Attracting Qualified AV Candidates

AVIXA

Audiovisual and Integrated Experience
Association

Best Practices Throughout the Hiring Process

With so many individuals looking for employment, it can be difficult to sift through the flood of applicants and identify those individuals who will be a great fit for your organization and your customers. This document attempts to identify key elements of the hiring process and how to increase the likelihood of finding a great next team member.

As with anything it is always worth considering that finding great individuals for your teams is as much about your company as it is about the candidates. As the title of this article suggests, truly great employees often aren't found, they are attracted to your company for some reason.

Write a Great Job Ad

More Than a Job Description

The purpose of a job ad is to attract the talent you need by selling them on your company. Your ad will give potential candidates their first impression and it is important to make an impact. Try to dismiss any notion that the job you have is something they need. This notion will rarely turn up the people you're looking for. Instead remember that it is you who need them, and do everything you can to put your best foot forward.

Make Your Post Search-Friendly

Before candidates can even consider your company as a good fit for them, they need to be able to find you. Think of the search terms the person looking for a position might utilize, then use them in your posting. If you create an extremely relevant job title and description, it is far more likely your ad will be found. Also, use terms that are important to the candidate in the body of your ad. Is your ideal candidate someone with a certification? Make it known! Be sure to take the time to verify the potential hire's certification is valid if an offer is to be made. If the individual has a CTS®, for example, you can check their status here: avixa.org/ctssearch. Another great tool to ensure industry knowledge is the AVIXA™ installation microcredentials, avixa.org/installmicrocreds.

Use and visit the sites that your candidates are likely to use. This will help you better understand how they will be looking for you and what your competition might be up to. This might help you find ways to differentiate your company.
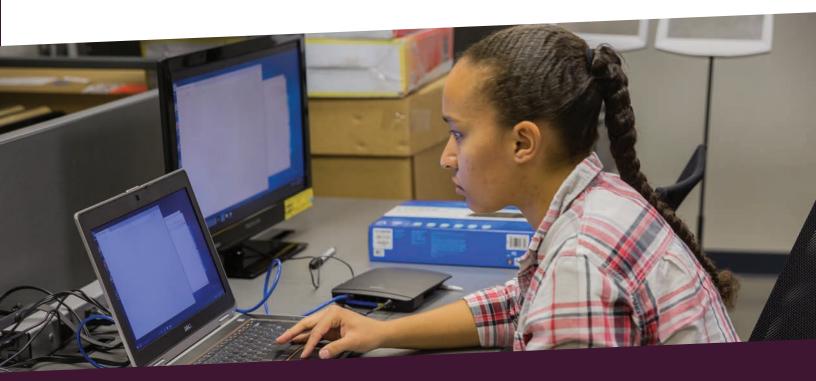
Stand Out

Use language in your posting that will get candidates excited about the idea of working with you. Give your potential hires real insight into your company's culture and mission. All of this is easier if you remember this ad is about them; speaking directly to the person you're looking for. Make the body easy to follow; break the content up into subheads and lists. Lastly, consider going visual. Plain text doesn't exactly inspire. Include photos of your best work and perhaps your team or special events.

Get Into the Details

You aren't writing a job description; you are writing a job ad, and the purpose of that ad is to get that team member you are looking for to apply. Identify what is relevant for the job and express it clearly. You'll need to be specific in what you are looking for but it is also important you don't drown the reader with details on who they will report to, office hours, or what your cellphone usage policy is. You want to keep their interest. Be sure that the duties and requirements of the job are easily understood and avoid using jargon that may not be known to all.

It is very important to distinguish between the must-haves and the nice-to-haves. Let them know what the position pays. This is paramount. You will absolutely attract more candidates by being honest about the pay scale of the job, and you will also save yourself time by not having to interview candidates who want 50 percent more in salary than you are prepared to pay. Be sure to describe all the benefits your company offers, and why your company is a great place to work. Remember, not all benefits have a monetary value.

Make Your Ad Work for You

You will no doubt have many applicants to sift through. One thing you can do to make the process easier is to use your ad as a filter. Let the candidate know that their application will only be considered if (x, y, and z). Additionally, you may ask them to do something outside of the usual resume and cover letter; for instance,

"tell us something about yourself that we would be surprised to know," or "what are your top 5 bucket list items?" This type of tool can give you great insights into who this person is and the kinds of things they are passionate about; giving you an idea of how they might fit with your organization.

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Get Serious About Placement

Avoid websites that are free to post your job ad. You'll likely need to spend some cash to get your ad in front of the people you want to see it. Also, depending upon the position, consider tapping trade schools, colleges, or state work placement programs. If you've tried these things and are coming up short, it may be worth the investment to work with a recruiter.

