

Dover

The Ultimate Startup Hiring Guide for Founders

dover.com



Hey!

Thanks for downloading our founder's guide to startup hiring. As founders ourselves, we understand that recruiting can be a tiresome, emotional, and (when it works well) rewarding experience. Over the past year, Dover has conducted over 6,000 final round interviews, and handled nearly half a million candidate touchpoints — we think we know a thing or two about what it takes to stand out and build your best team.

We put this e-book together as part of our mission to help companies find their next great hires. It contains data, research and best practices from personal experience and our work with hundreds of startups since launching Dover in 2019. It's long, and while we certainly don't expect you to devour it in one sitting, we hope you'll use it as a reference point as you scale.

Over the past three years, the recruiting landscape has shifted dramatically — new tools, shifting candidate priorities, and increasingly competitive strategies make it difficult to know where to begin, how to stand out and how to scale a team effectively. Through extensive data from our customers, we've learned a lot about what strategies work best, as well as how software and automation can transform the recruiting process.

We're excited to share our research and insights with you, as well as the recommendations we're making as a result. We hope this guide will help you and your company go beyond the basics to uplevel your recruiting strategy and create a stellar candidate experience.

Cheers,

Anvisha Pai, Max Kolysh and George Carollo, co-founders



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Startup Recruiting in 2022

3 key trends and what to do next

If you're a founder or work in talent acquisition for startups, you know that despite the COVID-19 pandemic and the Great Resignation, the tech industry bounced back quickly. **The unemployment rate for tech jobs is 1.3%**, its lowest level since June 2019 and about one-third of national rate. As more startups open up their talent pool by adopting hybrid or remote work models, the projected growth rate for tech jobs over the next decade is nearly twice the national jobs rate.

To attract candidates, companies at all stages have had to offer increasingly competitive salaries, flexibility and most importantly, extend their talent pipelines outside of tradition joe and claire have expressed some interest in helping with marketing as well, and we drafted up a list of projects for them (if they wanted to take them on with al technology hubs to other emerging tech cities.

At Dover, we work with hundreds of startups to help them recruit and attract high quality talent. As you work your way through this guide, we want to highlight three key trends that will inform your recruiting efforts as you source, screen and close top talent in this year and beyond:

1. The Great Resignation transitions into the Great Reshuffle.

The Great Resignation wave of 2021 continues to hit record highs — more than **4.3 million people** in the U.S. voluntarily left their jobs in January. This influx doesn't only constitute folks from poorly managed environments, but has bled over into industries where the pay and benefits have never been higher, like tech. Hiring professionals are calling this The Great Reshuffle, as two-thirds of tech workers are either already **seeking new jobs** or are open to moving.

What to do about it: First, be a place where employees want to stay.

Employees are reevaluating their careers and are holding employers to higher standards. Add this to the challenge that many early startups have in attracting candidates, and the problem compounds. Internal mobility programs solve both of the problems of retention and attraction

by increasing the attractiveness of your company while saving time and resources. Employees stay almost twice as long at companies with high internal mobility than those at companies without. And those who have found new roles internally are 3.5 times more likely to be actively engaged than those who haven't.

So, what does that look like? One option is to make a skills profile for your employees and keep track of their development. At Dover, we use people management tools like Lattice, which allows managers to gather data from their 1:1s, create individual development goals and assess their progress.

From there, you can create lateral mobility paths, where an employee takes on a whole new role in the company (e.g. a junior content marketer who wants to dive into product can become a junior product manager or content designer), or vertical mobility paths, where the employee moves higher in position (e.g. from junior to associate), with additional responsibilities.

Another option is to reimburse employees for online courses or workshops (check out Coursera or Udemy) to uplevel their skillset. Udemy even created their own internal mobility program titled MentorU, which connects employees with more experienced individuals within Udemy for mentorship and career growth.

2x

projected growth rate
for tech jobs over the
next decade.

2. Talent is prioritizing companies with better pay transparency.

Pay transparency is becoming a top priority of candidates looking for other opportunities — in fact, job postings that list salary range can **increase the total number of applicants**. On Dover's platform, we've seen that employers who include salary ranges in outreach to passive talent or in job descriptions receive **twice as many** interested candidates. Lack of pay transparency, either through withholding the information during the interview process or not making it public to your employees, is also the **number one reason candidates drop off** during the screening and interview process.

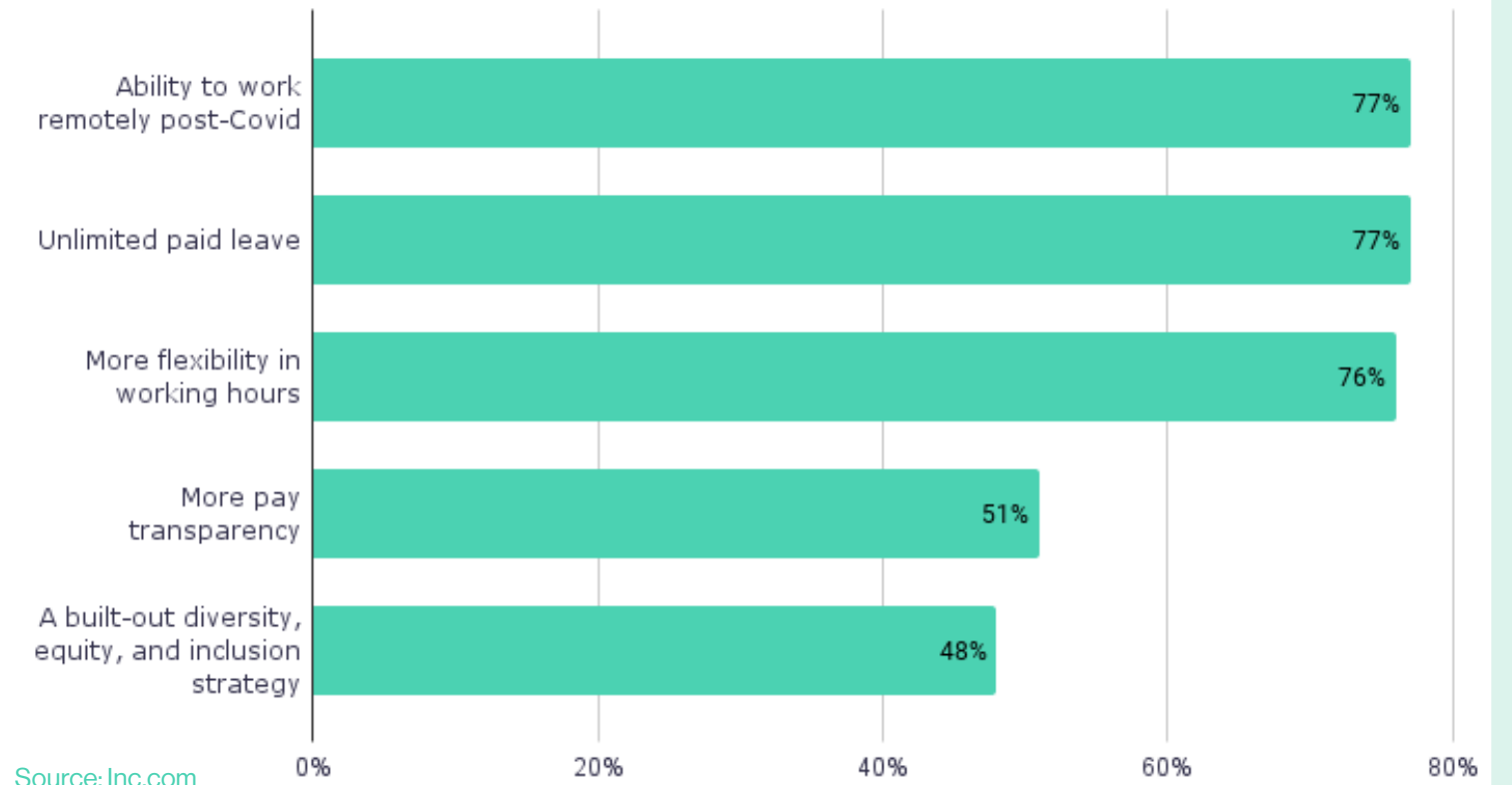
As with the other strategies, this will aid in retention as well: when employers are not transparent about pay, employees are 50% more likely to leave their job in the next six months, according to a recent PayScale study.

What you should do: Consider including compensation ranges early in the candidate experience.

Several state governments have instated comprehensive laws to even the playing field. New York City recently **introduced legislation** that requires employers to share compensation information in their job postings, and states like Connecticut, Nevada and Colorado have passed similar laws regarding pay transparency.

Adding compensation ranges to your outreach to passive talent, and in your job postings is the first step in **creating a culture of pay transparency** at your organization. You don't need to list the details of the equity package or commission for performance-based roles until later on in the interview process, but providing a number "commensurate with experience" can prevent backlash from those who feel like they've been offered the lower end of the range.

What benefits would make employees consider switching jobs?



3. Talent is more likely to reject a role due to lack of perceived inclusiveness.

While in 2020 only 33% of recruiters say job seekers asked them about their DEI initiatives, today that number has jumped to **49%**, meaning that DEI initiatives are becoming a top priority for talent as they assess culture fit. In fact, not making DEI one of the priorities in your hiring process can affect your ability to hire talent, as **39% of candidates** reject a role due to a perceived lack of inclusiveness within an organization.

What you should do: Recommit to your employer brand...

Your employer brand, or the way you're perceived by candidates, is an integral part of a recruitment strategy — especially when your company is just starting out. Employer branding encompasses not only how you market your company to job seekers, but also to internal employees. The better you are at employer branding, the more likely you are to attract top talent and retain them.

The most important element you can tack on to your branding strategy to candidates when it comes to inclusion is a unique and original DEI statement that speaks to your company's core values.

The **best diversity statements** include:

- your company's mission
- a statement about your commitment to diversity
- mention of specific underrepresented groups
- positive and inclusive language (such as foster, empower, grow, celebrate)
- unique information or benefits for diverse groups

...and create a structured interview process.

Unstructured interviews can make it harder for hiring managers to fairly benchmark candidates, making it more likely that unconscious bias will creep in. **Creating a structured process** that tests all applicants in the same way ensures they're all assessed against the same markers.

The simplest way to achieve this is to **stick to a specific set of questions for every applicant** – and remember not to diverge from them. This can help reduce subjectivity and allow candidates to be judged against others on the specific answers they give.

39%

of candidates reject a role due to perceived lack of inclusiveness



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Building a hiring process



Why create a hiring process?

The explosion in startup formation paired with The Great Resignation has created one of the most significant imbalances in supply and demand — you can't just be a great place to work or compensate well. You also have to know exactly who you need, when you need them, and how to run a swift and professional recruiting process to sign them.

A solid hiring process will help you:

1. avoid making costly mistakes,
2. help you better understand how you'll need to evaluate candidates throughout the process
3. reduce implicit bias throughout the interview process

In the early stages, when you're hiring from your network or internal referrals, you may be able to get away with not having a process in place. However, creating a culture of transparent and streamlined hiring early sets you up for success when you raise your first round of funding and need to scale quickly. It'll help you avoid making costly mistakes, and help you better understand how you'll need to evaluate candidates throughout the process. Putting in the work now means you won't be digging yourself out of a hole in the future.

Here are 6 key steps to build a process from the ground-up:

1. Draft a hiring plan for the next six months to a year.

A hiring plan with target metrics is an overall strategy that encompasses your startup's hiring goals and sets clear deadlines so everyone stays on track. You can assess this plan at a regular cadence to discuss blockers, give progress updates, and assess/approve new openings.

Your plan should:

- **Fully align with company strategy and goals** – i.e. positions outlined in the hiring plan should map to specific company goals and objectives. For example, if you want to increase your ARR MoM, it would make sense to build out your sales and customer success teams over the next year.
- **Detail the number and types of roles**
- **Include a budget for things like ads, recruiting fees and employee compensation**
- **Include a goal date for a hire to ensure you're on track**

On Dover's platform, we include an in-app hiring plan that allows you to track hiring needs and timelines for your company on a six-month or longer timespan. The plan prompts alerts, forecasts, and strategic suggestions so you're never behind.

2. Determine which stakeholders will be involved in the process.

After creating the hiring plan, you'll need to identify everyone in your organization, including external partners, who will be involved in the hiring process. This could include founders, internal or external recruiters, hiring managers, consultants.

From there, you'll need to assign roles and responsibilities, as well as assess bandwidth. In other words, if you need to hire several people quickly, does your current team have the capacity to take on the work involved? Or, do you need to partner with an agency to take on some or all of the hiring process in order to meet your timelines? It's important to consider the following questions for each open role:

- **How many interviews do you plan on having for this candidate?** At Dover, our standard includes a phone screen, two interviews, a take-home assessment, and an onsite that includes conversations with 5-6 stakeholders across different teams. Your needs will vary as you continue to grow and learn what's truly necessary when assessing candidates.
- **Who will be involved in each stage?** On our in-app hiring plan, we advise hiring managers to name everyone involved in the process before opening the role, ensuring that no one drops the ball at any point in the funnel.

3. Create a process to open a role.

When you realize you have a hiring need, you'll want to create a process for hiring managers to get approval, allocate budget and execute on an interview/recruiting strategy. The hiring leader discusses new requisition needs with the decision-maker whenever a department has a need to:

Though your process can differ based on your organization structure, it typically follows this pattern:

1. The hiring manager emails the decision-maker (at a smaller company, this is typically the CEO or CFO) to request a new open position — this is called a requisition form at more established companies, but at a startup it can be as simple as a Notion/Wiki/Airtable template. You can make this easy for all hiring managers to access.

