Four Ways Recruiters Build Trust With Engineering Managers

by Blane Shields

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In the technical recruiting game,
earning trust from your partner - aka
your hiring manager - is an imperative
edge. Just ask Neal Rosenblum, who
has spent his career sharpening his
recruiting skills at the most valuable
technology companies, including
Facebook, Google, and Apple.
His nearly two decades of talent
acquisition experience have led to
his proudest work today: Building
a world-class engineering team at
leading fintech startup WePay.

It's where he's crafted a process that commonly overcomes most stringent hiring goals, like onboarding 10 engineering interns within 2 weeks or hiring 18 developers within 16 weeks. What's his secret? His hard-won lesson is simple: "Our success is entirely because of our strong partnership with our engineering team."

Success for recruiters starts top down. If you don't build trust with the engineering leaders, your job is going to be an uphill battle, Neal once told me.

Everyone seems to understand trust, but how do you take steps to build it? I dug deep into the heart of this issue: What are some actionable ways you can start building a stronger relationship with your hiring manager... starting today? Here's a primer on the four pillars you need to know to build trust with engineering managers, VP of engineers, or directors.

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Open Communication: 'Speaking Engineer' with Closed-Off Engineering Managers

Most technical recruiters that I've come across share a common struggle: It's more difficult to get engineering managers to open up communication to get valuable feedback and alignment than, say, sales or marketing folks. Without strong communication, it's almost impossible to do your job well and earn the trust you deserve. But it's a complete myth that engineers are not communicative.

In fact, software development is a highly collaborative skill that requires development of communication skills. If you're feeling like your engineering manager is hard to approach, remember that it's not a matter of a gap in communication. Rather, it's a difference in communication style.

Developers are all about efficiency, quantitative thinking and cold hard facts. How can you solve for the fastest, most optimal solution? Approach every interaction with this optimality in mind. Here are some tactics to do so:

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## Tactics to Try

1. Use concise questions and answers

For example, "Which programming languages are mission-critical?" as opposed to "Here's a candidate who does C++, Java, and PHP. Does he work for you?"

2. Reverse engineer your process

Engineers like process. Talk about solutions by working backwards: In order "to source 15 PHP developers, we should attend PHP Experience, PHP World and International PHP Conference 2017."

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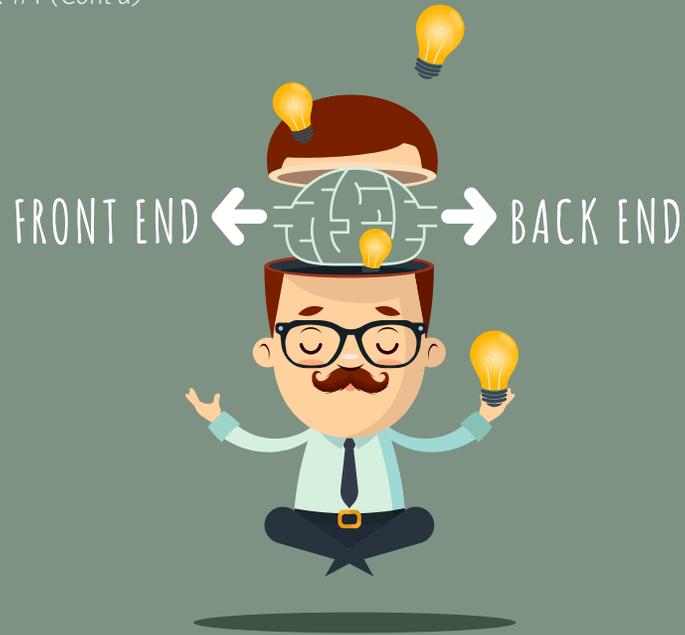
3. Learn their priorities, and relate it back to the technology stack

For example, say, "This Java engineering candidate will help you build the next generation of your enterprise app."

4. Be balanced with your emotions

A communication tip from systems engineer Byron Seastrunk: "If I show too much emotion while presenting to engineers, they think I'm in Sales. If I show too little while presenting to business development folks, they think I don't [like the candidate]…"

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Technical Competency: The Most Crucial Step to Understanding Technical Roles

As the talent acquisition leader, on the onset, you are the face of the engineering team for candidates. I can't emphasize this enough: Doing the work to truly understand the technical nuances of the people you are hiring is huge.

Average recruiters simply read the job requirements and then use keywords to find people's profiles that match. World-class recruiters, like Neal, for instance, know that investing a little time upfront to truly understand the technical roles pays off in a big way.

The next time you have an open technical req, ask your engineering manager to host a workshop for your recruiting team. There's only one goal: Make sure you understand how the technical role at hand impacts the engineering team at large.

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Technical Competency *(Cont'd)*

Ask your engineering manager to explain exactly how your engineering team, product roadmap and company mission will benefit from this role. Chances are, he or she will appreciate your taking the time to find the right skills.