The AVIXA Foundation's Grant Program, avixa.org/grant, is intended to mentor young professionals entering the industry, while filling needs in your organization. The program provides tuition reimbursement to students enrolled for degrees applicable to the AV industry, as well as paid industry internships to help them gain experience. Recipients also work toward a CTS certification, making them a more knowledgeable prospect.

Another great option is the AVIXA Career portal, avixa.org/careers, which is a great place for companies to post job openings, as well as a suitable way for employees to look for available positions. As an employer, you are also able to search through a database of resumes to help fill an open position.

Conduct a Great Interview

There is no doubt that the in-person interview is hugely important when considering a new hire. The interview will not only help you learn more about potential candidates, it will set an impression for the candidate as to the kinds of things that are important to your organization. Therefore, it is critical to conduct a great interview. Below are some tips that will set you up for success:

Make Them Feel Comfortable

If your goal is to get a true sense of who your candidate is, it is important to make sure they feel comfortable during the interview. Be willing to meet at a time that works for them. Taking time off in the middle of the day can be stressful. Interviews should be held in a private setting, free from distractions. Offer them coffee, tea, or water.

Help them be prepared for the interview by letting them know what your office environment and dress code are like, if they are expected to bring anything, suggest that they prepare questions of their own, and let them know the types of things you'd like to discuss. This will go a long way to making them feel at ease and will avoid wasting anyone's time. It will also give you some insight into how they listen and follow directions. Send interview questions to the potential candidate ahead of time. Adopting this practice will yield much more thoughtful responses. It's the difference between someone having the time to really think about the question versus just giving the first answer that comes into their head because they're on the spot about it.

Be Transparent

A job that sounds too good to be true probably is, and your best candidates understand this. Answer their questions honestly, allow them to see the workplace, even speak with other team members if they like. Sell your company not just on its strong suits but also areas where improvements can be made, and your commitment to do so.

Be Prepared

Write the questions you intend to ask ahead of time, or at a minimum bullet point the things you know you need to cover. If you don't, inevitably you'll remember three or four things you forgot to discuss right after the candidate leaves. This will also show them you respect their time and that this interview is important to you too.

Ask some questions that will assess their behavioral, logical, and reasoning skills. Use real situations, and ask for their solutions. This is guaranteed to elicit far more useful responses than "my biggest weakness is that I care too much."

Review the Job Description

It is important that the interviewer understands fully the role and its requirements. Make sure your job description is rock solid prior to the time of interview. Having this taken care of will ensure you cover all your bases during the interview and will let the candidate self-assess if the position is a good fit for them. If you leave any duties or expectations out of the job description, it can feel like a bait-and-switch to the employee once they are hired and discover the true scope of the position. To avoid this, having Key Result Areas (KRAs) and defined performance metrics makes it clear how the prospective hire will define success, and sets expectations for what their primary role will be.

Having a well-defined career path that you can lay out will also demonstrate that a career is being considered, not just an immediate need that could disappear down the road. A timeline for skills, training, and compensation provide information about your company that will set the expectation should they be brought onboard.

Leave Space

It is important not to monopolize the conversation. Remember that the person you are interviewing likely has as many questions about the company and leadership as you do about them. Leave room in the conversation for him/her to ask their questions and tell you what is important to them.

Know When to Sell

Don't waste your (or their) time by giving an exhaustive rundown on the history, operations, and culture of your company before you are sure that the candidate might be right for the job. Keep things light for the first part of the interview and give them a chance to tell you about themselves. Once you think you want at least a second interview, then use time to flesh out the story of your company.

Now What?

Consider hosting secondary cultural interviews for a narrowed list of candidates. Get other members of your team involved. Maybe start with some additional or deeper questioning, then go out to a meal or better yet, do an activity together; see how they behave socially. This can be key in your understanding of how the candidate might work with your team or interact with your clients. Don't leave candidates in the lurch. Let them know promptly if they won't be hired and let those you are considering know your timeline for decision-making.

Vet Candidates Carefully

Making a bad hire can have a big impact on your organization; often costing money, time, and even emotional turmoil. Before you conduct your grand slam of an interview, do some homework on potential candidates.

Do Your Research

These days there is a lot of information available to you on the internet. Social networks and online search engines can provide a lot of insight into work experience, volunteer experience, and what types of things are important to the candidate.

Know the History

Do a thorough review of the companies that candidates have worked for. What do you know about those companies? Do they operate similarly or are they opposites from your organization? Talk to provided references, and if you can, people at their previous employers. Conduct background checks and be upfront that you are going to do so. Give candidates an opportunity during their interview to inform you of anything you might find.

