

## 19.4: Start-up Culture

### Learning Objectives

- Discuss how to hire for a start-up culture and environment



If you're an HR professional in a start-up company, you're already a unicorn: start-up companies like flexible cultures that can change directions quickly, without a whole lot of structure or too many rules. HR is all about structure and rules, so founders of a start-up aren't likely to stop and say, "Hey, wouldn't it be fun if we had an HR function to keep us from doing the things we want to do as quickly as we'd like to do them?"

HR often gets sidelined, and the good habits a start-up should be establishing around recruiting and hiring practices quickly go sideways. The same things happen to a start-up that would happen to any business that neglected to establish a sound hiring process—the wrong employees are chosen, a toxic work environment develops, good employees are lost to competing businesses. Maybe it's better to have some HR structure in a start-up after all, then, wouldn't you think?

As an HR professional in a start-up, you need to be as flexible and adaptable to change as the rest of the business. And when you're hiring employees that will thrive in the start-up culture and environment, here are some things to keep in mind over and above the standard to-do list.

Put together job descriptions that reflect the "wish list" of the start-up but be realistic about what you're looking for—the leaders of the start-up would love someone who has deep marketing experience and can code, too, but that person doesn't likely exist. Develop your job descriptions based on real-life examples, determine competitive pay, and establish standards across the board that will keep employees happy and feeling like they've been treated fairly.

### Recruit Before the Money is There to Hire



Start-ups are quick to pull the trigger when they find an investor, and that often means hiring people they need. So, start building a network and candidate pool before you need it. Understanding the needs of the business and reaching out, with the help of start-up leaders, to start relationships with potential employees will help the hiring process move along at a speedy rate.

Know that you're looking for specific "start-up" qualities—Ben Yoskovitz, a start-up entrepreneur and blogger, cited some of the things he looked for in a prospective employee:<sup>[1]</sup>

- **Previous start-up experience.** Candidates who have a resume full of large corporation experience aren't likely to be as successful in a start-up culture.
- **Previous small business experience.** Even if the candidate doesn't have start-up experience, having some small business experience can show that she's interested in working in small teams and taking on more responsibilities.

- **Side projects.** Candidates whose resumes features open source projects or side projects that can be a sign that they like to try new things and work hard.
- **Experience in foreign markets.** A successful start-up employee needs to think outside the box, and spending time working in foreign markets adds a different dimension to a candidate's world view. This could be a handy thing.
- **Social media presence.** Particularly if the start-up is technology-based, a good deal can be learned about techie candidates from their Twitter or Instagram accounts. As a rule, they don't engage as frequently or with the same quality on LinkedIn.
- **Creativity.** Yoskovitz encourages hiring managers to ask for a demonstration of creativity when candidates apply for a position. "It's a great filtering tool. If you ask people to do something out of the ordinary and creative with their job application and they don't, you can scrap them immediately. And if you don't ask them and they do something interesting and creative, even better!"<sup>[2]</sup>

## Consider Remote Employees

Start-ups often require people with unique skills, and you may not be able to source them locally. Put together a plan that will help you, as the HR professional, easily welcome remote employees into the culture of the company.

## Consider an Employee Referral Program

Often, a start-up company's current employees have encountered others whose skills would be a good professional fit for the company. Encourage them to reach out and help with the recruiting process by offering a bonus for those that do.

Once you've established the kind of candidate you're looking for and generated some resources and a pool of candidates that you can work with, it's time to bring some of them in for interviews. What do you ask the candidate looking to come to work for your company? The Muse, a website that declares they are a "go-to destination for the next gen workforce to research companies and careers" (and have 75 million readers), interviewed 13 start-up founders who found a candidate was most successful when candidates:<sup>[3]</sup>

- could demonstrate accomplishments in previous positions
- had solutions to the company's problems in mind
- knew and researched the company's competitors, and
- admitted things s/he didn't know

They also indicated that they felt confident when a candidate was well-networked, asked smart questions, knew about the company upfront and used the product. This line of conversation, along with questions about the candidate's values and adaptability, should help an HR professional find the right fit.

### ? Practice Question

<https://assessments.lumenlearning.co...essments/18257>

Hiring for a start-up's unique needs can be a challenge, but there are plenty of candidates out there that are looking for the fast pace and constant change that a start-up environment offers. It's just a matter of finding the right fit for your business.

And then it's a matter of keeping those newly found employees engaged and happy. We'll talk about that next.

## Sources

"9 Ways to Recruit the Best Employees for Your Start Up," Ayetikin Tank, Entrepreneur Magazine, February 15, 2017

1. "8 Things to Look for When Hiring for a Start Up," Ben Yokovitz, The Instigator Blog, April 10, 2010. ↩
2. Ibid. ↩
3. "13 Start-up Founders Share: How to Nail Your Next Interview," Young Entrepreneur Council. The Muse ↩

## Contributors and Attributions

- Start-up Culture. **Authored by:** Freedom Learning Group. **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** CC BY: Attribution

CC licensed content, Shared previously

- **Authored by:** rawpixel. **Provided by:** Pixabay. **Located at:** [pixabay.com/photos/african-descent-american-analyzing-3472462/](https://pixabay.com/photos/african-descent-american-analyzing-3472462/). **License:** CC0: No Rights Reserved. **License Terms:** Pixabay License

- **Authored by:** blackmachinex. **Provided by:** Pixabay. **Located at:** [pixabay.com/photos/office-people-team-group-woman-4480198/](https://pixabay.com/photos/office-people-team-group-woman-4480198/). **License:** [CC0: No Rights Reserved](#). **License Terms:** Pixabay License

---

This page titled [19.4: Start-up Culture](#) is shared under a [CC BY 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Nina Burokas](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.