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# How to Hire a Rock Star Engineer

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## Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Why This Guide?</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>How to Hire a Rock Star</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>How <i>Not</i> to Hire a Rock Star</b>	<b>2</b>

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**A guide to interviewing engineers at our company**

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**tl;dr**

We want Rock Star Engineers joining our team, so:

- *We hire aptitude*, not just knowledge
- We divvy up several *interview topics* among the team, covering technical skills, commercial software craftsmanship, and team fit
- Every interviewer must reach a *yes or no decision*—we can't hire “maybes”
- We make and *follow a plan* so that interviews are efficient, effective, and respectful

[Wondering what this guide is and where it came from? See the *about* page.]

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## 1 Why This Guide?

Our company is undergoing a period of dramatic change, in its products, its business, and even its approach to engineering. We're going to need more people—and the *right* people—to meet the opportunities ahead:

- **Hiring well is critical to our success**

We must rapidly grow the engineering team. But we have to grow it carefully. A single bad hire can drag down the entire team.

- **Hiring takes time and effort**

A full interview round, covering all of the areas we consider important, can take 4–5 hours or more. Trying to shortchange the interviewing leads to bad hires.

- **Hiring is a team sport**

With this much hiring and interviewing, every engineer will need to participate—not just managers and leads. (And besides, don't you want some say in who's joining the team?)

This guide is an attempt to make sure that everyone understands how we vet candidates, agrees on what we're looking for, and that everyone's time interviewing is well-spent.

## 2 How to Hire a Rock Star

Hiring great engineers involves time and effort, but it's not really that complicated. What it takes is:

- Understanding our *key hiring philosophy*
- Covering all of the *important topics* during the interviews
- Having an efficient, effective *interview plan*

This guide goes into detail on these areas. It also covers some *special situations* that may arise.

## 3 How *Not* to Hire a Rock Star

For comparison, here are some actual hiring approaches I've encountered (and why they just didn't work):

- “*His resume looks good enough, and we can't afford to wait for a better match.*”

(The job market was really competitive and we needed “warm bodies fast.” Problem is, his resume exaggerated his skills, his bugs delayed our release, and we had to go in and undo virtually all of his code.)

- “*He's really friendly and easy to get along with. Perfect team fit.*”

(Every interviewer had a great conversation with him—the *same* great conversation, it turned out. Nobody went deep technically. After he was on board, we realized he couldn't cut it and had to fire him, which was awful for everyone.)

- “*She's highly-recommended by [respected employee], so we shouldn't ask tough questions in the interview.*”

(We were afraid a challenging interview would alienate her. But our softball questions gave her the impression we were technical lightweights, and she took a job with a competitor.)