It should include:

- Is this a new position, refill position, or temp position?
- Title
- Seniority level
- Who the person will report to
- Basic scope of the role/responsibilities/skillset required — attach job description if this is a refill

for a past role

- Compensation benchmarks (you can use online tools like Glassdoor, or Option Impact to gauge the correct equity/comp bands for this role)
- Budget for job boards (Indeed, LinkedIn, etc.)
- The decision-maker approves or rejects

2. If approved, the requisition form is sent to HR (if you are a small team, this step may be handled by founders). It's helpful to attach a job description at this point if it is available. For help, check out [Dover's Job Description e-book](#) with examples from other top startups.

3. HR/Finance reviews the requisition form to verify that the job's responsibilities, necessary skills, and compensation match the open role, and suggest edits if necessary.

4. Once approved, the hiring manager is given all relevant information and begins launching the recruiting process.

On Dover's platform, we include an in-app hiring plan that allows you to track hiring needs and timelines for your company on a six-month or longer timespan. The plan prompts alerts, forecasts, and strategic suggestions so you're never behind.

Hiring Plan

Title		Employee #	Hiring Manager	Launch Date	Goal Start Date	Status
Account Executive	+	1		11/15/21	01/17/22	On Track
Customer Support	+	8	Jane Smith	09/14/21	10/14/21	Completed
		9		10/14/21	01/03/22	On Track
Product Manager	+	1		11/24/21	12/31/21	Off track
Content Lead	+	1		09/20/21	12/06/21	Late
Senior Software Engineer	+	1		11/01/21	01/10/22	On Track
		2		11/01/21	01/31/22	Opportunistic
		3		12/06/21	02/14/22	On Track

4. Write a standard outline for your job descriptions.

Though each role will have its own set of requirements and responsibilities, you'll want to streamline a few key points that all ads should cover:

1. Your **diversity, equity and inclusion statement** statement
2. A paragraph about your company's mission
3. Your employee value proposition (the values that make up your culture)
4. Your benefits
5. Any notes on visa sponsorship, if applicable

Also, add a level of enthusiasm to show off your employer brand so that potential candidates get excited about possibly working for your company. Remember, the job description is the core of your job ad and it's the way you attract the talent you're looking for.

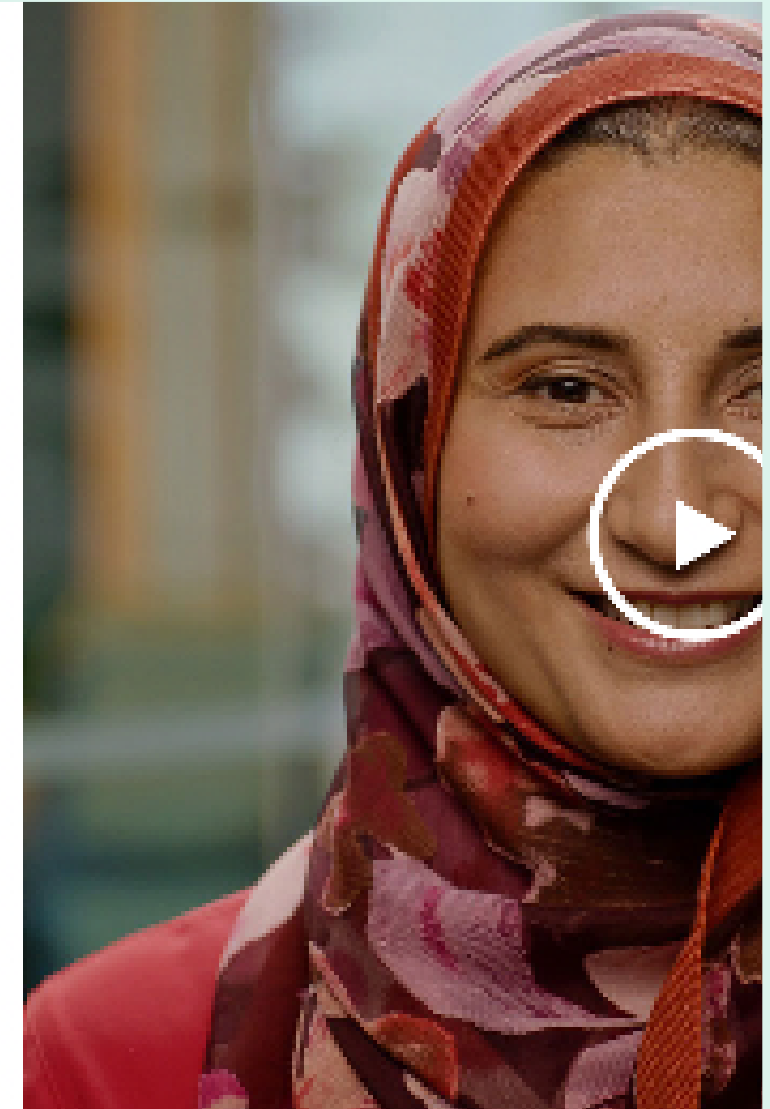
Here are some other potential considerations when writing your job descriptions:

- Will potential candidates apply on job boards or on your company site?
- Do you want resumes and cover letters only or do you want candidates to answer specific questions?
- Do you want candidates to submit links to their writing or content portfolios?
- What information is absolutely necessary for you to consider a candidate?
- Do you want to include screening questions to eliminate candidates who don't meet the minimum criteria?

Building a Workplace That Reflects Society

Equality is a core value at Salesforce. We believe that businesses can be powerful platforms for social change, and that it is our responsibility to further equality for all. Creating a culture of equality isn't just the right thing to do; it's also the smart thing. It empowers us to innovate, build deeper connections with our customers, and ultimately become a better company.

We strive to create a workplace that reflects the diverse communities around us and where everyone feels seen, heard, valued, and empowered to succeed. Clearly, there is more work to be done, but together we can build a more equal workplace and world for all.



5. Standardize and structure your interview process.

Traditional interview processes are flawed, and often poor judges of character with plenty of room for inserting your own confirmation bias, or the tendency to search for, interpret, favor, and recall information in a way that confirms or supports one's prior beliefs or values.

Think about it, when is the last time you answered the question: What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses? Tell me about a time you overcame a challenge at work? If you've been on the hunt for a job, probably recently.

Most interviewers ask these questions simply because they've heard them before. But, the more intentional and structured you are about your interview process, the better chances you'll have of landing a candidate who is the best fit for the job - aiding in attraction and retention.

Though our questions and assessments differ by the type of role and team we're hiring for, at Dover, we have a standardized set of steps that every candidate goes through, regardless of seniority, past experience, or source:

1. Remote phone screen
2. Second interview

3. Take-home assessment and portfolio review (if applicable)
4. Onsite interview process (covering behavioral assessments, technical assessments, and social fit)
5. Reference and background checks
6. Debriefs and blind assessments with all stakeholders involved
7. Offer or rejection

For an in-depth guide on running a solid interview process, check out our [Ultimate Guide to Startup Hiring](#).

6. Define and document your recruiting metrics and interview notes.

Once you have a hiring plan in place, you'll need a place to track metrics, source candidates, and organize notes throughout the process. There are a multitude of options, but the most common are Applicant Tracking Systems (like Greenhouse, or Lever), external agencies, temp recruiters, or platforms like Dover, which combine the best of an ATS with a human-in-the-loop to manage your pipeline and optimize for efficiency and cost.

When assessing your hiring process specifically, you'll want to pay attention to two key metrics:

- **Time-to-hire:** If it's taking longer than three weeks to go from phone screen to onsite, or you're noticing a ton of candidate drop-off later in the funnel, you may have issues with follow-ups, or scheduling.

Consider: creating templates for rejections, next steps, and scheduling that you can copy/paste for various logistical parts of the process to eliminate bandwidth issues for the stakeholders involved.

- **Quality-of-hire:** If folks are joining your company and leaving after only a few months, or you find that they're not able to rise to the challenges your product presents from a technical standpoint, you're probably assessing the wrong skills during your onsite, or take-home assessment process. Additionally, you may want to add more questions that signal at a candidate's desire for longevity, like "Where do you want to be at 1 year into this role?"

Additionally, you should [create a rubric that is used to assess candidates on a very strict set of criteria for phone screens, and technical assessments](#). Ideally, interviewers for later stages won't know the specifics about how well each candidate did in terms of the resume review and work sample. The goal is for the interview to become a third independent data point.



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Employer branding

Employer branding

How to best position your company to prospective candidates

Your employer brand is different than your company brand (your logo, product or the problem that you're solving). At its most basic, an employer brand is **your reputation among the workforce as well as your employees' perception of you as an employer.**

It encompasses:

- Overall values,
- Company culture,
- Work environment,
- Benefits and
- Public perception

For startups, it matters way more than you'd expect. Today's candidates want to know the whole story—the company's mission, its core values, its culture, and its commitment to social responsibility. They also want to know, if hired, what they can expect on a day-to-day basis. In fact, research shows that a whopping **75% of jobseekers** consider an employer's brand before even applying for a job. And considering that organizations that invest in employer branding are **three times more likely** to make a quality hire, a strong employer brand can help you attract and hire the best candidates, and greatly improves your chances of getting to that IPO.

Great employer branding can also reduce

your cost-per-hire. A LinkedIn study found that when employer brand was strong, recruiting costs **plummeted by 43%**. In other words, you'll experience less friction attracting top talent and getting them to the offer stage. This makes sense, as candidates are **valuing work-life balance and company culture** as strongly as things like comp and benefits in the wake of the The Great Reshuffle.

Employer branding helps you maintain top-of-mind awareness in a crowded market. Early hires and execs set the tone for talent, and greatly influence who else will want to work with you — that's why it's never too early to start.

You can divide employer brand into three distinct categories:

- 1. Things you can control:** career page, job listings, website and blog, culture and corporate values, candidate communication
- 2. Things you can directly influence:** company reviews, employee stories and advocacy, social media activity
- 3. Things you can indirectly influence:** public perception, awards and accolades

75%

of job seekers consider an employer's brand before applying

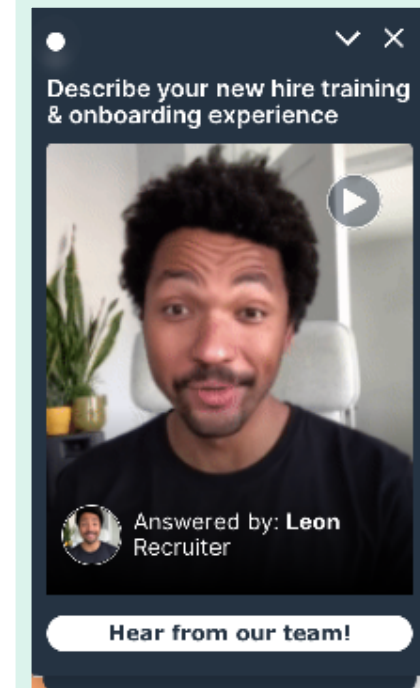
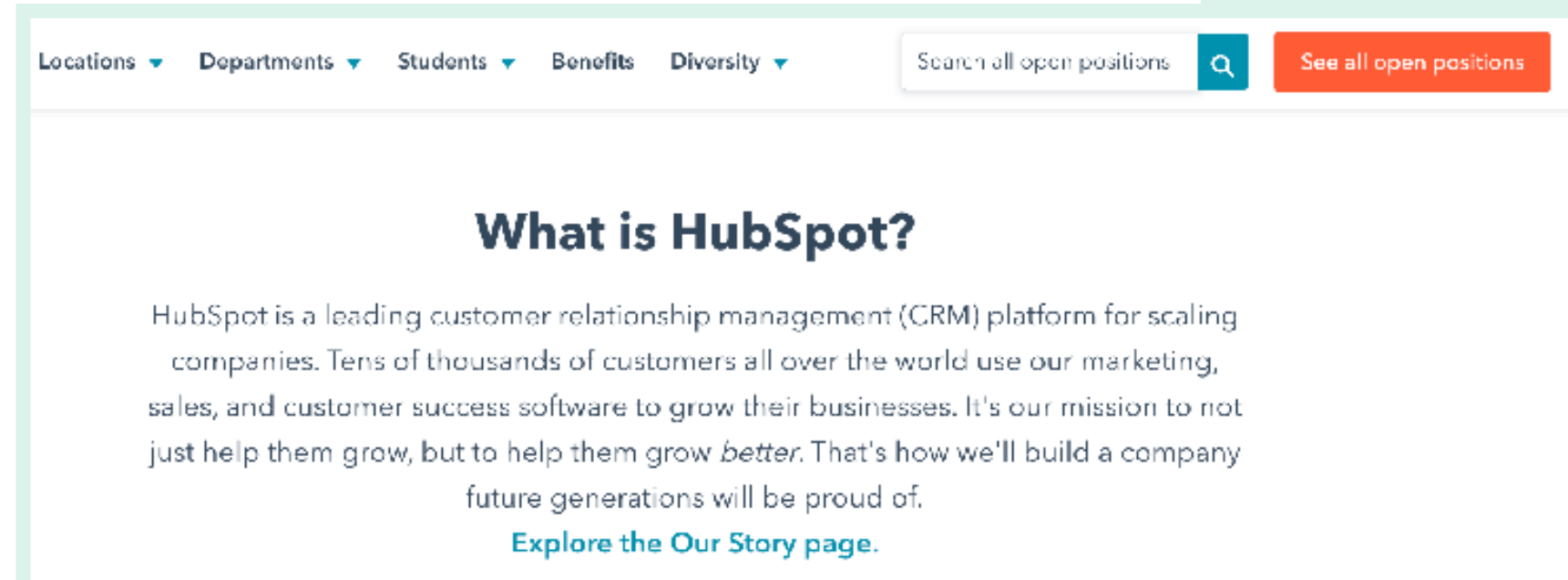
5 steps to creating an employer brand from the ground-up

Here are 4 steps you can take this month that will set you up for success as you begin scaling your team:

1. Create a Careers page on your website.

The first place candidates will go if they receive a recruiting email or come across a job posting is to your company website. Having a team page that talks about your employee value prop, has photos of your team, and outlines your benefits will help talent visualize their potential future at your company and lead to more applications. It'll also show that you value your employees and their commitment to your mission.