Get Them in the Game

Looking to hire a technician? Test their skills in termination, infrastructure install, reading drawings, conducting site visits, or wiring racks. Hiring a project manager? Ask them for project photos, examples of successful integrations, instances where they faced major challenges and what they did about it. Looking to hire a design engineer? Ask them for reference drawings of systems they've designed, find out what product lines they favor and why, ask them to mock up a system based on a set of requirements. Of course, these are just a few suggestions, but the idea is to get them into real-world scenarios and find out how they deal with things. Having them work alongside your employees for a day gives them a better understanding of what the job entails, and gives your team a chance to see them in action and sign off on the hire. Nobody understands your culture better than your current employees, so having them meet with the candidate, answer questions about the position and the organization, and feel out how they would fit is highly valuable.

Hire for Culture

You can help to tweak or refine someone's skills to fit your business process in a relatively short amount of time, but you'll be hard pressed to change the demeanor that they have spent a lifetime cultivating. Therefore, it is vital to make sure that your candidate's behavior, values, and attitude align with the core values of your organization. Having people on your team who don't fit in this way commonly ends in one of two ways:

The new employee will become frustrated and leave the organization

The employee will frustrate others to the point that they leave the organization. Protect against toxicity in the workplace by making sure your team is holistic. As the adage goes "culture eats strategy for breakfast."

Another method to make sure they are a good fit is aptitude and personality testing. It is crucial to hire the right person for the right seat. These tests will provide strengths and weaknesses compared to average scores for the open position, methods for communicating and working effectively with the candidate should they get the job, and can even provide insightful questions to ask during the interview that may bring up red flags otherwise unnoticed.

The other positive of job aptitude testing is to make sure the candidate is placed in a position that will help them achieve satisfaction in their new position. An overqualified candidate, or a candidate whose personality does not align with the skills and tasks required of the open position can quickly find themselves unhappy and looking for other options, or failing to find success. A good fit is rewarding for the organization and the employee.
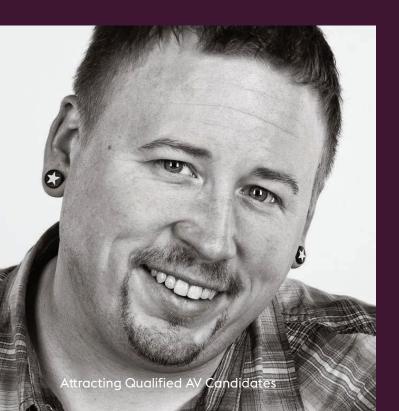
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At the end of the day, the culture of your company is a relationship. It is how your company relates to the team members who work inside it, and how your team members relate to each other. Like any relationship, it takes work from everyone involved to have a great one. There is no magic wand that can be waved that will give a company great culture. Spouting words and catch phrases about what your culture is, does not make it so. To have a great culture, everyone needs to believe in the mission at hand, understand why the mission exists, and be all-in to make it happen. When this takes place, everyone sees clearly the benefit to their lives and the lives of their team members and beyond.

To quote one of my favorite speakers, Simon Sinek: 'The opportunity is not to discover the perfect organization for ourselves. The opportunity is to build the perfect organization for each other.'

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Andrew Birklid, CTS-D,
Director of Operations,
Tempest Technologies

Hire From Within

Take Care of Your Best

Chances are pretty good that you have some team members within your organization who are considered rock stars. It is important to take care of these employees so that they remain loyal to your organization. While it may seem like a painful prospect to lose them from their current role when promoting them into a new position, consider what it would be like to not have them on your team at all.

Less Risk

A 2012 study by Matthew Bidwell of the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania found that "external hires get significantly lower performance evaluations for their first two years on the job than do internal workers who are promoted into similar jobs. They also have higher exit rates, and they are paid 18% to 20% more." These outside hires are also at "a much greater risk of being let go during the first few years," meaning you may make a significant investment in training someone only to let them go later. Armed with this knowledge, consider that it may be smarter for your organization to promote into higher ranking positions from within and bring new "green" employees in to fill the vacancies in lower ranking positions.

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Hiring from within is essential to our business model. To maintain an incredible culture, we promote from within wherever possible. This ensures that all levels of our organization are filled with people who love who we are. We care for our team members just as much as we care for our clients, and hiring from within allows us to invest in our people and give back to them and their families. Our best leaders all started out as technicians and now lead our Sales, Production, and Customer Support. It really is the very best way to operate because our leaders are fully committed to our values and our vision.

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Sam Jordan,
General Manager,
Electro Acoustics, Inc.

Make Them an Offer

Set Expectations

The offer letter is the time to get into some of the nitty-gritty details such as who will they report to, how does insurance work, how will they be compensated, how much PTO is offered and how does it accrue. We advise setting a clear expectation that the first 90 days are an exploratory period for the company and the employee alike. You should reconvene with new hires at the 90-day mark and discuss how things are going, if everyone feels it is a good fit, and what if anything needs to be changed or improved for the long-term benefit of the relationship. If things aren't working as expected and can't be reconciled, this may also be the time to part ways with no hard feelings (remember you set clear expectations to begin with). If all goes well after 90 days, cast the employee into full-time status.

