Selling and closing

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If you're growing your team, you know that selling is part science and part art.

There are a lot of things candidates have in common when picking a job, but then there are many things that are highly personal. The art is understanding when to apply general best practices vs. when to tailor to each candidate.

The good news? If you're reading and implementing the steps in this guide, you're already going to make a good impression on the candidate. Your employer brand, interview process, outreach and other touchpoints all factor in to a candidate's decision to join your team. In other words: you're always closing.

This section will cover a framework for how candidates make decisions, and specific tactics / best practices for how to close at every step of the recruiting funnel.

In this guide:

Understanding candidate motivations

Getting to know the candidate's primary motivation for joining your company will allow you to frame your opportunity along the dimension that actually matters to them. The best way to do this is to ask discovery questions and listen, starting with your very first conversation.

Management consulting company ghSmart breaks this down into five categories, known as the five F's:

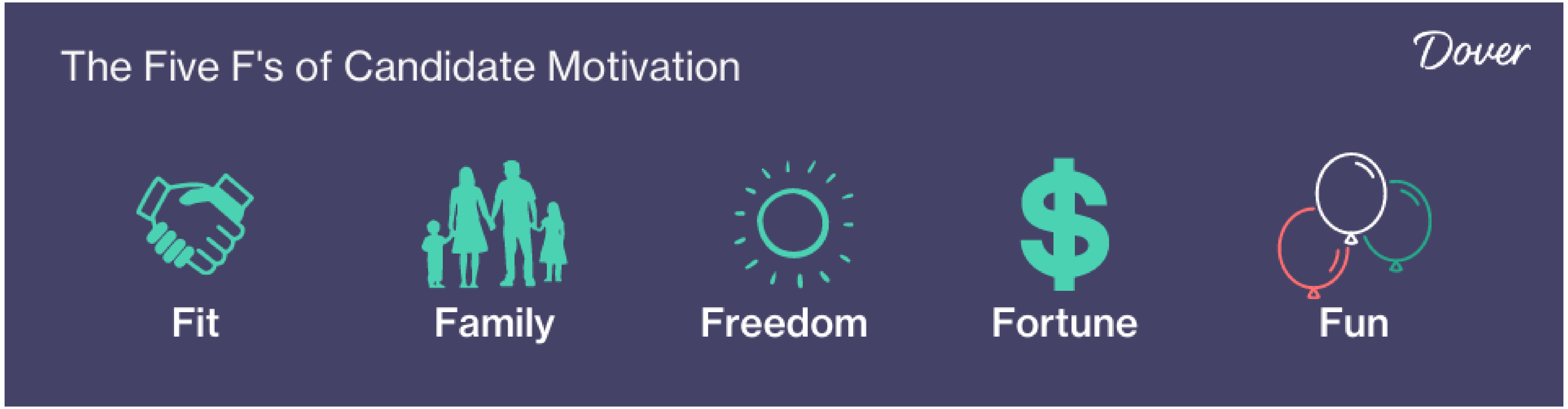
1. **Fit**
   Fit ties together the company's vision, needs, and culture with the candidate's goals, strengths, and values. "Here is where we are going as a company. Here is how you fit in."

2. **Family**
   This category takes into account the broader challenges of changing jobs and recognizes that big career decisions involve a candidate's full family. "What can we do to make this change as easy as possible for your family?"

3. **Freedom**
   Freedom can be defined as the autonomy the candidate will have to make his or her own decisions. "As an early hire, you'll have an ton of greenfield to take on projects and build out our product."

4. **Fortune**
   This reflects the stability of your company and the overall financial upside. This may be more important for seasoned startup folks who may have been a part of companies that didn't pan out. Early hires are typically given "founding equity" which can also be a key selling point — more on that later.

5. **Fun**
   Fun describes the work environment and personal relationships the candidate will make. "We like to have a lot of fun around here. I think you will find this to be a culture you really enjoy."



Closing during discovery conversations

The initial sell conversation

The close starts with your very first conversation with a candidate. **The first touchpoint is often called the "initial sell conversation"** because it's mostly about selling the opportunity enough to get a candidate to move on to the next round.

If someone is actively interviewing or applying to your company, you can spend a bit more time evaluating them upfront as it's expected. That being said, we still recommend spending half your time getting them excited once you've qualified that they may be a good fit.

In the initial sell conversation, you need to get great at:

1. **Making candidates comfortable by building strong rapport.** Do your research ahead of time to find a topic of conversation that starts the conversation in a natural, non-sales focused tone. This can be a shared interest from their profile, or a simple "How is your day going so far?"
2. **Getting to know what's important to them**, which is very similar to "discovery" in sales. You can do this by asking about their interests, career goals, and why they're looking for a change.
3. **Telling your startup's story** - you'll want to keep this short. Perfect your elevator pitch.
4. **And doing a small amount of qualification on whether they're a good fit**, but if and only if you've done steps one through three.

If they're a fit, lock in the next step.