Hubspot does a great job of this. Their careers page includes videos from new team members describing their hiring and onboarding experience, employee reviews, photos, where their team is located geographically, and their value props.



2. Write your employee value prop.

Your employee value prop explains what you offer to candidates and what you expect in return. It also sets the tone for more employer branding materials moving forward. It's not a tagline, but instead serves to align what your company is looking for with your target candidate audiences.

Your employer branding strategy should communicate your EVP in all candidate materials as a way to attract the right applicants to the role. It's the statement that would make your ideal candidate stand up and say "Wow! That company wants the same things as me, and my experience there will help me fulfill my own professional goals."

Your EVP should:

- Align to your organization's vision, mission, and values.
- Be achievable and honest – your EVP statement should reflect what your organization is actually like, not just what it aspires to be like.
- Be targeted to attract the candidate persona(s) you created as part of this process.
- Be unique in your marketplace.
- Be written in your brand's tone of voice.

When drafting your EVP, you'll want to include two of the following:

- **Company culture:** What are your values around team spirit, ethics, inclusion, and socializing?
- **Work environment:** How you describe your office or remote work atmosphere and autonomy level?
- **Benefits:** What compensation and perks do you offer beyond wages? Check out our employee value prop worksheet below for a list of over 30 ideas.
- **Career advancement:** How do you help teammates grow professionally?

Your EVP is typically placed at the beginning of a job description, on a careers page, or highlighted during the interview process. If you're pursuing talent in several diverse functions (say, accounting and design), consider developing separate EVPs for each group.

Employee Value Prop Formula

(Company name) offers (job title and desired attributes) the opportunity to achieve/earn/develop (key skills) and we reward those who (stated company goals).

"Acme Startup Co. offers motivated and creative software engineers the opportunity to work on innovative projects and train on the latest programming languages and we reward those who are devoted to shipping excellent code on schedule."

3. Well-written job descriptions

While it may be tempting to copy and paste a decent enough job description from another posting, it's vital to carefully think about and craft a message that resonates with your employee value prop. Job descriptions are arguably the most important part of your employer brand — they're also the only place where you are directly asking candidates to apply. According to an Indeed survey of over 2,000 job seekers, **more than half** say that the quality of a job description is “very or extremely influential” on their decision to submit an application.

Look at your job postings as a one-stop shop, where candidates don't have to leave the page in search of extra information. They should contain a short mission statement, the projects the new hire will work on or day-to-day aspects of the role, necessary skills and competencies, and the organization's culture. Download our **How to Write Great Job Descriptions Ebook** for best practices and standout examples from other top startups.

4. Set up a Glassdoor/Comparably profile and have early team members leave reviews.

Remember when we said that candidates will do their due diligence before applying to your company? That's more true now than it has ever been before, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Asking your team to leave positive reviews on sites like Glassdoor and Comparably isn't only something that's nice to do, it can reduce your cost-per-hire by **almost 50%**. That's because candidates are 75% more likely to apply to a job if you're actively managing your reviews by responding to both positive and negative comments.

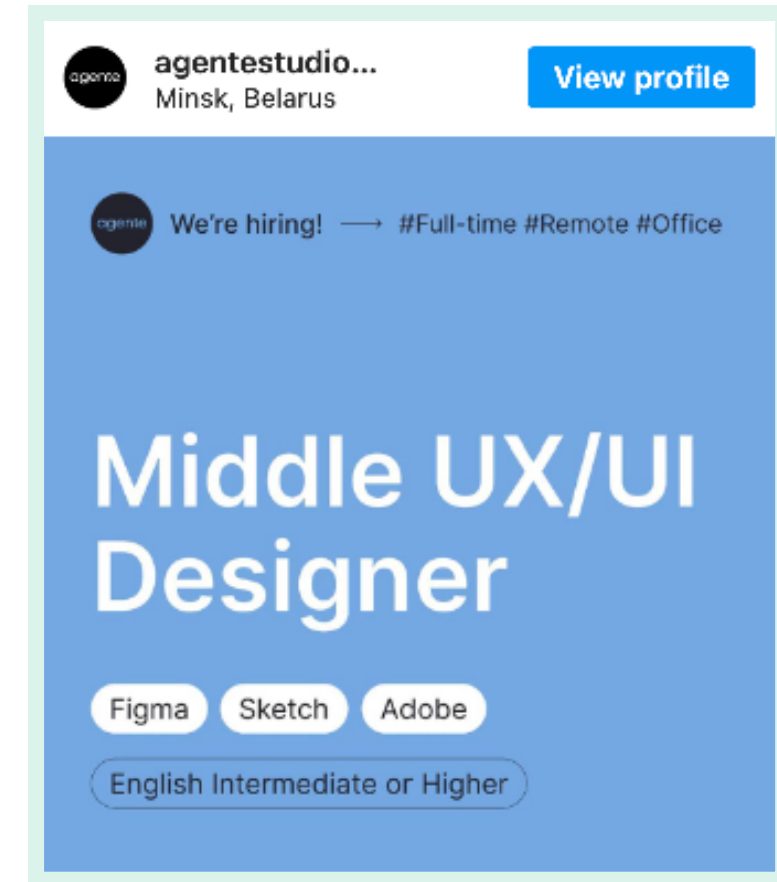
Pro tip: Have employees write blogs about why they chose to join your company - or hire a copywriter to help you interview and put these together. At Dover, our blogs have helped us double the amount of interested passive candidates when we've linked to them in outreach.

5. Advertise that you're hiring on social platforms.

Social media is an easy way to reach the audiences you're trying to get in front of. In fact, LinkedIn states that completed company pages (where you can even incorporate a Life at X section!) get **twice as much traffic** as incomplete profile. Plus, **68% of Millennials** indicated they visit an employer's social media profiles specifically to evaluate the employer's brand. Include recent press or your careers page in your “Featured” posts, and include “we're hiring” in your title. Incorporate team photos into your feed.

For more advanced strategies to attract candidates and uplevel your employer branding, download our —>

Employer Branding Playbook.



75%

percentage of
Glassdoor users that
agree they are more
likely to apply if an
employer is active on
the site.

Keep in mind that your employee value proposition is a living document and should ideally change as candidate needs change. As your company grows, your ideal candidate persona will shift too, depending on what your current hiring goals might be. Internally, it'll help you align your teams and make sure that every team member is exhibiting the qualities that you value most. If your role models display your core values, it's more likely that your staff will too.

In a market where 35% of job seekers think company culture is more important than salary and 80% of candidates consider employer brand when choosing where to apply, companies that have a strong EVP:

- Attract more applications from the best candidates
- Persuade those candidates to join their team rather than take an offer from a competitor
- Retain their best hires for longer / reduce staff turnover
- Reduce their recruitment costs

That being said, there are a few key steps and strategies that can help you craft a unique, appealing and comprehensive EVP that will attract an MVP:

1. Understand existing perceptions (and if you're small, decide how you want to be perceived).

An effective EVP will be shaped by feedback sourced directly from current and prospective employees and revised as your needs and values shift. If you have a small team, this can also be how you'd ideally like to be perceived by your team as you continue to grow. Consider surveying past and current employees (or your leadership team for now) every six months or so.

Try writing down your initial answers to these questions now, or how you would hope that your future team would answer them:

Who are we as a company?

What do we do?

Why does it matter?

Why do people work here?

What do people like or dislike about working here?

Writing your employee value prop

35%

of job seekers think company culture is more imporant than salary.

Research your competitors.

You don't have to start from scratch! Leveraging what others in your industry are offering their employees is key in ensuring that you're standing out, or at the very least, matching candidate expectations.

List two competitor's EVPs below, and highlight areas where you think your company overlaps or aligns.

Competitor #1: _____

EVP:

Competitor #2: _____

EVP:

Draft your ideal candidate persona across a variety of roles.

Your ideal candidate persona is similar to a buyer persona — it's a semi-fictional representation or archetype that more broadly defines who you're looking to target and attract. When researching candidates, you'll want to ask yourself what's important about the people you want to ask to work for you? This can be split up into the following categories:

Past Experience	Personal preferences	Motivations	Behaviors	Potential objections
What is their past professional experience? Current and past job titles, qualifications	What do they value in a team and company? How do they like to work?	What are their professional goals, challenges and needs, and desires for growth?	Self-motivation, self-sufficiency, interpersonal skills, how they problem-solve or learn information	Any reservations they might have about the role or about joining
5+ years in B2B Saas at Series A and B startup - Potential titles: Digital Marketer, Digital Marketing Manager, Director Of Digital Marketing Strategy - Hubspot/Google qualification	Value autonomy and control of own projects, would like to manage a team, data-driven and results-oriented	To eventually become a CMO, would like a flexible but hybrid work situation, looking to expand into recruiting tech and build a product from the ground-up	Engages in marketing LinkedIn Groups, listens to podcasts like Story Brand and SaaSr, likes to attempt their own solution at a problem before reaching out for help (self-taught graphic design and some basic coding to build Hubspot forms)	Moving into a smaller co from a more established startup, might not have a team to lead in the first six months and would default to more IC work
List your own criteria here.				

Determine your strengths and selling points.

After you've fleshed out your candidate persona, the next step is to determine what value your company can provide to attract that person.

Many of the startup we work with worry that it's not going to be possible to design an EVP that stands out because "everyone offers the same benefits." But not every element of your value proposition needs to be unique. It's the combination of benefits that needs to be unique.

Here are two steps to take when considering your strengths and selling points:

1. List all of your current benefits.

What do you already offer for employees in the way of health insurance, paid time off, remote/hybrid office setups? This is your starting point.

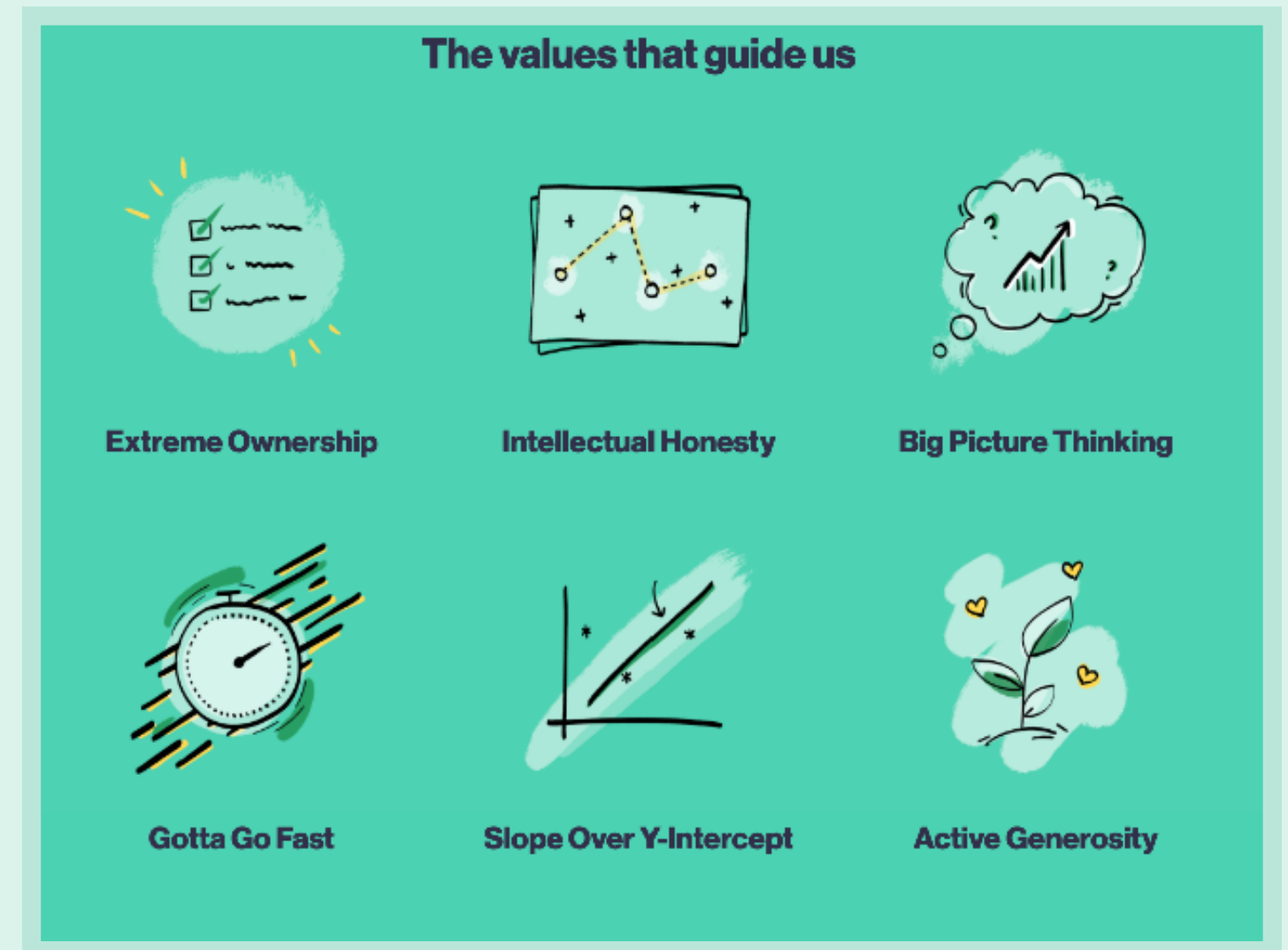
2. Enlist the guidance of your leadership team.

Open up a simple spreadsheet and have your team brainstorm ideas of your value offerings for 5-10 minutes. When you're done, go through the list together and eliminate any duplicates. Then create three separate columns and have everyone cast a vote for their top 3. From there, you can draft up several ideas that incorporate your best value offerings.

