance Checklist.

USE THIS WHEN

You are about to hire, and you want to get the person you actually want

Most founders spend their thinking on the role and the salary, and almost none on why a great candidate would choose them over everyone else. That is the gap this closes.

None of it needs a budget or an HR team. It needs about two hours before you post anything, and it is the difference between a shortlist you are excited about and three months of wondering why nobody good applied.

STEP 01

Work out why someone would pick you

Do this first, before the role description, before the ad, before you tell anyone you are hiring.

- ☐ **Write down three things that make this a good place to work for the person you want.** Real ones. "We move fast" is on every ad in the country.
- ☐ **Be specific about the work.** What will they get to build, own or decide that they would not get at a larger company?
- ☐ **Be honest about the trade.** Smaller salary, bigger scope. No process yet, so they help build it. Say it plainly. The right person hears opportunity.
- ☐ **Check it against what you would say to a friend.** If you would not say it out loud over coffee, do not put it in an ad.

Five minutes on this makes the ad, the interviews and the offer conversation easier, because you know what you are selling.

STEP 02

Decide what good looks like before you meet anyone

- ☐ **Write the three to five outcomes** you want in the first six months. Outcomes, not duties.
- ☐ **Separate must-have from nice-to-have.** Most job ads are a wish list, and the wish list is what stops good people applying.
- ☐ **Agree how you will measure each one** in an interview. If you cannot think of a way to test it, you cannot assess it, so take it off the list.
- ☐ **Build the scorecard now**, while you are thinking clearly, rather than after you have met someone you like. The Interview Scorecard Template is in the library.

STEP 03

Write the role

- ☐ **Title that people actually search for.** Your internal name for the role is not it.
- ☐ **Open with the why-you from step one**, not with your company boilerplate.
- ☐ **Say what the person will own.** Three to five outcomes beats fifteen bullet points of duties.
- ☐ **Publish a salary range.** Ads without one get fewer and worse applicants, and you will have the conversation eventually anyway.
- ☐ **Say where the work happens.** Office, hybrid, remote, and how many days.
- ☐ **Cut the requirements list in half.** Then look at what is left and cut the ones that are really preferences.

STEP 04

Run a process you would not mind being on the other side of

- ☐ **Decide the stages before you start** and tell candidates what they are.
- ☐ **Keep it to three stages or fewer** for most startup roles.
- ☐ **Put the same questions to everyone** for the things you are scoring.
- ☐ **Score against the scorecard straight after each interview**, before you discuss with anyone else. Memory bends towards whoever you liked.
- ☐ **Pay for any work task**, keep it under two hours, and never use real work you would otherwise pay someone to do.
- ☐ **Reply to everyone.** Every applicant gets an answer. The Candidate Rejection Templates make this a five minute job.

STEP 05

Hiring from your network

Hiring someone you already know is a good way to hire, as long as you run the same process.

- ☐ **Put them through the same scorecard** as everyone else.
- ☐ **If you already know how they work**, say so and shorten the process honestly rather than pretending to assess them.
- ☐ **Be clear with them about pay and expectations early.** Familiarity makes those conversations easier to delay and worse to have late.

STEP 06

Decide, then move

- ☐ **Compare against the scorecard, not against each other.** The best of three mediocre candidates is still a mediocre hire.
- ☐ **If nobody meets the bar, do not lower it.** Go back to step one and work out why the right people are not applying.
- ☐ **Call the successful candidate before you send anything in writing**, then send it the same day.
- ☐ **Move quickly.** Good candidates have other conversations happening.
- ☐ **Tell the unsuccessful ones within a day of deciding**, with something useful in it.

Watch-outs

Hiring on gut feel. The most common failure in startup hiring is meeting someone likeable and building the rest of the process around confirming that. The scorecard exists to stop it, which only works if you write it before you meet anyone.

- **Do not let the process drag.** Two weeks of silence loses more good candidates than a low salary does.
- **Do not ghost applicants.** It costs you nothing to reply and it reaches more people than you think.
- **Do not hire for a role you have not defined.** If you cannot write the outcomes, you are not ready to hire yet.

Next step

Open the **Interview Scorecard Template** and build it before you post the ad. When you are ready to make the offer, the **New Hire Compliance Checklist** covers everything you need in place before day one.

Sources

PeopleStack hiring practice. No legal rates or thresholds are quoted in this checklist. For pay floors and award coverage, see the New Hire Compliance Checklist. Last reviewed 11 October 2026.