Don't put anything in the offer letter that you can't back up later. For instance, don't promise training opportunities if you aren't prepared to deliver on them. Likewise, don't leave anything out of the offer letter that you will expect from the employee later. For instance, don't ask the employee to spend weeks on the road if you didn't tell them it was a requirement of the job in their offer letter. Be in communication here, this is a contract between two parties.

Compensate for Value

Top talent is usually worth the price of investment. Be competitive with your compensation -- you don't need as many people when you have a few with loads of talent. Also set an easy to understand roadmap for advancement. How and why does your company promote individuals? What are the kinds of things you look for in your "dream team"? Are there salary increases available for industry certifications? All things that your new employee should understand from the onset to ensure their happiness and success with the company. Some considerations are geography, make sure the compensation is adjusted for the area you are hiring for. Additionally, using industry resources as a guide for job-related pay scale is a good tool for creating consistency for skill-based compensation, as well as helping to stay competitive.

How Does Your Pay Compare?

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Check out the AVIXA Compensation and Benefits report

avixa.org/marketintel

Use Employee Referrals

The AV industry is a pretty tight-knit community and chances are good that the people already working for you have a pretty broad network around them. As people tend to gravitate to others with similar views and behaviors, why not ask your "rock stars" to make introductions with potential candidates? The company doesn't get a free lunch on this one though; put in place a compensation program for their efforts. Give them a little something for referring a candidate who lands an interview. Give them a generous bonus if you make a hire who becomes a full-time employee.

Retaining Top Performers

There is no greater impact to your company than losing a top performer. Not only will you be faced with the costs of hiring and training an individual to replace them, there are impacts to company morale and culture. There's no reason you can't keep your top performers happy and producing extraordinary results. So why then do top performers leave? Common complaints during exit interviews suggest:

• **They feel undervalued** (praise not given)
• **The culture has turned toxic** (problem employees not dealt with, communication is poor)
• **They have no idea what is expected of them** (lacking clear roles and training)
• **There is way too much expected of them** (company is complacent or taking for granted)
• **They are not fairly compensated for their work** (wage and benefits are greater elsewhere)
• **They feel they've hit a ceiling within the organization** (don't see any room to grow)
• **The leadership doesn't hear them** (does more speaking than listening, doesn't try new ideas)
• **The leadership makes decisions that just don't make sense** (decisions made in a vacuum outside of the people performing the work)

There are some critical steps your company can take to ensure you don't find yourself in this place.

Be in Communication

Talk with your team frequently, and let them know how valuable they are. Make your praise public when appropriate. This will not only cement for that individual that the comments are authentic, but will show the rest of your team what you're looking for from a great employee. If team members are being told something is wrong more often than they are being praised for their efforts, something is out of balance with leadership. Create a culture of connecting with your team, not just around the business at hand, but understanding what's going on for them personally, what they're excited about, and what they're struggling with.

Show Them the Path

Provide a clear and achievable pathway for growth -- both personally and professionally. People who excel at what they do generally like clearly defined goals that they can set their sights on, and move toward. People who produce well also need to remain engaged. If they feel topped out, they may become tired or unfulfilled in their role and begin looking elsewhere for a position that challenges them. People learn and grow the fastest when they are operating at the edge of their comfort zone and abilities.

Be a Team That Wins Together

Celebrate victories no matter the size. Keeping a culture that continually reinforces the good in people's efforts, and does not dwell on the past will go a long way to making people feel valued. When problems do arise, address them as a learning opportunity and grow together. Often this type of value is more important to an individual than monetary value.

Be Open

Make sure your people know what you expect of them, and equally as important, what they can expect from leadership and the rest of the team. Expectations are healthy, if everyone is aware of them. They are not healthy if they are kept hidden and become surprises later. Provide clear job descriptions for the entire organization, and make them public. Don't be afraid to tell people when they aren't delivering something you need, or when they are performing work you don't need them to do. If presented in a constructive way, they'll take the feedback happily!

A Company That Learns Together, Grows Together

Have a killer on-boarding process, and offer continuing education to keep your team feeling supported and growth-oriented. Routinely offer internal training on your business tools and processes and make sure leadership understands what is important to their team around education. One pitfall that will damage the company's integrity is promising educational opportunities during the hiring process and then not following through later. Don't falsely sell potential hires on your company benefits if you aren't prepared to stand by the commitments you make.

Don't Stand in the Way

Organically grown leaders are usually in the position they are because they are exceedingly good at doing the work of the company. The trouble with this is that these leaders often have trouble shifting focus from doing the work, to supporting the people who do the work. Define the destination and the timeline for success and don't focus too heavily on the path it took for your team to get there. Leaders must empower their team and trust them to succeed.

Acknowledgments