Here are 10 questions to inspire your own brainstorming process:

- 1. Salary:** how do you compare to benchmark performance of other companies?
- 2. Comp:** Is your process for assessing raises and promotions merit-based? Experience-based? Skills-based?
- 3. Time-off:** How much time off do you give for family leave, parental leave, vacation, sick or personal days?
- 4. Insurance and retirement:** Do you cover 99% of health insurance? 100%? Do you offer 401K matching? A donation matching program?
- 5. Professional development opportunities:** Will you offer a course stipend (for things like Coursera or Udemy?) A book stipend?
- 6. Mental health services:** do you offer a mental health or physical wellness stipend?
- How do you think about autonomy and recognition?
- 8. How do you share information internally?** Are all documents shared in a Notion or Wiki?
- 9. What kind of leaders and managers do you have at your organization?** Are they past founders? Past team leaders?
- 10. Are there opportunities for folks to meet or collaborate cross-departmentally?**

At Dover, we list our values directly on our careers page where candidates go to apply for open roles:



Determine which benefits you'll offer and why.

Employee benefits, especially for startups, are no longer sticking to the basics. Especially for startups in their early stages (who may not be able to pay higher, more competitive salaries) must get creative with their compensation packages. If you have budget constraints, unique perks and useful benefits can help you stand out in a crowded job market.

The basics you should definitely offer to all employees are:

1. 401K
2. Medical/Dental/Vision insurance (choose a provider that will handle the paperwork and admin aspect of this — at Dover, we use [Gusto](#))
3. Unlimited PTO (or 2 weeks paid vacation at the very minimum)
4. Flexible hours
5. Remote/hybrid work model (if you're offering a relocation package for an in-person setup, you will most definitely have to extend your timeline to secure top talent ready to make a very significant move. Recent data from CNBC states that businesses who don't offer any kind of flexible-work options are losing out on [up to 70% of job-seekers](#))

Other creative benefits we've seen startups offer that make their package more competitive:

- Lunch/meal stipends
- Home office stipend
- Coworking space stipend, if you don't have an HQ
- Pet insurance
- Mental wellness stipend (given out quarterly or monthly, to be used for physical fitness, psychotherapy, acupuncture, massage therapy, etc.)
- Travel stipends to visit hubs/HQs where much of your team might be located
- Book/professional development stipend for employees to uplevel their skills
- Parental leave
- Fertility benefits
- 401K Matching
- Donation matching

Your benefits package should align with employee feedback and continue to evolve as you scale.

Communicate your EVP in the most important places.

When you've finalized your employee value prop, you'll want to present it to the team and other stakeholders involved. If you have a team that's larger than 20 people, you may consider presenting this as part of an all-team meeting to stress the gravity and importance of centering these values as you continue to interview and grow a team.

Additionally, you'll want to audit the following to ensure they accurately reflect your EVP:

- Careers page
- Job descriptions
- Company website
- Social media accounts
- Recruitment marketing (outreach, job ads, etc.)

“

I have worked in many different industries and I have never worked for a team that is so helpful. Everyone is so kind and wonderful and willing to help you no matter what the question is or how big the task is.

”

Employee testimonials are an effective way to provide social proof and communicate your EVP on a Careers or Team page.

Dover

Sourcing

Sourcing

When you're first beginning to hire for your startup, you might be overwhelmed at the plethora of options: from job boards, to passive outreach to LinkedIn InMail, it's nearly impossible to weed through thousands of profiles to find your perfect match..

As a founder, sourcing is probably the area you have the least experience in the hiring process, especially if you've worked for companies with talent teams before. The methods that work best for larger companies or talent teams aren't always as fruitful for smaller companies with no internal talent team.

In this section, we'll list the best candidate sourcing strategies for startups just beginning to scale their team ranked from highest to lowest ROI.

In this section:

1. Sourcing from your personal network
2. Referrals
3. 2nd-degree connections
4. Passive talent
5. RPOs/Agencies
6. Inbound

1.

Sourcing from your personal network

Similar to investors, it's usually a bit of a red flag when the founder can't convince family, friends, or old colleagues to work with them. Though you may never get this feedback directly from candidates, knowing that you have a team who trusts in your vision and product (and enjoys working with you!) builds your credibility.

Sending cold recruiting outreach to people you don't know will be lower-ROI as a startup, and is truly a numbers game. **On Dover's platform, we average 250 emails per role per week and consider a great interest rate (aka the number of candidates who respond with interest for an introductory phone screen) to be about 3% depending on the role type.** That's a lot of emails for one person — even at larger companies, this is often handled by full-time recruiters and sourcers, who spend 40 hours per week to make ~3 hires per quarter.

Additionally, it'll be tough to get anyone on the phone in the preliminary stages of hiring (we're talking less than a five-person team) if they don't know you personally. Your first hires are going to take on the biggest risk (and potentially a pay cut) when joining your company — these are going to have to be folks who trust you, not just your produc

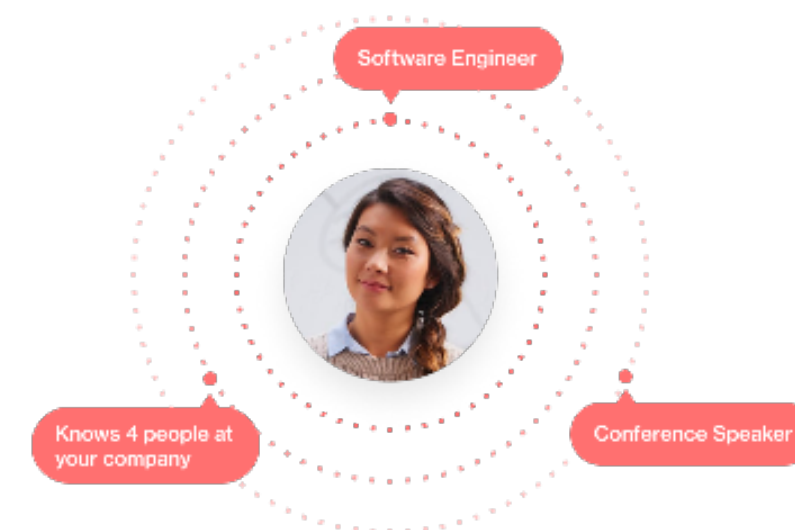
First, make a short list and reach out.

Before you start casting a wider net, you'll want to build out a short list of 10-25 people who you've worked with in the past. These include:

- 1. Level 1 Connections:** People who you've worked with closely, or know by reputation, that you'd want to work with no matter what. This is where you and your co-founders should start.
- 2. Level 2 Connections:** Folks you suspect are good, but maybe haven't worked as closely with. These may be classmates from school, friends from previous internships, and colleagues from former companies.

Carve out a few hours to go through your Facebook and LinkedIn connections to build your list of connections. There's a good chance this will turn up a good number of secondary connections as well. If you're using Dover, you can download our Chrome Extension to seamlessly import each person from LinkedIn with one click.

If you haven't done a great job maintaining Facebook or LinkedIn connections, run a search on LinkedIn to find people you know that you haven't connected with yet from your school or former employers.





From
Jess, CEO of Acme



To
Nisha, Senior Software Engineer

Saw that you worked at Facebook — Jason from our team worked there before joining us too! I'd love to hear more about your work migrating your team to Typescript. It's actually on our roadmap for next quarter.

The tools you'll need

While sourcing from your own network is typically much more casual than reaching to 2nd or 3rd degree connections, you should still use tools to track metrics, and ensure no one drops the ball on responding to outreach or moving candidates through your pipeline.

On Dover, we allow you to source directly from your LinkedIn connections, and we'll also cover all of the bases between candidate search, candidate work history, email finder, outreach, and CRM. But you can also piece together your own custom stack if you want to.

Here's what you'll need:

1. **An email finder:** Clearbit, or ContactOut If you don't know your personal contact well enough to text them, email will be your best bet since most candidates have LinkedIn InMail turned off:
2. **Candidate search program:** LinkedIn is the clear outlet to source from your personal network. You'll also want to ensure your profile is up-to-date with information about your company and a tagline that lets people know you're looking to hire. Dover only surfaces candidates that fit your search criteria — you can approve or reject them directly in Slack.
3. **CRM:** You'll want a place to organize the people you're reaching out to, kind of like a Salesforce

for your pipeline. A simple spreadsheet could do here, or you can use Dover to manage your funnel.

4. **Email manager:** As a founder, keeping your inbox clean can be an overwhelming task. Even if you choose to send recruiting outreach from your email for now, you'll want to transition to an email management system as soon as possible. There are plenty of programs like Reply.io, or Front which help you handle one-to-many emails. Dover sends automated personalized outreach to passive candidates and handles follow-ups, scheduling and even rejections. We track responses by level of interest and provide benchmark percentages to help you know how you're stacking up against other companies hiring for the same role.
5. **ATS:** Once you've built out an in-house recruiting team or start hiring at scale, you'll probably want to invest in an Applicant Tracking System (ATS), like Greenhouse, Lever or parts of Dover's platform. In the early days you probably won't have enough inbound interest to justify a career site or pain-points around tracking complicated interview loops.



2. Referrals



As you start to build our team, referrals will become a natural part of the process. Social proof, or the idea that people want to behave in ways similar to their peers, is a strong way to attract candidates to your startup as you're starting out and building up your brand.

You can also get referrals from friends, VCs, and advisors. The key is to put good processes in place to make it as easy as possible (and low-pressure) to source referrals, reach out, and follow-up.

In this guide to sourcing and reaching out to direct referrals, we'll assume you're using Dover because we allow you to source direct referrals in-app and send them personalized, automated outreach with follow-ups to nurture a relationship.

If you're not using Dover, the two big reasons likely blocking your team from reaching out to their network:

- 1. Not knowing where to start.** Just like you, many members on your team may have never sent a recruiting email, so it's hard to know what to say.
- 2. Anxiety about recruiting friends.** Team members may be nervous to recruit their friends and former-coworkers. For certain team members, you may want to offer to send the outreach yourself.

Host a referrals party.

Get your team excited and mentally prepared by explaining the importance of recruiting. Setting aside a time for your whole team to reach out to their networks together is a low-pressure way of ensuring that it actually happens. Also, it can ease the nerves of reaching out to networks cold.

Provide them with the right language.

If your team is less experienced with hiring, it can be difficult to come up with a personalized and witty recruiting email, especially if they haven't spoken to certain people in a while.

You'll want to create a template for them to use in their personal emails, such as this one:

Use this example template to get you and your team started.

Make sure to personalize these to your company by replacing bold sections with content specific to you. Also, if you're remote, consider suggesting catching up over call/video chat instead of a coffee.

If they have a friendlier relationship with their connection, sending them a quick text / FB Messenger chat can feel more natural and higher-touch. These can incorporate a lot of the same elements as your email outreach but should be shorter (and potentially spread out over 2-3 messages).

"Hey, **[FIRST_NAME]**, how's it going? I recently left **[COMPANY]** and started a new job at Dover. Things are going super well and it's been a blast. ***[INSERT 1-2 SENTENCES PERSONALIZATION ABOUT YOUR CONNECTION]*** We were eating lunch the other day and Max (our cofounder) was asking if I knew anyone great who was looking for their next thing. You immediately came to mind. Have you started thinking about what's next after **[CURRENT COMPANY]**? If so, let me know if you'd be up grabbing a coffee with Max — it would be awesome to work together again :)

Let's take a look at an example.

Subject: Launch new products at BlueVine - fintech startup with \$200M raised

Hi [REDACTED],

I'm a MIT grad/engineer running a boutique search firm for software and bio startups. Your nearly 6-year tenure and rise into management at [REDACTED] caught my attention. I thought you might want to learn more about BlueVine or connect for a broader discussion of the market & your career goals. Plus, it's always good connecting with fellow alumni! :)

(And BTW, if you want to keep working in the city, I could see [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] also being worth discussing/having on your radar.)

BlueVine has raised nearly \$200M in venture funding and made over \$1B in small business loans the past 5 years. Their engineering team is based in Tel Aviv, but we're looking for a hands-on eng manager to build out a new product group in Redwood City and develop our new generation of products.

This is an opportunity to have the impact and flexibility of an early-stage startup, backed by the resources of a high-growth business. BlueVine has made a big dent in the lending world but harbors much larger ambitions. It would be great to tell you more.

Feel free to put time on my calendar for an intro call. If the timing isn't right, I'm happy to circle back later or grab a coffee. Would love to see if I can be of any help. Warm regards!

[REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Personalization and flattery.

High-level overview of company funding, investors and customers.

Focus on impact and scope of the role.

Direct CTA — including a calendar link can double response rates.

3.

Second-degree connections

Second-degree connections are people connected to those folks in your network who don't work for your startup. This might be other founders, classmates or connections from networking or professional groups.



