How To Attract And Hire People For Your Startup In Africa

the CareerBuddy ô

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most challenging things about Africa's start-up scene is how to attract and retain talent. The techniques often used in London, Silicon Valley and Paris to recruit top talents are rarely effective in Africa. The small number of exit opportunities through the use of initial public offerings and acquisitions have been a significant contributor to the cycle of frustration encountered by African startup and smart young folks have actually learned that stock options rarely provide a large payday. Hence the inability to hire and retain adequate talent.

Due to a number of reasons, there's a limited talent pool in Africa, especially in the area of technology. One of these reasons is how some of the universities in the continent struggle to stay open as a result of incessant strikes and disruptions. Another major reason for this is the presence of infrastructural challenges responsible for derailing some countries' economies in the schools, such as poor learning facilities or inadequate utilities like electricity and water. Although there are millions of unemployed graduate in the continent, it is still extremely difficult for companies to find new hires with the skills needed.

Even though multinational enterprises in other places around the world can recruit foreign talent, it is not always possible for startup enterprises in the African region. There have been complaints across-the-board that graduates in Africa are little prepared for the workplace and the problem of finding talent is further worsened by the global entrepreneurial revolution. The global business movement has made many gifted and skilled graduates who are looking for employment feel that having their own startups is the only road to success

The "Accelerating Entrepreneurship in Africa" study report shows that 57% of survey participants in major African economies considered entrepreneurship a major career option. With the encouragement of entrepreneurship by local governments, venture capitalists expanding their operations, cost of starting digital companies low, an increasing number of graduates are looking to become their own bosses straight out of school. However, the shallow talent pool means even founders are struggling to find partners or staff.

The few talents available prefer (deservedly) to work for the highest bidders, in form of foreign-funded start-ups that offer better pay and great work environments. The competition for talent causes inflation in the cost of wages, and it's more difficult for the under-funded local start-ups to build teams. All in a bid to keep the talent they have, some even come up with illegal contracts that make it almost impossible for their workers to leave. Indisputably, the majority of vibrant local startup companies in Africa are having issues with recruiting and retaining of their talents; a World Bank study shows that "startups in Africa try hard to fill open positions. Creating and maintaining a startup is just like racing in Formula One, your excellence is significantly dependent on the team you have.

The quality of your talent, managing processes, and tasks will dictate how fast you'll grow, and as such, you'll need to have top talent in your team pushing your startup from day one. Ideally, this team should consist of aspiring, qualified and results-oriented talents who work for long hours at a low cost. Such workers are competent, able to deal with complexity and regularly show exceptional ability and exceeding achievement in a variety of activities. That being said, it is not enough to recruit purely on the basis of skillsets

Your team should also have workers who flow with your company culture. Having a company culture alongside hiring people who jive with your company culture are two things that work hand in hand to achieve the best result. Recruiting people who don't meet both criteria will hurt your business, tensions will rise, morale will dwindle, you'll become so engrossed with conflict management in your company, and consequently, growth will pause.

Cutting back on the quality of your talent you hire is not an option because investors often ask questions about your team when you contact them. Besides funding, the biggest hindrance to the growth of startups is hiring and having the wrong people, in the right roles, at the right time. This guide will cover the nuts and bolts of startup recruiting, ranging from difficulties you'll encounter to developing a basic but productive hiring process to enable you to make intelligent and knowledgeable hiring decisions and to create a high quality startup team.

THE CHALLENGES OF GROWING A STARTUP TEAM

For any startup owner, recruiting your first set of employees is a significant experience. But as significant and exciting as it is, it's likewise a difficult time. If you are able to get the right people for your startup, you'll have managed to recruit the adequate skills and experience to build your company and develop your product, while hiring the wrong people poses a risk to the success of your company.

It can be daunting to build up your startup beyond the founding team - particularly if you are a first time founder or have never before been in the recruiting or hiring process. Although, it can be challenging to recruit for any role at every stage of the company, it is particularly challenging to recruit a team for early-stage startups due to three main reasons.