Asking the right discovery questions

Just like sales, before you pitch your company, you'll want to ask candidates questions (especially passive applicants) to understand their motivations around wanting to make a change.

Here are some questions to consider including in your first round phone screens:

5. "What prompted you to reply?" This would only make sense if you reached out over email.
6. "Sounds like you're starting to think about what's next. Have you thought about what's important to you?"
7. "What's motivating you to make a move right now?"
8. "What kinds of opportunities are you exploring? What types of companies? What size?" Get specific.
9. If you learn that someone is considering both startups and larger companies like Scale, ask them if they've thought about the tradeoffs. This can also help you understand what type of team and environment they like to work in.
10. Although you're not legally allowed to ask certain questions like what they're currently making, you can ask "what are your expectations around compensation?"

If you master discovery, it should feel natural and conversational.

In some cases, you uncover hard blockers where no amount of convincing is going to win a candidate over (such as comp, location, or benefits). In these cases, be straightforward, verify it's a blocker, and then try to be helpful.

For example, in the early days of Dover, we would sometimes discover that an engineer needed to make a minimum cash comp that was too far from what we could offer. The talk track would go something like, "Look, it sounds like you need to make $220k and we probably won't be able to bridge that gap – is that going to be a blocker? How can I be helpful in pointing you in the right direction or providing context?"

Closing during the interview process

Closing continues throughout the interview loop. This means including direct and clear CTAs in outbound outreach, having a tight turnaround with clear next steps, asking the right discovery questions, and giving them a sense of what it would be like to work with you.

Schedule next steps at the end of a successful interview.

As stated in the previous section, the best way to ensure that you close candidates quickly is to limit the amount of time between interviews. In fact, it's so important that we wrote this blog with Harrison Hunter, the CTO of MaestroQA, who shows you how to cut your interview process down to just 29 days.

Give them a sense of what it feels like to be part of your team

Invite them to optional events, that may pique their interest or help them better understand your company and feel connected. At the bare minimum, we time our interviews so they can grab lunch with the team, but if they're interviewing on a day when we have All Hands, we time it so they can attend. We've done this for team standups, interesting customer meetings, etc.

Ask them how ready they are to join at the end of an onsite interview.

By the end of an onsite process, a candidate should have a clear understanding of your company culture, the scope of the role, and how well their skills align with the requirements listed in your job description.

Before making an offer, make sure you understand a few key things:

- **Will the candidate have any competing offers?**
- **What's their timing?**
- **Do they have any reservations or concerns?** Address these first.
- **Are there any obvious reasons why the candidate may not accept that they aren't telling you?** e.g. do they have a bonus or vesting where they need to stick around for a few more months?

Know these things. If you don't, you're flying blind.

At Dover, we ask about candidate readiness in the closing interview of our onsite process. Usually it's something like: "On a scale of 1-10, how ready are you to accept an offer?" The 1-10 technique can be a catch-all for things that you didn't discover initially or things that came up in the meantime.

Here's what we know:

At the offer stage, anything less than a 9 or 10 means you have work to do.

The key is to ask follow up questions to dig in – what would it take to get you to an 8? A 9? A 10?

If a few candidates give less than a 9 for the same role, it could also mean that you need to revisit your interview process. Are you asking the right questions? Are you having them meet with the right team members? Are those teammates aligned on how they should structure their interview?

Making an offer

Step 1:

Pre-offer checklist

Once you're ready to make an offer, you'll need to:

- Make sure you are 100% aligned on the role & title with the candidate.
- Know exactly how much cash/equity you plan to offer & how much wiggle room you have for negotiation.
- Have an email draft queued up and ready to send with the formal offer, so all you have to do is press send once you've presented it verbally.

Step 2:

Presenting an offer

Verbal offers come first.

You should always present a verbal offer before sending a written offer. This gives your candidate a chance to ask questions and gives you a chance to offer additional context and read their reactions. In-person or over video is best. Just like in sales, we always present pricing proposals in person or over video, because watching body language is key. Are they smiling? Are they leaning forward? Are they excited?

Additionally, this is your chance to help them understand their equity and compensation package, especially if they're newer to working at startups. If they don't have a great understanding of equity, you can educate, which builds trust.

Ask: Can I walk you through your equity and compensation options? Do you understand dilution? Liquidity? Do you understand 409A price vs preferred price?

Transparency is key.

We recommend taking a transparent approach to all of closing. If they're savvy, a lack of transparency is fatal, because the candidate may think you're trying to hide something. If you're not willing to share "here are our biggest challenges", "here are the milestones we need to hit to raise our next round", "here's our runway", or if you're dodgy about your revenue, you'll lose credibility big time. The best people you want to work with will see right through it.

After pitching the offer, ask this simple question — **"We're all SUPER excited to work with you. Is there anything else we can do to get you onboard?"** — sometimes you get a simple answer and may even be able to close them on the spot (i.e bumping their base by $5k or paying for an online course they want to take). If you don't ask, you'll never know.