Using 1st-degree connection nodes to source 2nd-degree connections

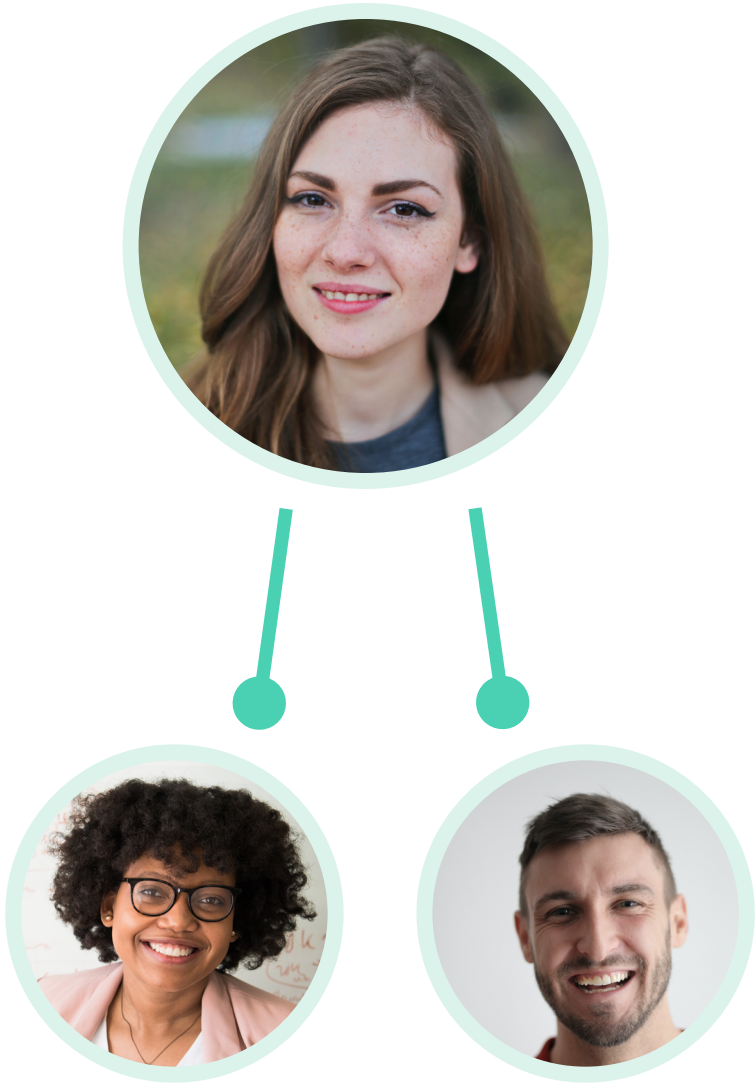
The best approach by far is to leverage strong “1st-degree connector nodes.” This idea comes from Steve Bartel, and is one that we use frequently at Dover. **A 1st-degree connector node is someone from your network who’s well-connected to other talented people.** Think of this as a referrals party for people outside of your company — you’ll reach out to those you know who have strong candidates in their networks and ask permission to name-drop the connector node in your initial outreach.

There are a few important factors when choosing your 1st-degree connector nodes:

1. Reach out to your connector node first. Give your connector node a heads up that you’ve reached out to a few folks from their network, so they aren’t caught by surprise. This goes without saying, but make sure they know you well and would say good things. The best thing that can happen when you name-drop your connector node is the candidate hearing positive things about you or your company from your mutual connection. This essentially turns your cold outreach into a warm intro. Not asking

for permission can backfire if your connector node doesn’t know you well enough, or isn’t super excited about what you’re working on.

- 2. Pick those with positive reputations or larger networks.** You want to pick connector nodes that your candidates will respect & trust. Also, talented people tend to know other talented people, so starting with the best connector nodes from your network will increase the quality of candidates who respond.
- 3. Prioritize connector nodes that tap into communities outside of those you’re a part of.** Out-of-network candidates can be a great way to prioritize diversity early on. Especially, because your 1st-degree connections will almost certainly have similar backgrounds and connections.



4.

Nurturing passive talent

While more established companies may be able to rely on inbound recruitment, the tech industry is simply too competitive for most young companies to get away with it.

Undoubtedly, the highest ROI recruiting option as an early-stage startup with limited visibility is to seek out passive candidates. However, this is typically a time-consuming process — at Dover, the average amount of touchpoints to get to a hire are 60.

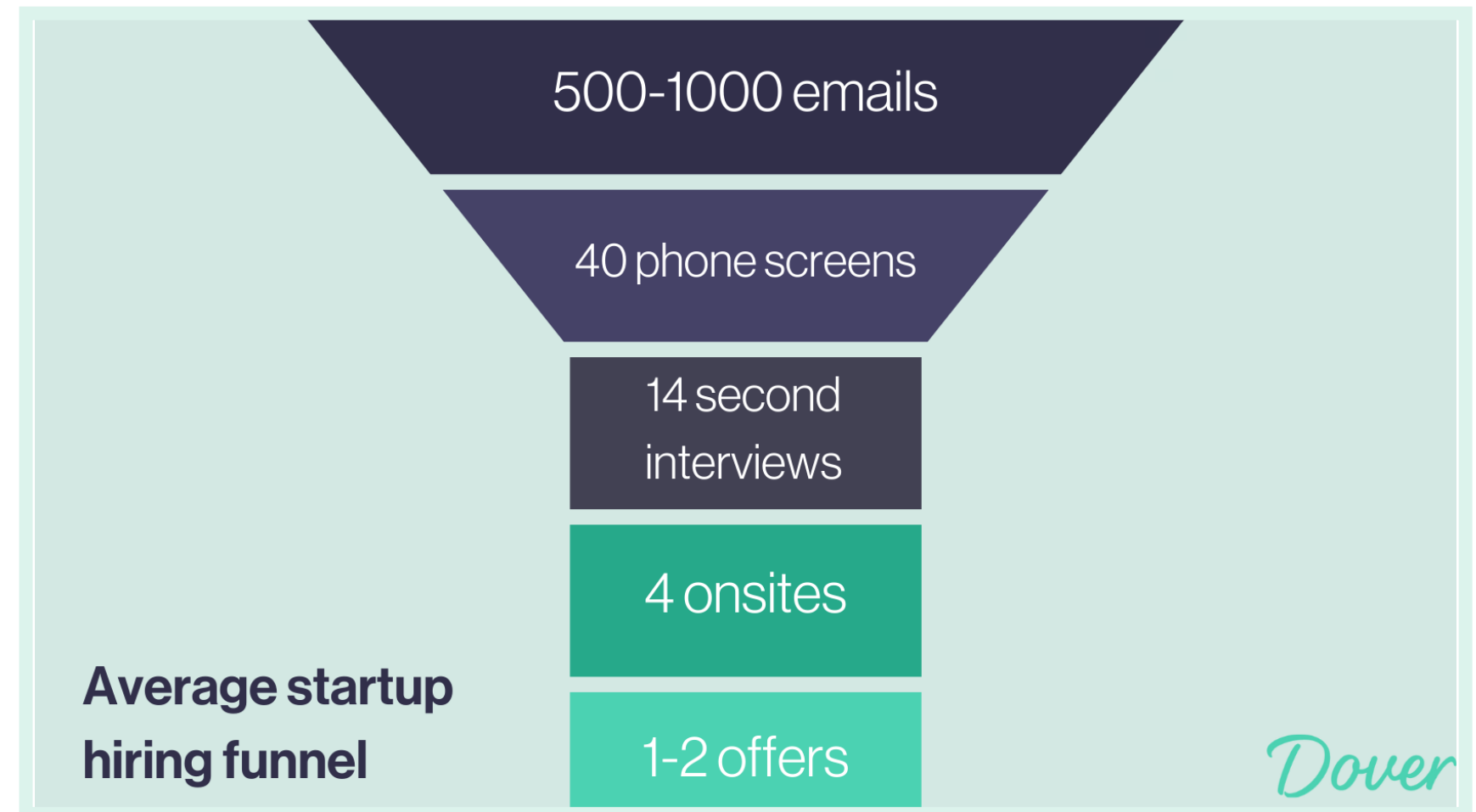
Not only that: relying solely on inbound recruiting severely restricts your talent pool. Only about 10% of job seekers say they're actively and urgently looking for work, according to a new survey from Indeed. Around 45% are passively looking for jobs, and another 30% plan to get a job in the near future but aren't looking at all right now. **If you're waiting for that 10% to apply instead of reaching out to the 75% who are open to offers, you're letting a huge talent pool go untapped.**

So... where do you start? In terms of tools, you'll want to source passive talent the same way you would source from **your own network**, but it'll take longer to nurture them to make the decision to leave their current role and join your company. Additionally, you'll want to employ varying degrees of engagement as they move through your funnel.

Low vs. high touch engagement

Deploying a variety of touchpoints across spectrum is also a good idea to keep candidates engaged. Illustrative examples include:

1. Low-touch — Quick emails, texts, calls.
2. Med-touch — Coffee chats, video calls.
3. High-touch — Happy hours, game nights, lunch with the team, coffee with another founder/engineer.



Keep sentences short, simple and concise.

Emails are read on mobile — think of the scroll test; if they have to scroll more than twice, they're probably not reading the entire email. Get the important information in first.

Focus on the you vs. the I or we.

The goal of an initial recruiting email is solely to get candidates on the phone. You'll have an opportunity to sell them on the company during the interview process. Leave your mission statement to 1-2 sentences and spend the rest of the message focusing on the role.

- How much impact will they have?
- How much autonomy and ownership do you offer?
- What tech stack do you use?
- Do you have any out-of-the-box benefits?
- What are some projects they'll work on in the first six months?
- Who will they be working alongside?

Use flattery and personalization.

In the crowded tech space, catching a talented candidate's eye often requires a personalized pitch. Crafting an email subject line or LinkedIn message that references one of their unique experiences or interests will get their attention much faster than a generic recruitment message.

If you can manage to establish a personal connection with a candidate, it can really pay off in the long run. **On Dover's platform, outreach that contains a personalized sentence results in 10 to 30% more interested responses** — even if those candidates have responded as not interested to another company's outreach. And even if the individual isn't looking to change careers at that exact moment, they're likely to keep you in mind once they are ready to consider new opportunities

Have a direct CTA.

Include specifics and action steps for the candidate. Writing: "Can you hop on a call within the next few days?" is much more specific and committal than "Are you free to chat sometime soon?"

Send emails, not InMail.

Again, a lot of people on LinkedIn have their InMail notifications off. Especially engineers — 40% of technical talent have notifications off.

Include relevant links.

- LinkedIn profile of the person sending the email
- The job posting for the role
- Your company website
- Any relevant press (if you haven't had a write-up yet, you can also consider writing a blog post about why you started your company as something to include in outreach)

How to write great recruiting emails

30%

increase in interested responses in outreach that includes details about the candidate's interests or past roles.

Most of your responses will fall into one of four categories:

- 1. Interested.** Sweet! Reply immediately to schedule that initial coffee chat or call. Aim to schedule it no more than a few days out.
- 2. Not Interested.** If someone says no, thank them for responding, and ask for their top 3 people they'd recommend you reach out to, especially if they're in your network.
- 3. Later.** Chances are the timing may not be right. Plant the seeds that you'll follow up down the road and set a due date for yourself.
- 4. No response.** Regardless of how you reached out, it's important to follow up 2-3 times if you didn't get a response. Reaching out to a friendly acquaintance to catch up is almost never going to be considered annoying or bothersome if you have a prior relationship.

Follow-up email cadence

Our data shows that **3 follow-up emails, spread 3 days apart, result in the highest response rates from passive candidates not from your network.** Inversely, if someone becomes less responsive, or doesn't respond at all, you can consider re-engaging them within 3 to 6 months.

Followup 1

EDIT MODE

PREVIEW MODE

Hi Alice, following up to make sure you didn't miss this. Are you open to learning more about what we're building?

Followup 2

EDIT MODE

PREVIEW MODE

Pinging this one more time Alice. Do you have time this next week for a chat?

Thanks!

Sidd

Handling follow-ups and responses

If you want to go even deeper on outreach best-practices, download our [Great Recruiting Emails](#) or [Great Rejection Emails](#) E-books, with stellar examples that have been successful for other top startups using Dover.

A better solution to outbound recruiting: automation

Finding the right person for the job, reaching out to them with the right message, and fostering the right relationship between candidate and company is the best way to hire top talent. It's also the most time-intensive. Founders shouldn't have to choose between the most effective form of recruitment and the most feasible.

At Dover, we **partner with you** to take on the operationally intensive tasks of recruiting, so you can meet with stronger candidates in less time. Save yourself the time-intensive job of sourcing and have conversations with people you actually want to talk to. **Most users get 2-3 qualified first interviews with just 10 minutes of setup time.**

Automatically generated outreach and follow-ups.

Through the use of AI, we automatically generate an outbound email and follow-ups to passive candidates based on your pitch, and the job responsibilities. We have a dedicated content team that optimizes our templates as the recruiting market changes (so you don't have to).

Personalization powered by AI.

On every email sent on Dover's platform, we pull relevant information from a candidate's online profiles, and construct a personalized, custom sentence using AI and GPT-3.

A/B testing.

Create multiple outreach campaigns and track metrics to ensure you're putting your best pitch (and foot) forward.

Automated scheduling.

Our recruiting coordinators schedule each stage of the interview process so you don't have to.

“

We initially used Dover to help with sourcing and candidate outreach -- **it's rare to find software that does both well.** But pairing that with automated scheduling meant we could optimize that *and* the bottom-funnel candidate experience, which was game-changing.”



Christopher Weber
CTO, Factor

“

“The integrations with tools we already use, like Slack, are nimble which makes the hiring process frictionless.”



Greg Shove
CEO, Section4

4. RPOs and Agencies

RPOs defined

Startups scaling quickly might go with an agency or use an RPO, an acronym that stands for “recruitment process outsourcing.” Similar to a consultant, an RPO model provides staff that is embedded into your company to handle sourcing, screening and hiring candidates, as well as improving your recruiting process and infrastructure.