1) Every Hire can Break or Make Your Team - When your startup has developed beyond the founding staff, each and every fresh hire you've will essentially modify your company's structure. Newly hired talents influence everything: company culture, product development; team morale; team capabilities; the quantity and quality of work etc. Keep in mind that in a small team, the high stakes, fast-paced surroundings of a startup significantly improves the effect of every contradiction in values, culture or processes. To avoid this, recruiting a staff member who is a great fit is able to boost your capacity and set of skills, while simultaneously boosting team morale. Contrarily, in case you hired a terrible match for your team's culture, the hire is going to have an adverse impact on the work atmosphere, sometimes result in a decrease in efficiency levels, irrespective of the expansion in staff numbers.

2) You're Seen as a High-Risk Opportunity - An important thing to bear in mind is actually that becoming a member of a startup will not be the best choice for everyone. Although others will find risky and it really stressful, a number of individuals are going to find the opportunity exciting and energizing. Becoming a member of a startup is very different from joining an already developed, stable business enterprise. Many talents are going to prefer the perceived security and safety of a job at an established organization to a startup with virtually no funding, along with no track record of achievement.

3) You're Unknown - It is inordinately difficult to attract top talent when nobody knows you, and except the owners of a startup have a reputable background, they are pretty much unknown - especially if they're still at the stage of bootstrapping or yet to raise the first round of funding. Meaning you have to work extra hard to attract good-fit hires, sell your company vision, and existing team to them. A lot of businesses never remember that recruiting is actually a two sided procedure - just as the job applicant has to impress the organization, the company usually must have to make an impression on the applicants.

Hiring is a crucial step that should be one of the primary concerns for a startup founder, and as a founder, you should be ready to devote a considerable amount of your time to the hiring process. You need careful planning to move beyond your first handful of hires, so how can a startup attract top talent to your as-yet-unknown startup?

HOW TO HIRE EMPLOYEES FOR YOUR STARTUP

Building a great team of talents is directly proportional to the success of your startup, but it's more difficult for a small team working on a product that only a number of people have heard of, to convince top talents to join your company.

The very first step to take when recruiting your very first hires is actually to attract or draw in talent: develop a business which captivates high quality applicants, make sure your job advert gets to the best individuals, and also get them pumped up about the work your business is actually involved in, and so on. There are several things a startup can do to attract top talent to themselves.

1) Build an Attractive Company

You or your cofounder's extended network are likely to produce the first few employees, which means the hiring process will probably be much more lenient than subsequent hires. Your first step in these initial stages is to actually concentrate on setting up a company that people will wish or desire to work for. But, this doesn't mean you necessarily have to splurge on slick offices and expensive employee perks (although it will look better for your startup if you're not working out of your garage or spare bedroom when hiring your first employees). Rather, you should determine your identity as an employer: pinpoint your company's culture and maximize your social presence.

2) Reaching Candidates

Even if you don't have the workload or resources to grow your team in the moment, as a startup owner, you should always be recruiting.

Essentially, you should always be building connections and nurturing relationships for times when you need a specific hire. Setting up an eye-catching startup convinces your prospects that they truly would like to join your startup, and will consequently be appealing to leads who're attracted to your company culture, team and product. To employ the best talent, you cannot wait for these people to track you down: you have to reach out to them as well.

Networking - If your startup's anonymity is a major hiring challenge, there's a relatively easy way to remedy that. Alongside having an online presence, it's likewise important to devote some of your time to physical networking. Some great ways to grow your network are attending conferences, talks or tech meetups. You might even meet top talents that you can hire there.

Sourcing - If you think about networking as a passive means of reaching prospective candidates; sourcing is definitely the active way. If you know the vacancy you are going to be recruiting for next, you need to absolutely devote a little time to finding good fit applicants within your founders' extensive network, and also reaching out to them directly. Actively reaching out isn't restricted to you and your co-founders, your early employees probably have their own strong networks - top talents know other top talents. Let your team know the requirements for the next-hire, and encourage them to contact anyone in their network who they think would likely fit the role.