Step 3:

After the offer

It's all hands on deck, so involve the whole team, and especially those who interviewed the candidate directly. **At Dover, we post about offers in a Slack channel, and tag all interviewers so that they know to send a congrats message on LinkedIn or over email.** Even if they didn't chat 1-1 with your entire team, have everyone send them a congrats email. If you have a nurture event coming up (like a happy hour), invite the candidate to come meet the team.

Step 4:

After they accept

Closing does not stop after your candidate signs. Some folks, especially passive talent, may get a counter offer, or renegotiate the offer given (more on that later).

You can keep the momentum going by making them feel like they're already a part of your team:

- Consider ramping them up on low urgency work. Nothing on the critical path, because you don't want to make it high pressure.
- Add them to all hands, company offsites, team meetings. Frame these as optional and give them a heads up that you'll add them in case they can make it.
- Have everyone on your team add them on LinkedIn.
- Send a welcome gift or card if you haven't al-ready.
- Schedule a coffee/lunch/dinner with them be-fore their start da

Offer letter template

Hey [First Name],

Congrats again! I'm attaching your offer letter below. Everyone is super excited about the prospect of you joining the team.

Please read it over and let me know some times today or tomorrow that work for you to chat about it and ask any questions!

Email attachment

Dear [First Name],

[Company] is excited to offer you the position of [Role]. Our conversations with you over the past few weeks lead us to believe you'd be a very valuable member of the [Company] team.

We are pleased to offer you the choice between one of the following two compensation packages:

1. Comp + equity option 1 (typically lower cash with higher equity)

2. Comp + equity option 2 (higher cash, lower equity)

The equity component of the compensation will vest over a X year period with a X year cliff.

Additionally, you will be provided the benefits listed in Addendum A attached.

This offer is valid until the end of the day on X. If you choose to accept this job offer, let me know which compensation option you prefer, and I will send over a formal offer letter. We look forward to welcoming you to the [Company] team.

Please let me know if you have any questions or if I can provide any additional information.

Negotiation

Naturally, curveballs will come up in the close, such as competition, counteroffers, and exploding deadlines from other companies.

This section outlines strategies so you're armed to handle any scenario:

Dealing with competition

Ask candidates who else they're interviewing with early-on in the process and continue to check-in throughout. If you uncover competitive offers, here are two ways to navigate the conversation:

1. **Focus on the aspects of your opp that are unique** and that align best with what you know they value from your discovery call.
2. **For an incredibly high-quality candidate or a senior hire, consider getting creative with your offer.** Do you know that their favorite basketball team is the Lakers? Get them tickets to a game as a thank you for being a great candidate throughout the interview process.

While you should be closing a candidate throughout the entire process, sometimes they'll get an offer you simply can't match. At that point, it's best to revisit your pipeline and think about your entire benefits/compensation package to ensure you're making the best offer and targeting the right candidates.

Dealing with counteroffers

Counteroffers are very common in startup recruiting, especially as the demand for certain roles continues to increase in the hiring market.

Here are a few strategies to help you connect with limit the attractiveness of a counteroffer:

3. **Lead with curiosity, and get the candidate to do the same.** Counteroffers rarely solve the root problem of why someone is looking for other opportunities. If you've done enough work in the interview process, you'll understand their current motivations for making a transition, and you can bring those up here.

   You can say something like: *"I know you've mentioned that company culture was a major reason you were looking to make a transition. Do you think they've made strides in solving that concern of yours?"*

- **Offer to coach them on their resignation conversation before they have it.** By saying "I'm happy to coach you through a conversation with your current company about your transition, if you'd like," you're positioning your offer as an opportunity they can't refuse, while also showing them that you value the effort it takes to leave their current situation.

A note on offer deadlines

Exploding offers are a huge red flag to candidates, and for good reason: they signal desperation or a bad interview process that has involved lots of candidate drop-off. **While not all deadlines are considered "exploding", anything under a week should be a negative signal.**

If you feel strongly that you need to drive urgency, you can consider starting a clock with the candidate, but let them choose when to officially receive their offer.

For example: *"We're ready to make you an offer, but we want to make sure that you're in the right headspace to think about it beforehand. Once we make an offer, you'll have X days to decide."*

Giving a candidate at least two weeks is industry standard, and should be enough time for them to give it their full consideration. Of course, if they wait until the last minute to accept, this can also be a red flag about their excitement to join your company.

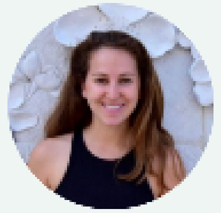
Dover

Looking to scale your team?

Dover is an end-to-end recruiting solution that helps high-growth teams achieve their hiring goals through automation and operational excellency.

Learn more at www.dover.com**.**

“**Working with Dover has meant we get support on all fronts,** and from every angle of recruiting including sourcing, optimal channel usage, and interview best practices.”



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