Agencies defined

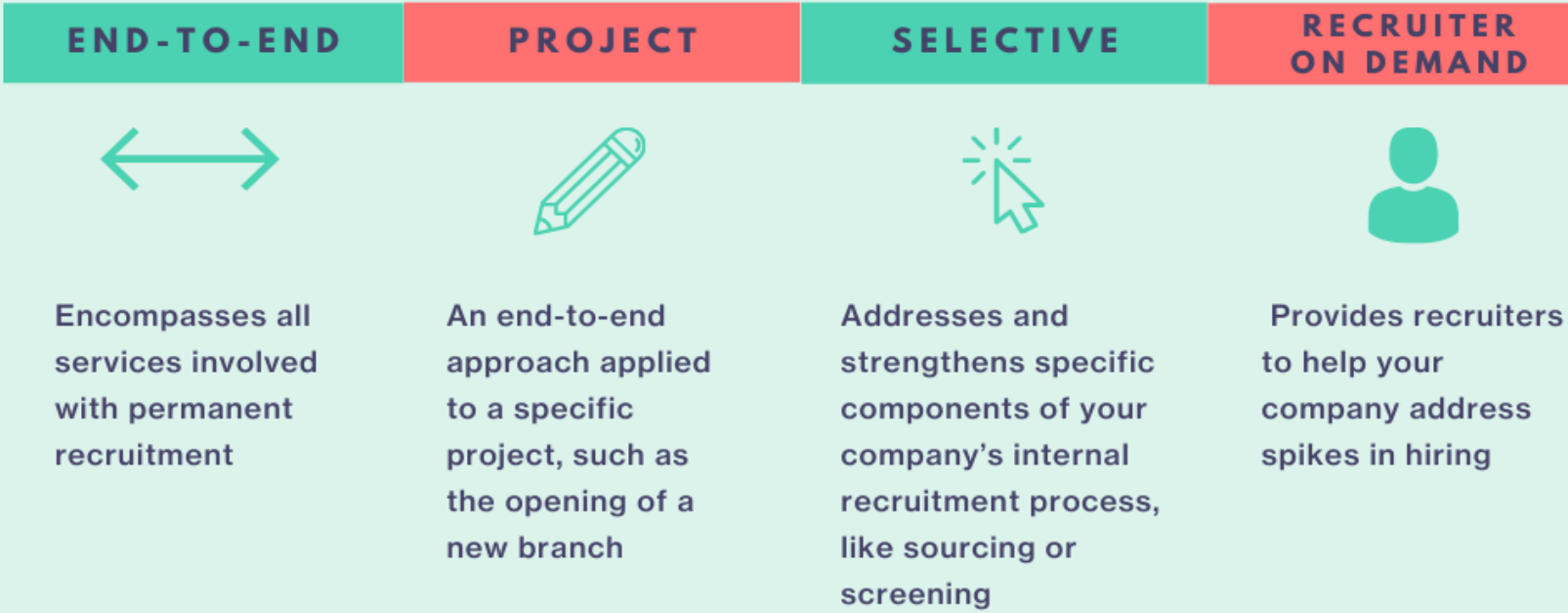
An agency acts as a middleman between your company and candidates, handling the sourcing, screening and late-stage scheduling with your team. They typically take a fee or percentage of first-year salary when they place a hire.

Recruiting agencies are mixed ROI for small startups largely due to cost, incentives, and variance in quality

- **They typically cost ~20-30% of a new hire’s first-year salary.**
- **Incentives might be misaligned.** Since most agencies are only held accountable for short-term performance and aren’t aligned with placing candidates that are a long-term fit, they might incentivize a candidate to negotiate your offer up or to take an offer from a larger company that can pay more cash.

The one place where you may consider using an agency is when hiring for roles where you aren’t an expert and don’t have a strong network. They’re hugely valuable for executive roles, but you probably won’t need to make that hire for several months or years.

Types of RPOs



The future of RPOs: tech-enablement

Some platforms, like Dover, are aptly called “tech-enabled RPOs” because they provide a human-in-the-loop to advise on strategy and calibrate searches, while automating the more tedious administrative aspects of the hiring process.

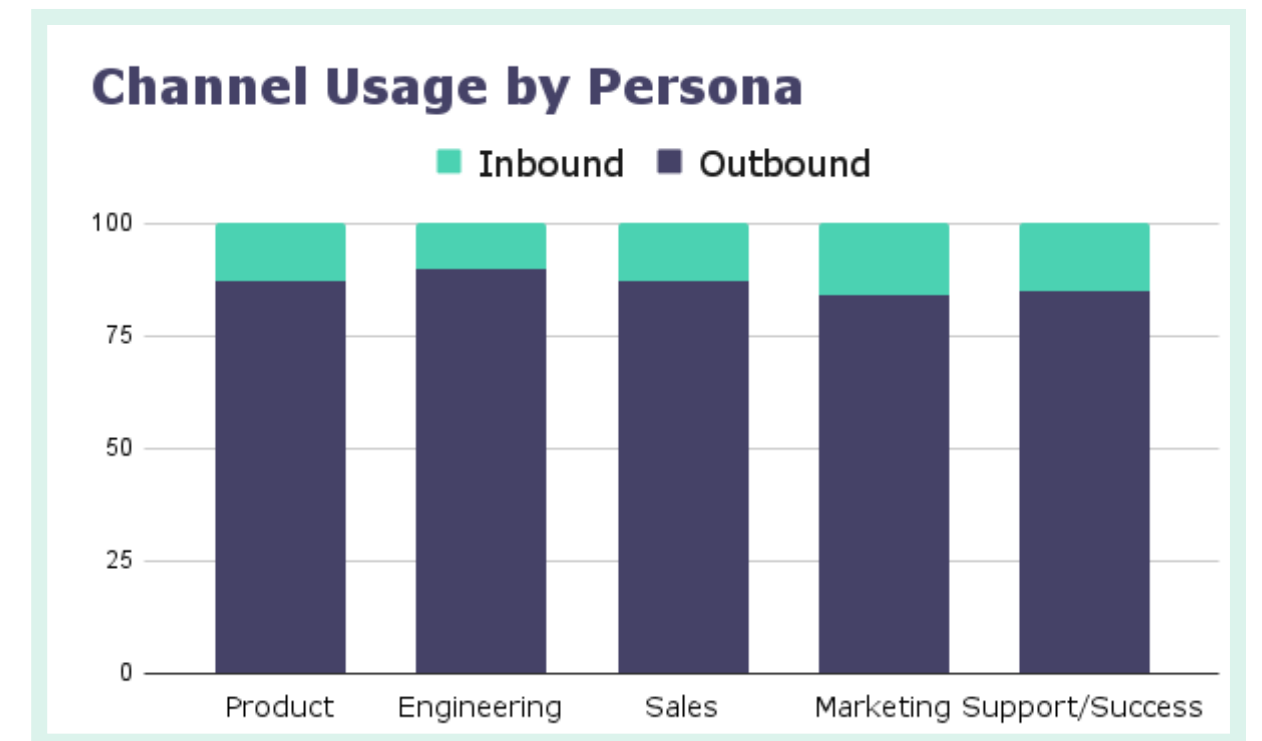
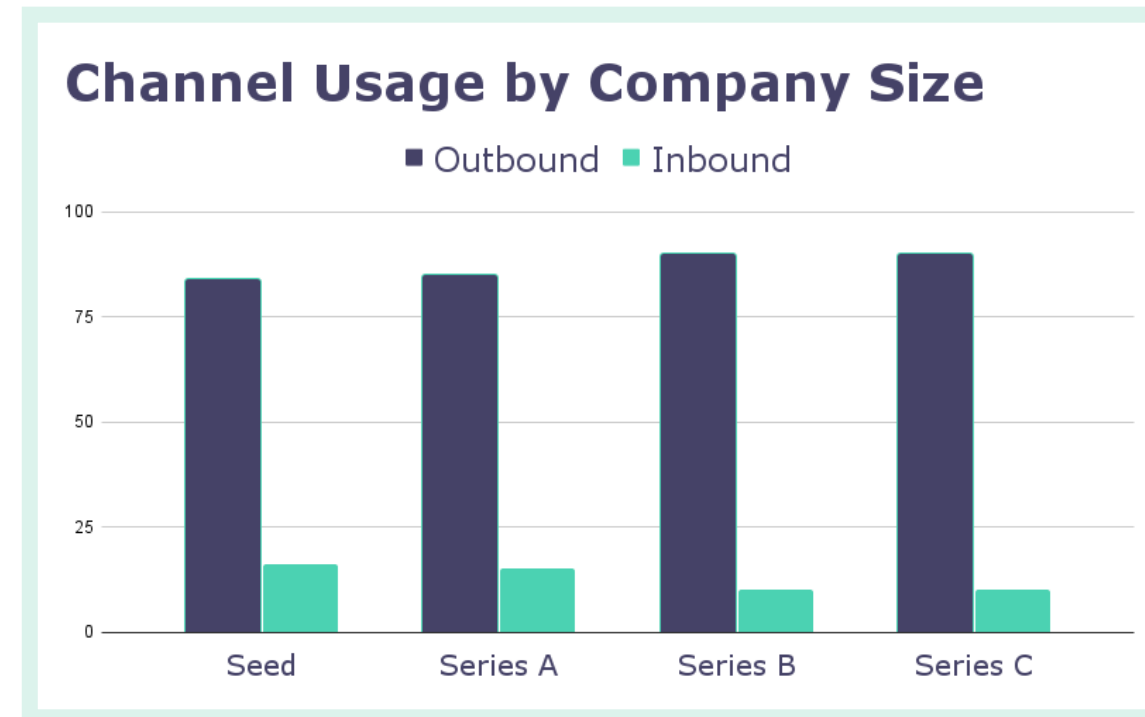
If you’re curious about how Dover stacks up against traditional external recruiting options, check out our [Buyer’s Guide](#).

6.

Inbound

We typically advise against spending too much time or money on job boards to hire your early-stage team unless combining with other channels.

To illustrate this, we broke down channel usage by company size and across personas. As you can see, most startups focus on outbound recruiting, especially with the unemployment rate for tech hires being historically low:



Using Dover to manage inbound applicants

Active Job Boards

Name ² ↑	Status ¹ ↑	Monthly Budget	# Applicants Received	Potential Candidates
Angellist	ACTIVE	Free	4	28
Behance	ACTIVE	Free	3	9*
Dribbble	ACTIVE	\$349	10	9
LinkedIn	ACTIVE	\$500	88	38
UX Jobs Board	ACTIVE	\$250	19	--

Attract high quality candidates from Dover's supported sources

+ Find More Job Board Candidates

As part of a comprehensive strategy including passive talent, and referrals, we’ve used automation and AI to make inbound recruiting easier than ever for early and scaling startups. Here’s how:

1. **We automatically find and post on the job boards that are most relevant to your searches**, and allow you to choose from an array of additional job board options.
2. We also suggest how much you should spend on various job boards to meet your hiring plans. **With our integrations, it’s as easy as toggling a job board on or off, and processing payment directly in-app.**
3. In the same way that our outbound recruiting software surfaces interested and qualified candidates to you in Slack, **Dover filters inbound candidates so only those that meet your exact search parameters are surfaced to you in Slack.** No more reviewing noisy applications and hours spent on tedious resume reviews.

Top job boards on Dover (based on # of applicants —> hires)

1. LinkedIn (#1 for Engineering, Product, and Marketing)
2. Indeed (#1 for Customer Success/ Support and Sales)
3. Angellist
4. ZipRecruiter
5. Dribbble
6. Built In
7. Startup Jobs
8. Crunchboard
9. Women Who Code (engineering only)

Honorable Mentions:
DGMG Jobs and Swipe Files (marketing), We Work Remotely (all startup jobs)

Our shortlist of the best inbound job boards

Horizontal

1. **LinkedIn** is one you surely already know about. It's an industry leader for good reason.
2. **Indeed** is the premier job site globally with 250 million regular visitors. You can post all types of jobs, sponsor the ones from your careers page, pay per click and search resumes.
3. **Beyond** automatically distributes postings to niche sites and talent communities based on specific criteria.

Tech-specific

4. **Dice** is a leader in the tech job boards industry. It has a cross-posting network with a database of more than nine million members.

Creative

5. **Behance** is where some of the top brands post their creative jobs. It's also the place where professionals showcase their work enabling you to take a sneak peek before you decide.
6. **Dribbble** gives you access to designers' portfolios and profiles. Dover's designers are really fond of it. Plus you can post your jobs and connect with top talent.

7. Freelance and remote-specific

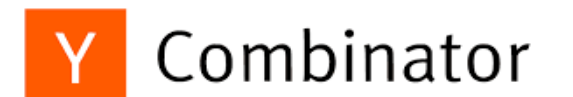
8. **We Work Remotely** allows you to narrow down talent without it having to be in the same location as you.
9. **Upwork** is free and for freelancers only.
10. **Flexjobs** is free and effective when it comes to flexible jobs job posting. Only applies if you're in search of part-time, telecommute or freelance employees.

Startup-specific

11. **AngelList**: You probably already know it if you're a startup. Candidates get to apply privately and see salary and equity up front and startups get to access a huge list of developers and designers actively looking for a job.
12. **StartUpHire** lists hundreds of jobs, but only for venture capital backed companies. It also comes at zero cost.
13. **YCombinator**: if you're a Y Combinator alum, you can post job ads on their website. Dover's received a ton of applications from high quality candidates looking for early stage companies.
14. **The Muse** lets you "showcase the heart and soul of your company" in 500 words, videos and photos and then display your job openings.



AngelList



Dover's early team and where we found them

As you've probably guessed, we used Dover to hire some of our founding team members (if they weren't already in or network or referred through others).