In startup hiring, quality trumps quantity all the time. You don't want just anyone and everyone applying so that you don't spend hours sifting through largely unsuitable resumes and applications. So what are you supposed to do? Have a specific idea of what a good fit employee is going to look like, before you start searching in earnest. The following area of this guidebook discusses what you should search for in potential hires, exactly how to appraise culture fit and skills.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN PROSPECTIVE EMPLOYEES

Looking for great employees can feel like you're searching for a needle in a haystack, hence before starting the hiring process in earnest, you must identify the top priorities for your new hire:

- What level of experience do they need? Do you want an applicant with five years' experience, or perhaps will you give consideration to a fresh graduate?
- What skills do applicants need to possess for the role?
- Do you need applicants with in-depth knowledge in a specific area, or those with a wider range of knowledge and experience?

Such mindful considerations can make it easier to recognize key characteristics or qualities to watch out for in potential applicants, before you begin hiring. Here are five key areas to consider to help establish your top priorities.

1) Attitude vs Skills - While checking the resumes, it's easy to think that the applicant that is most qualified is your best option, or the one with the highest years of experience or the one with a particular skill. However, note that, in a small startup company, attitude can be just as important as the experience and skill and qualifications. And you can't directly identify an applicant's attitude from their resume alone, which is what to bear in mind when interviewing candidates.

2) Experience vs Potential - Which one is better? Hire an experienced candidate or a candidate with less experience but has more potential to learn and become better with your startup? There's no easy answer to this important question.

The 'perfect' combination of potential and experience will be dependent on many things such as the role you're recruiting for; your company culture; your long-term growth plans for your company; and the capabilities of your team. Note that this will change every time you hire and as your startup team grows and develops.

3) Culture Fit - Like attitude, you can't evaluate how potential hires will fit into your company's culture just from looking at a resume. Especially for your earliest employees, culture fit is as important as hiring someone with the right skills, because they're integral to building your company culture. The attitude and values of people you hire in the early stage, will significantly impact the type of people you hire later on. Ensure that you don't confuse 'hiring for culture fit' for 'hiring someone just like you', as this can add to a lack of diversity in your startup team, which means you're missing out on the creativity and knowledge that diverse applicants can offer.

4) Soft Skills - Skills such as interpersonal skills, communication skills (both written and verbal), creativity, teamwork, adaptability and empathy are quite easy to miss when you're perusing job applications and interviewing numerous people, but keep in mind that they are as important as the practical skills that are usually easier to demonstrate and notice

5) Generalists vs Specialists - Do you find it better to work with an applicant with comprehensive knowledge in a particular field, or perhaps one with a wider scope of expertise in a number of aspects, but with reduced knowledge?

The generalist vs specialist issue is actually a complicated one. For the earliest hires, you will probably find that it is much better for you to opt for applicants who're generalists, with an extensive skillset,

but as your startup expands, roles become much more clearly defined and you will find that you need to have staff members with specific expertise or competencies, since it will not be very important that all your employees to have the ability to do everything. Because of this, it is starting to be increasingly prevalent for startup businesses or organizations in Africa to employ 'T-shaped' employees at their earliest stages, employees with a broad range of expertise in numerous aspects, but comprehensive experience in one.

WHEN AND WHO SHOULD YOUR STARTUP HIRE

Setting up an effective startup workforce is a continuous act of prioritization. Founders have to continually make choices about who their future hire need to be, based on the fast-changing requirements of their companies' workload in addition to teams' expertise or skillset. Also when you need to or should be hiring, based on the variations in your workload as well as the types of work which has to be completed.

Who to Hire

Once your startup begins to expand, your main priorities will also expand. From product development, to reaching potential customers, to actually getting paying customers, to keeping those customers, the type of roles you need filled in your startup will change over time. When you are entirely focused on product development, you will have to hire or retain the services of more developers than customer service personnel but as you develop a fairly large client base, you will have to commit more in customer success so as to strengthen your chances of keeping them. Hence, deciding who to hire will be closely connected to the stage your startup is at.