Disclaimer: This exercise is not about learning how to code or memorizing technical specs. It's about asking "why" at least 4 or 5 times until you get to the heart of what types of candidates will make the biggest impact. As a bonus, this info on the candidate's impact will come in handy when you're convincing him or her to join the company.
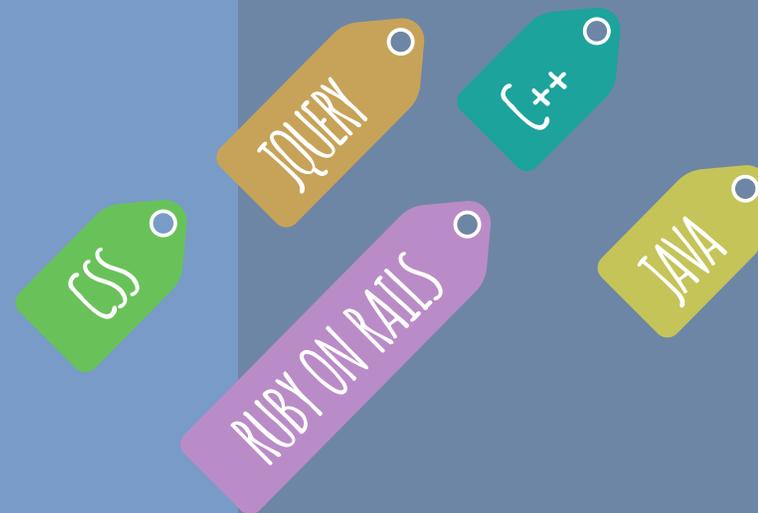
PRO TIP

Go beyond keywords. Ask "why" at least 3 times to understand the role's impact

For instance, it's fine to say that you need a front-end engineer with HTML, CSS3, experience with jQuery, and Ruby on Rails. You can scan through resumes, search boolean strings on LinkedIn and find people that seem good on paper. But what does all of this really mean to you beyond acronyms and technical jargon?

CSS

JQUERY

C++

RUBY ON RAILS

JAVA

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Reliability: Never Underestimate the Importance of Project Management Skills

Before Soham Mehta became a tech interview coach at Interview Kickstart, he was a director of engineering at Box. In working closely with technical recruiters to build and scale his team, he says that one critical way recruiters can build trust is by being killer project managers.

"For a hiring manager, hiring has many unpredictable or fluke factors." Mehta says. "I need to know that my technical recruiting partners aren't dropping the ball and letting candidates slip by."

Organization is key. Use a good ATS, and keep a record of everything, which brings us to our final pillar of trust....
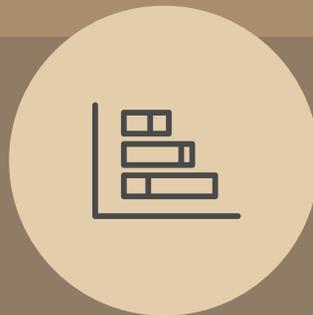

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Metrics are a Shield from the Unpredictability of Hiring

If you're not confident in your metrics, there's likely a bigger issue with your process. Metrics are the best way to speak the same language as your engineering manager (re: #1). Sit down and review...what are the items that you can quantify, benchmark:

How big is your pipeline?

How many have been sourced?

Numbers rejected at Stage 1, Stage 2?

"Make a spreadsheet for metrics and watch them like a hawk," Mehta says. This is essentially how engineers manage their projects: By breaking down each piece and then measuring its performance.

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METRICS

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It's how you can identify interesting patterns, learn what's working and where you need to double down.

For instance, when Soham was at Box, he had a strong feeling that certain proxies, like schools, weren't the best way to measure skills. So, he asked his technical recruiting partner to keep a look out for seemingly weak resumes that still had strong indications of skills otherwise, like a Github profile or other project-based achievements.

"There was a candidate which all other teams passed on, but my recruiter caught," Mehta says. "He came from an average school, but had strong footprint of shipping great stuff. He impressed some of our best engineers in the interviews and got hired."

That engineer is still at Box working at the core, most integral team.

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CONCLUSION

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Of course, it's hard for a technical recruiter to know or understand what to look for without walking in an engineering manager's shoes. It's why most people, again, fallback on the same proxies, like strong resumes, to hire talent. But the really great technical recruiters can build a strong foundation of trust with open communication, strong technical competency and reliability.

A big thank you to Soham Mehta for not only contributing to this article but also reading a draft.

ABOUT HACKERRANK

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HackerRank is a platform that ranks engineers solely based on their coding skills and helps companies discover talent and save time to hire. We're driving a new paradigm shift by eliminating resumes and creating opportunities for hundreds of thousands of programmers worldwide. Over 1,000 companies use HackerRank to build strong engineering teams.

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questions are broken down into three phases:

- Diving into the hiring manager's mind

- Understanding the role at hand

- Tweaking, tinkering and refining your process

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