**John**

founding engineer, 1st degree, a classmate from MIT

**Sidd**

founding engineer, 1st degree, a classmate from MIT and John's friend

**Brittany**

first support hire, 2nd degree, referred to us through a colleague from Max's previous company

**Gillian**

our former chief of staff, 2nd degree, a YC alum

**Akash**

founding head of biz ops, 1st degree, Anvisha's high school classmate

**Noa**

founding engineer, 1st degree, a classmate from MIT

**David**

first Dover outbound hire

**Sharon**

2nd Dover outbound hire

**Frank**

1st Dover inbound hire

**Thomas**

our second support hire, 1st degree, Brittany's classmate

You'll notice a few things:

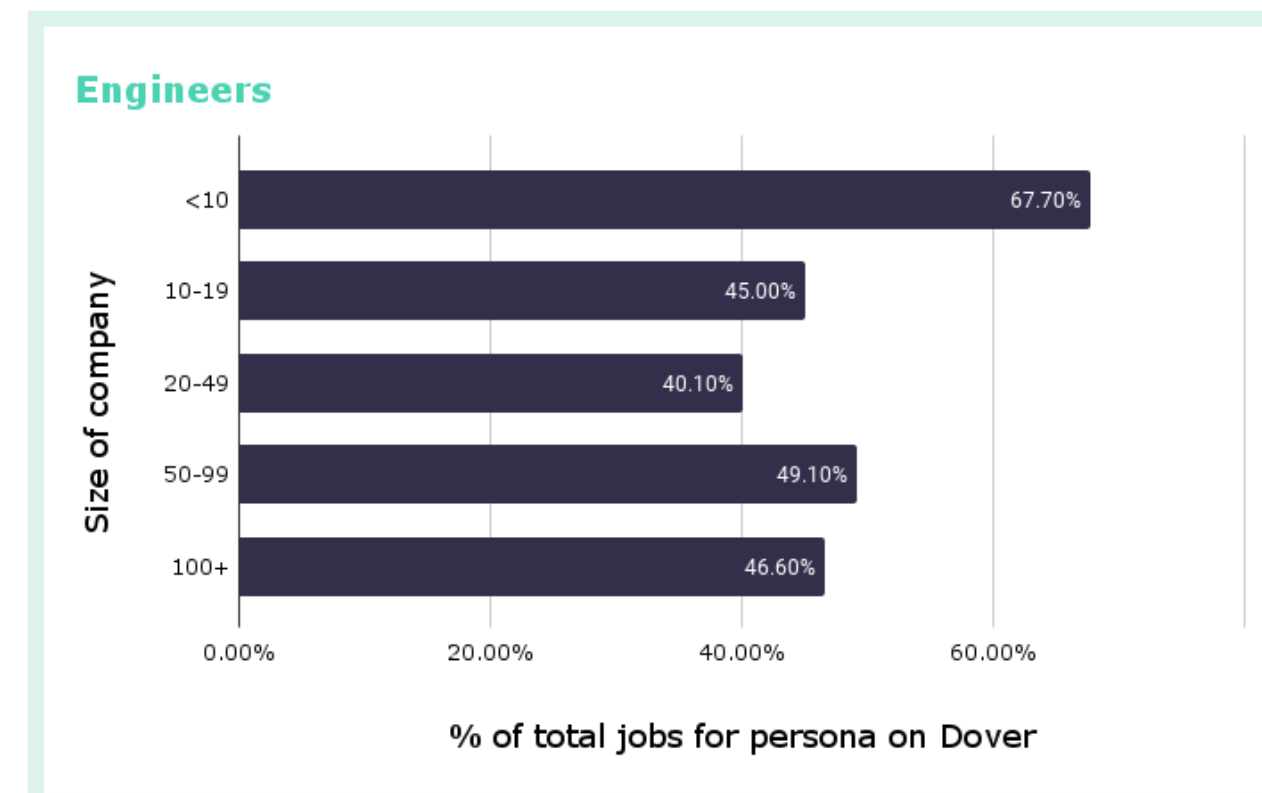
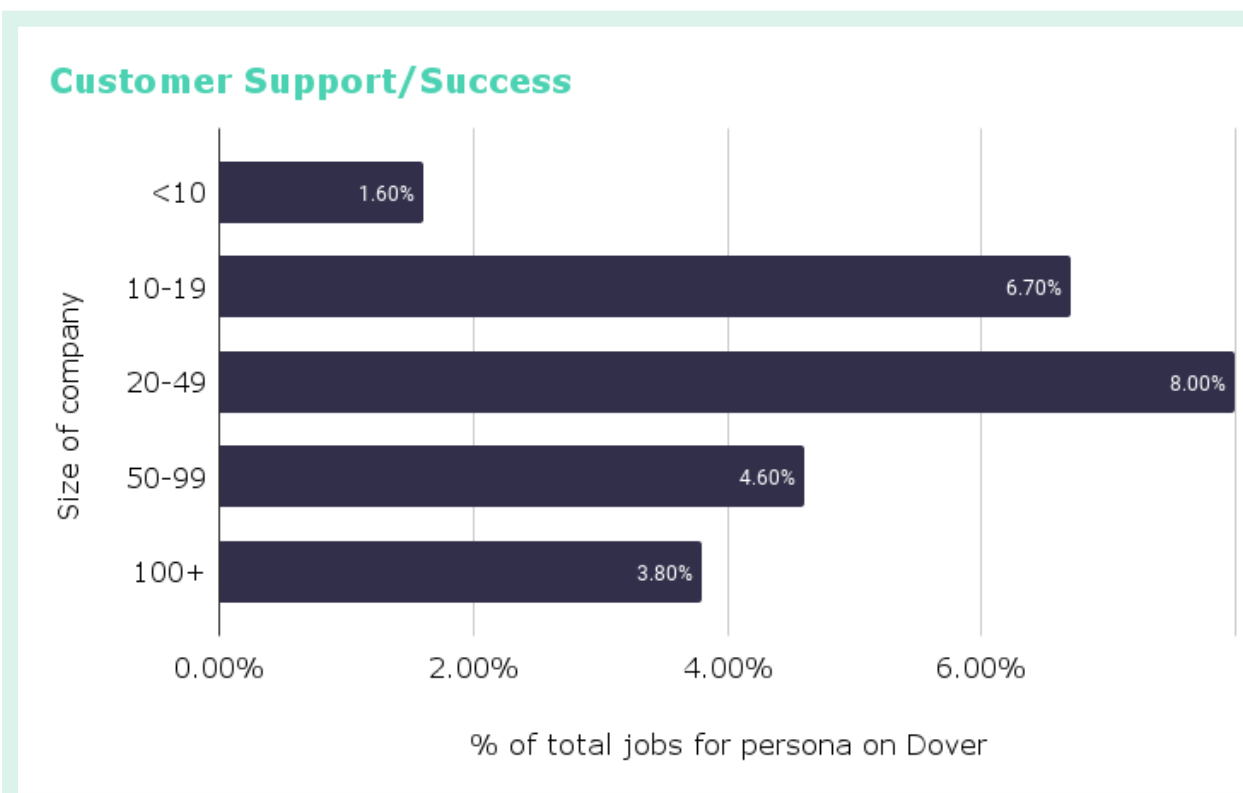
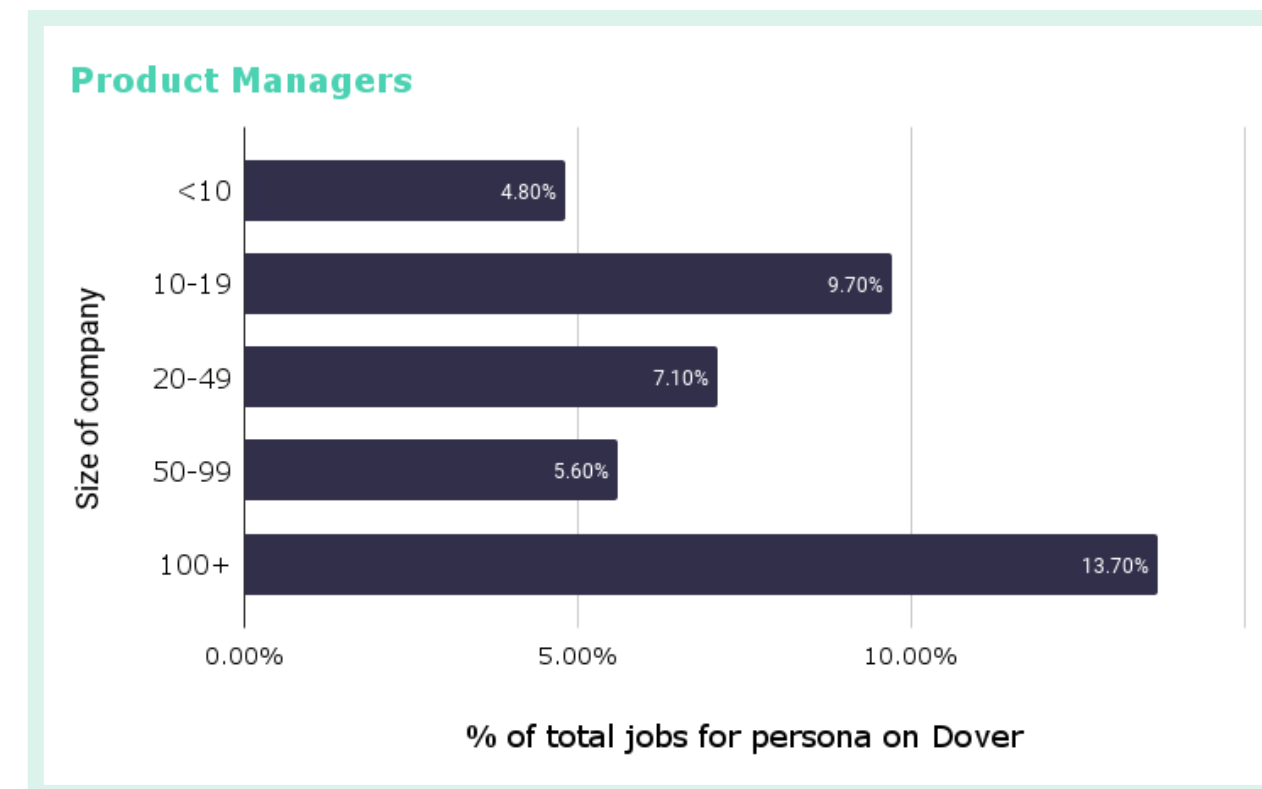
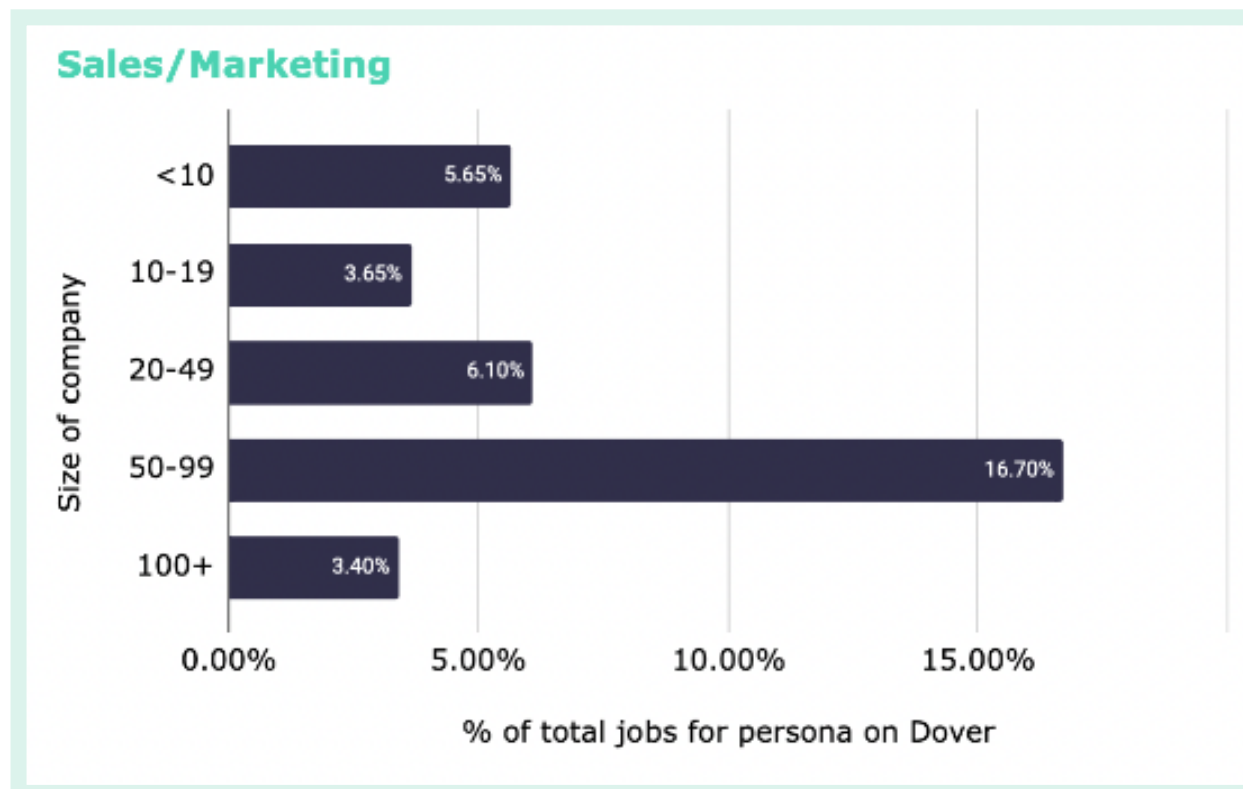
- **Our first few hires are 1st-degree connections.** Before your startup has a brand and is fairly risky, hiring connections is an effective way to de-risk the opportunity for people — because they know and trust your founding team.
- **Our founding team is incredibly talented and experienced.** They helped us build out the amazing product our startup customers use today, hired and onboarded incredible teams and built out amazing workflows to ensure we could grow to the size we are today. We wouldn't be here today without them.
- **Bringing on great people helped us hire more great people** (you see several referrals within the founding team).

When should you hire your first...?

Each company is different, but a question we often hear from founders is “When should I hire my first [insert role here]?” Deciding when to hire for a position (or scale up a team) is dependent on a few factors:

1. **Your company size and funding**
2. **What type of product you’re selling** (i.e. if you have a customer-facing tool, you may want to hire support team members earlier than other startups)
3. **Your priorities over the next year** — do you plan on designing a new feature of your product? Then you’ll probably need more engineers and product managers/ marketers. Are you trying to expand into a new market? Then you’ll probably want to build out your sales team.

It can be helpful to see what size other companies were when they decided to hire for a specific team. We’ve compiled the four graphs to the right to help you assess whether you should start thinking about hiring your first X... or holding off.



Dover

Interviewing



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Conducting an interview process

In 2021, Dover conducted over 6,300 interviews for top startups. In this section, we've distilled a few best practices to help you design a thoughtful interview loop that's specific to your team and the role you're hiring for.