In addition, decisions about who to hire will be based on the existing skill set in your startup: identifying the particular skills or experience gaps within your team. To keep track of this, you may possibly need to survey your team's skills or competencies, in comparison to the types of work your startup is actually doing, to ensure that as their workload changes, you are able to easily notice where there are gaps, and hire more individuals to fill up those gaps before they turn into a big issue.

When to Hire

Premature hiring can make you short of cash, and a late hiring can leave your team functioning ineffectively under a growing workload. Knowing when to hire is a delicate act that must be balanced:

• Can you bring on a new hire without being stretched for cash?

• Do you have enough workload to justify recruiting an additional employee?

• Do you have sufficient time to recruit and complete the onboarding process for a new hire, before your team becomes swamped by their workload?

A startup founder has to constantly juggle time, money and workload when starting out, because the three factors are always changing. For your first few employees, you will know when to hire probably through gut instinct: a sense that the workload is overwhelming your existing team and that you need to expand your team. In contrast, later recruitments requires strategic technique such as preparing planned hires months before hiring, and spotting major financial and workload signals that will indicate you're right on for hiring new employees.

A Short Note on Investment

Sourcing for funding will remarkably influence your hiring strategy and blueprint. While raising investments will give you the capital you need to recruit the best talents, it may also open you to pressure from investors demanding that you expand your team more quickly than you need.

CREATING A HIRING PROCESS FOR YOUR STARTUP

Hiring mistakes can destabilize your entire startup team, therefore it is important to have a clearly defined hiring process. Early-stage startups don't hire regularly, so you need to have a process in place as soon as possible, to guide you through the steps so that nothing is overlooked or forgotten.

After you've written a job description and begun advertising the vacancy, applications should start rolling in. There are five stages you need to follow: from application to making a hire, to help manage the hiring process in a simple and easy way.

1) Screening Written Applications

The first step of the process will be to screen written applications. Screening will initially involve you juxtaposing applications with the required skillset that you listed in the job description. Applicants who don't meet your 'must-have' requirements will automatically be removed from consideration. There may also be other red flags you may have identified, that suggest that a particular applicant will be a poor fit for your startup's culture and values. After identifying the good-fit candidates, you can then proceed with them to the next step. Integrate some kind of practical skills test into your hiring process for an idea of how they work.

2) Practical Skills Test

The practical skills test will vary based on the role you're recruiting for. You can conduct it as part of the interview, or as one more stage to eliminate candidates before reaching the interview level.

Conducting this test helps you to know that their practical skills are exactly what you expect them to be, and it's also an effective method of gaining insight into not-so- substantial traits like attention to detail, response to feedback and the ability to work effectively.

3) In-Person Interview

When at the in-person interview stage, you should be certain that based on their resume, candidates are a great fit for the job. To have reached that point, they will have displayed the fact that they possess the skills and the requirements included in the job description and that they can succeed in the role. Hence, interviews should not focus so much on quizzing the applicants on their skills and knowledge of the job, rather be more focused on ensuring that candidates will be a good culture fit for your company's values. You should also confirm that your interviews for a particular role all have the same structure, so that each candidate answers the same questions. This is in order to compare candidates objectively, and to help you stay impartial, not preferring one to another because of a perceived gap in one area, due to the fact that it wasn't covered in the interview.

4) Communicating with Unsuccessful Applicants

Responding to unsuccessful applicants is an often-overlooked part of the hiring process, but it's crucial that you do this in a timely fashion: don't make applicants wait for weeks just to hear that they've been unsuccessful at interview. Responding in a prompt fashion to candidates who were unsuccessful and going as far as providing them with helpful feedback from their interview can leave a good impression in their minds, such that despite the fact that you didn't hire them, they may recommend your company to others in their network. Or they might be more suited for a different role in the future, or possibly the same role when they have acquired additional skills and experience if you re-recruit later on.

DEVELOPING AN INTERVIEW PROCESS FOR YOUR STARTUP

As earlier mentioned, the interview stage should mean that you're already confident that the candidate has the required skills to be successful in the role. So, during the interview, you should concentrate on gaining more in-depth knowledge of them and figuring out how much of a good fit they would be with the rest of your team. What structure should your interviews take in order to gain the best insight into how working with each candidate would be like?

1) Introductions

As tempting as it is to go straight to the interview, try to introduce yourself and the other team members who will be conducting the interview with you in the first few minutes. Take time to explain the structure of the interview to them - if different team members will be leading different parts of the interview, if the candidate will be performing a practical task as part of the interview - and then allow them to introduce themselves.

2) Assess Culture Fit

You should first define the key values of your startup, in order to help you form questions that will enable you evaluate a candidate's culture fit. After this, you can then develop some questions that are in line with that value. Here are some examples of the questions you can ask:

• Transparency - Which is more important: transparency or confidentiality? Why?

• Smart work vs hard work- Which is the better option, a total solution that takes effect in 6 months or an 80%-perfect solution that takes effect in 3 months? Why?

• Self-improvement - What personal or professional habits have you imbibed to aid your growth and enhance your skills?

These questions will give you an insight into candidates' personal and professional values, and how they think, prioritize and what they're passionate about.

3) Discuss the Practical Task

If you'd earlier asked applicants to execute a practical task ahead if the interview stage, make sure you discuss this for a while. Alongside helping them understand the task's connection to their daily roles in the company, it will also provide you with a better insight into their thoughts process, their attitude towards the task, and the amount of time and effort they put into executing it.

4) Inquire About On-the-Job Practicalities

As a part of the interview process, you should also evaluate the practicalities of recruiting a certain candidate. If they won't be working from home, inquire about their transportation, if commuting will pose a problem for them. However if your team is completely remote, inquire about their time zones and work set-up: if they have a space at home dedicated solely to work or if they'll be exploring other options for a work space. Also ask about their salary expectations. If you added compensation information to your job advert, their salary expectations should align with yours by the time they reach the interview stage.

5) Give Candidates Opportunities To Ask Questions

Even if candidates asked questions during the interview, you should still end the interview by pointedly asking if they have further questions. In addition, give them your email so they can contact you after the interview if they have follow-up questions, or later remember something they'd like further clarification on.

The ultimate aim of the interviews you conducted is to help you choose the most suitable candidate for the job and for your team. Grading your candidates based on practical fit, culture fit, and their capabilities, depending on your evaluation of their practical task is the most impartial as well as the simplest way to do this.

You can try this recommended weighting split: 50% culture fit; 25% practical fit; 25% practical task. Recruiting the wrong fit can irreparably damage your startup, so it is vital that you find someone who is a good fit for your existing team. This method of grading candidates enables you to objectively compare them, in order to choose the candidate best suited to your team.

NEW EMPLOYEE ONBOARDING PROCESS

Taking on new hires will markedly impact the whole of your team. It is possible that in their first few weeks of working together, your team's collective output will decrease as your new team member gets used to their new role, despite having an additional member.

Your new hire's onboarding experience is directly related to the amount of time it takes for them to get to grips with their workload, so keep this in mind before they join. Below are the six most vital things to focus on during onboarding:

1) Meet the Team

Obviously, you should introduce the new starter to your existing team. Do this as early as you can on their first day. Use names and ensure that your new employee knows what each person works on, to help them when they need to make specific queries.

A most productive resource that has been in use in the world of startups for new starters is a who's who Trello board or any other like it. It includes everyone's name, photo, job title and areas of specialization. Although you can include as much detail or as little as you want, the tool's simplicity makes it an extremely effective reference point for new hires in a new workspace.

2) Key Tools and Technologies

You'll want to get your new employee up to speed as soon as possible, so make sure you have all the key tools and technologies set-up and ready to go. For instance, you may have their computer and an email account set up. Accounts for key technology like project management and time-tracking tools set up prior to their resumption to help save time on their first day.

It also means that they have access to the important tools they'd need every day right off the bat.

(3) Socialise Outside Of The Office
Have a team lunch or get drinks after work to help your new starter become familiar with your team, away from the constant pressure of work. This is a relatively easy method of helping your new hire feel like they're part of the team.
A sure-fire way to achieve this is to go out of the office. A number of startups are attempting to break away from the stiff-lipped culture of formal establishments and create a relaxed office culture, so to this end they may have takeaway delivered to the office often, or have drinks in the office on some days. However, going out of the office means that your team can focus on socializing with each other without work, and don't have to eat/drink as quickly as they can and then go straight back to work.

4) Check-In on A Regular Basis
Don't stay in your office with the assumption that they're fine and have everything they need - doing that is telling your new employee that they're still an outsider. You can further help them settle in by providing sufficient support - particularly if your existing team is a small, very tight-knit startup team. You might want to ask another team member - someone more accessible than you or your co-founders - to dedicate some time to the new hire when they need to make small, daily queries.
In addition, prioritize catching up with them regularly, maybe after their first week, first two weeks, or first month, in order to give them the chance to ask any bigger questions they may have and provide feedback on their initial performance.

5) Ramp-up

The onboarding process aims to supplying your new hire with the skills and information needed to progress from the level of knowing next to nothing on their first day, to the level where they are a full member of the team. So, your onboarding process needs to ramp-up slowly over their first weeks. Their first day may be very light, as a lot of time is spent on meeting the rest of your team and general orientation and administration, with their first week involving mainly information-sharing and learning about their role. Following this, the next few weeks should have their workload planned to shift gradually from learning about their tasks to performing it. In the case of developers, it may mean pairing the new hire with a more experienced member of your team or marketers could create content drawing from an outline provided for them, and for your sales team, the new employee could sit in on sales calls and gradually go from just listening to making the call themselves.

6) Don't Overlook the Small Stuff

It is quite easy to become so caught up in the big picture - getting your new hire settled in and introducing them to the existing team - such that you are likely to overlook a ton of the little stuff. New employees normally have a lot of questions and this isn't out of place. They usually ask about things like your startup's mode of operation, lunch hours, office hours, using the printer, claiming expenses, pay day etc. If your startup is expanding at breathtaking speed and you're hiring a lot of people in a short amount of time, a better option is to develop some sort of welcome pack that answers these seemingly trivial but frequently asked questions. Having this welcome pack means you don't have to answer the same questions each a new employee asks, since they can get their answers from it. That way they don't feel like they're constantly interrupting to ask questions.

CONCLUSION

A successful startup is difficult to build. You need to develop the right product and still have enough resources at your disposal to help you grow faster than your competitors.

That appears to mean you often juggle three competing priorities as a founder:

• Money - is your supply of cash is drying up? When do you need your next funding round?

• Product - is your product something people actually want? Do you need to switch products to align closely with your customers' needs?

• Team - where can find your next hire? Who ought to be your next hire, and how are they going to blend into your current team structure?

It is now completely obvious that hiring process for startup companies is one of the most important, ongoing considerations and one of the biggest hurdles you are going to face. A lot of founders try to set up a startup which adds value to the lives of millions of people, while failing to understand that team members are those they can significantly influence the most, and not their potential clients. Building a great team is a necessity to help develop a great company culture - a culture that excites and impassions employees towards their work and solving problems for customers.

Put in mind that an early wrong hire can literally break your enterprise, but having a really good team in an enterprise with a vibrant, positive and inclusive culture can be the advantage your startup requires to surpass your competitors. So for that simple fact, a detailed recruitment process must be implemented beforehand to help you to effectively manage the critical recruitment missteps that could damage an otherwise up-and-coming startup.

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