Designing an interview loop

The interview loop is a series of conversations and tests designed to assess a candidate's fit for a role.

Interview loops are most effective when they are standardized, meaning that everyone goes through the same amount of conversations as stages as all other roles. For each role, a candidate will also be asked the same questions, in the same order.

A well-designed interview loop serves four purposes:

1. It gives you a clean signal on the candidate's skill and values.
2. It gives the candidate confidence in your team and approach to team building.
3. It helps to calibrate interviewers, recruiters, and hiring managers.
4. It helps to eliminate personal bias in your recruiting process.

So, where do you start?

1. Create a scorecard.

A scorecard helps you to remain consistent and honest when evaluating candidates. Doing this before beginning your search can help you discover what you're actually looking for in the role — and what qualities could instead be “nice-to-have”. It'll also help you align on which questions to ask during each part of the interview process.

Some areas to consider are:

- **General demeanor:** This can include politeness, timeliness, friendliness, and the ability to articulate ideas clearly. Did you leave the interview with more energy than you came in with?
- **Past experience or career trajectory:** Where do they see themselves in the next year — could this role meet those needs and goals? If it's a technical role, were they able to explain highly technical projects in a clear and simple way?
- **Professional requirements you care about:** This can range from experience in specific programs you will need the role to use frequently, tech stack knowledge, or other specifics that pertain to the role.
- **Any areas of concern:** Poor communication skills, potential issues in start date/qualifications, etc. This can also be company-specific. For example, one of our top customers Hey-

Jane provides affordable and accessible abortion care. They asked us to assess how comfortable candidates were with using the word “abortion” — those who seemed hesitant would obviously not be the right fit.

You'll want to save these rubrics somewhere where they can be easily accessed. **As part of your hiring process, you can ask hiring managers to outline their requirements and present them alongside their request.**

If you've never hired for a role or hired in general before, the best way to develop a rubric is to ask folks at other companies what they've found to be critical in assessing different personas and ensuring they make a great hire.

Don't worry, we also created a series of [scoring rubric templates](#) across the most popular personas startups hire for — [check it out here for inspiration and a starting point.](#)

Create interview stages that highlight your values.

You'll typically see candidates through 5 or 6 stages. They are:

1. Initial sell conversation

For inbound candidates, your remote screen will also be your initial sell conversation.

For passive candidates you sourced from your network, your first intro call is just an opportunity to garner interest in the role, and your company with the hopes of moving the candidate into a traditional interview process. We cover more of this in our selling/closing section.

2. Remote screen #1

The first remote screen tends to focus on the candidate's background, experiences, and any particular personality traits you're looking to evaluate. A first-round phone screen should quickly qualify the candidate for or eliminate them from further evaluation so that no one is wasting their time.

Additionally, they can help you:

- Check for potential dealbreakers early on (e.g. availability, relocation, proficiency in

your tech stack, etc.)

- Ask for clarification on information in candidates' resumes or LinkedIn profiles
- Evaluate candidates' verbal communication skills (in some cases, test candidates for their ability to speak foreign languages)
- Get to know candidates
- For passive candidates, learn about their goals and desire to switch companies

Save more in-depth skills assessments for your second screening interview.

3. Remote screen #2

This second screen tends to focus on technical or practical skills. This interview should map to the hard skills in your rubric.

For engineers, you might ask them to describe technical projects they've worked on. For sales candidates, you might have them role-play their current product demo. For design, you might have the candidate send along a portfolio for review.

This interview is important because it's the first time you're evaluating the baseline skills required to do the job. If this interview isn't properly

designed, you will end up wasting everyone's time bringing non-qualified candidates onsite.

3. Take home assessments and work samples

Asking candidates to do part of the job helps you see and evaluate their work. The right homework assignment or exercise can even get candidates excited about the job. Homework, in particular, can also allow them to show off what they can do without the added pressure of being in an interview. However, you need to be careful with homework assignments: you will lose candidates if you ask them to do too much. And not having clear evaluation criteria (how you'll grade the homework) can make the whole exercise a waste of time.

Bottom line: When it comes to homework assessments, don't overdo it. Choose assessments that make sense to candidates (they should be able to understand why they're doing it and how it's relevant to the job) and try to confine their work to 2 to 3 hours at most.

4. Onsite Interview

If candidates make it to the final stage of the process, you have enough conviction that they would be able to do the job. The point of an onsite is to assess culture fit and increase the likelihood that the candidate signs.

We suggest choosing 3-4 focus areas from your hiring rubric that you care the most about for this particular persona. Hiring managers should assign which question set will be covered by the interviewer during each portion.

Read more about how to run an onsite interview process below.

5. Reference checks

As a startup, one bad hire can set you back months. Getting references will validate or invalidate the information you gathered during the interview process. They'll usually give you additional signal (positive or negative) and sometimes raise flags you missed during the interview process. A standard reference call should last between 15-30 minutes.

How to run an onsite interview process

Final round conversations in an onsite format should be equal part evaluative and selling. In this section, we'll outline a few key components you'll want to consider when building out your interview process.

Behavioral assessments

Behavioral interviews assess a candidate's likelihood to exhibit the values you outline in your employee value prop. Candidates should be interviewed by people outside of the functional area they are interviewing for (make note that for a smaller company, this might not be feasible).

Instead of trying to get through a long list of questions, ask probing questions to dive deeper into answers, understand candidates motivations, and clarify any ambiguous signal or language.

Probing questions often begin with "what" or "how." Questions inviting personal reflection often begin with "do you" or "are you."

Here is an example:

- **Question:** "Tell me about a mistake you made?"
- **Answer:** "Once I sent an email to the wrong person with sensitive information."

Possible probing questions:

- Can you tell me more about the email you were writing?
- What was the setting/circumstance in which you made the mistake?
- How did you realize the mistake was made?

- Once you realized the mistake made, what did you do? Was there a list of options you considered in how to rectify it? How did you decide what path to take?
- Did you implement anything to make sure the mistake didn't happen again?
- Did you learn anything else from this mistake? Any other insights that came out of it?

Clarifying questions can also be helpful in getting clarity around ambiguous signals or general answers:

- What I hear you saying is ...
- Can you give me an example of ... ?
- What makes you feel that way?
- You just told me about ... I'd also like to know about ...

Regardless, each of the behavioral interviews in an onsite (at Dover, we typically do two per candidate) should follow a very consistent format:

1. [Selling] Introduction (5 minutes): who you are, where you grew up, what you've studied, where you worked, why you joined your company, what is a cool problem you're working on right now.
2. [Evaluative] 2 deep-dive questions (7-8 minutes each): these questions should cover one specific experience from the candidate background in great detail. The reason for going into one experience in great detail is to really understand how the candidate thought and felt during a particular scenario from their past. It is also less likely for a candidate to lie when they are pressed on a particular scenario in great depth.
3. [Selling] Open ended to allow candidate to ask questions (8-10 minutes)

Here's an example of a behavioral interview that assesses how a candidate exhibits our value of “extreme ownership”:

Question phrasing

I would love to deep-dive into a story from your past to understand how you saw something going wrong which was not directly part of your responsibilities and did something about it. How did you go about resolving it?

Detailed questions to guide the conversation:

- What was the business problem?
- Was it supposed to be someone else's responsibility to solve it? Why did they not get solved?
- What did you do about the problem?
- Were there some parts of it that you did not understand? How did you get help from others in the company to solve it?
- What were some parts of this problem that you did not enjoy? How did you go about addressing that?

How to grade this answer

- 0:** Candidate saw the problem, explained the rationale to the rest of the team on why it needs to be solved but did not take it to completion themselves
- 1:** Candidate got into the details of the problem and solved it to the best of their abilities
- 2:** Candidate learned something new, did some unglamorous work and also created a system or process to make sure issues like this did not happen again

Social interview

These are casual interviews with a member of the candidate's team, and ideally, a member from outside of their team. This could be a nice break in what will be a long day of interviews and assessments, and can help a candidate feel more comfortable with your team, as well as give them the opportunity to ask any questions they might have about the culture.

Roleplay/coding challenge

The roleplay interview is typically best reserved for customer-facing or sales roles. It should depict a scenario the candidate is likely to encounter in the role, and should challenge them to exhibit their relational and interpersonal skills. If you're conducting a roleplay as part of your onsite, you'll want to come prepared with a scenario, specific questions and success criteria to ensure that you're able to assess candidate equally.

For example, with our customer support role, we assess:

- Did the candidate lay out a clear agenda for the call/ask us if we had anything we wanted to cover?
- Leave something ambiguous and see if they clarify next steps

- How well does the candidate deal with curve balls?
- Do they offer emotional support?
- How clear is the candidate's communication?
- Did the candidate become easily frustrated in the face of adversity or did they remain calm and collected?

For technical challenges, it's best to pair with an engineer on an actual part of their product.

A great thing about this process is it gives you clear conviction — with our founding engineer, we gave him three product features to pick from and work on (and obviously, compensated him for his time). Within 3 days, he had built out all of them. The decision to hire John was unanimous and easy.

Not all candidates will be as clear as John. It's important to have a clear scoring rubric for each part of the roleplay or challenge that you find valuable (such as code literacy, communication skills, ability to think strategically, etc.)

Sample roleplay scoring rubric

Strong No

- The candidate did not get it done
- The candidate may have given up early. You, the interviewer, may have had to reject them early.

No

- The candidate came close but failed to implement some MUST HAVE functionality or did something incorrectly.

Yes

- The candidate got all of the MUST HAVES and at least 1 NICE TO HAVE.
- OR the candidate got most of the MUST HAVES but multiple NICE TO HAVES. Issues with the MUST HAVES could be easily addressed.

Strong Yes

- The candidate absolutely killed it.
- The MUST HAVES are done to perfection and they completed at least one (likely more) NICE TO HAVE.

Career Fit

The goal of the career fit conversation is to better understand the candidate's professional motivations and how they align with your company's growth and culture. In other words, it's not an evaluation, but a measure of how engaged and excited they are to join your company.

At Dover, we assess this by asking questions like:

- What did you learn from people today?
- What has surprised you?
- What worries you?
- What would success look like for you over the next year? Why can't you get this at your current company?

This is where your hiring rubric can really make the difference — let's say one of your values is "many hands make light work", and you'd like to foster a culture of support and collaboration. If a candidate's response to "What would success look like for you over the next year?" is something like "more flexibility, autonomy or work/life balance", they might not be the right person for your company, even if they're a strong candidate.

Closeout

This is typically a meeting with a founder or someone on the executive team. The point here is to sell the role, answer any final questions, and gauge candidate interest if they were to receive an offer. We ask all of our candidates to tell us how willing they'd be to join Dover if they were to receive an offer on a scale of 1 - 10.



Next: Debriefs 101

Debriefs 101

After a candidate has gone through your onsite process, the hiring manager should meet with all interviewers to discuss whether or not an offer will be extended. By definition, this is a debrief.

You may also realize in a debrief that you have insufficient information to make a hiring decision, and in this case, having a formal conversation is still helpful because it will help you uncover what signal you may be missing on a candidate and align on what next steps (if any) to take. This could mean more assessment of a candidate, or a revamp of your hiring process, rubric or questions to achieve more signal across the interview process.

How to structure a debrief

1. **Make sure that interviewers are not talking about the candidate before everyone has written up this feedback.** Talking to one another before submitting written feedback will lead to interviewers biasing each other on the panel.
2. **Ask interviewers that participated in the panel to simultaneously throw out rankings between 1 (low) and 4 (high).** By doing this at the same time, you prevent bias or a junior team member being swayed by a senior team member.
3. **In the order that the interviews were conducted, ask each interviewer to explain their rating.** Start by recapping what they were asked to evaluate in their interview, so the room has that context.
4. **The hiring manager will take notes** and enter them into your ATS, or a spreadsheet afterwards.
5. **If you're having trouble understanding how the interviewer landed on their rating, you should ask follow up questions**, like "this interview sounded positive, what would you have needed to see to give a strong yes, vs. a yes?" or "why was this a weak no vs. a solid no?"

Making a decision

You might end the debrief in clear alignment with the team on next steps (moving to an offer or reference checks, or rejecting).

It is also ok to end without a clear decision, and you might end the debrief torn on what to do. There are a few different scenarios here:

1. **You believe the candidate is good, but you don't have enough information to feel confident in making a decision.** Ask yourself:
 - Do we need to change our interview process to make sure we get this signal next time?
 - Is there a way to get this signal from the candidate at this point in time? Maybe we do another interview, a take-home test, or something else.
2. **You might be torn because the interview panel was torn.** Some want to make a hire, and others don't.
 - First off, don't feel like you have to make a decision in the room. It's ok to say "thanks for the feedback. I'm going to think this over and will follow up on the next steps."
 - If your team is small, it's probably important to have a lot of alignment and excitement around the first few hires. If a debrief is particularly contentious, you might want to pass.



Sample reference call format

You should start most reference calls by sharing a bit on your company & role and learning more about your reference & their relationship to the candidate. Then, you can dig into the meat of the call. Depending on how the interview process is going, you'll want to get information on the candidate's work, their strengths, their areas for improvement/gaps, and a high-level rating from the reference. You should tailor a few of your questions to specific things important to the role, your company, or that you're lacking signal on based on interview performance.

Here's a template you can use to structure your reference calls, including example questions.

1. Start with some context on your company & the role you're considering the candidate for.

2. Learn more about the reference itself & their relationship to the candidate

- What was your role at the company?
- How long have you been at the company?
- How do you know the candidate?
- How did you work with the candidate?
- How was the team structured?

3. Get a high-level overview of the candidate's work.

- In what capacity did you collaborate with them?
- Can you share a few examples of what the candidate worked on?

4. Strengths

- What would you say is the candidate's biggest strength?
- What was the candidate's biggest achievement while you worked with them?
- What was a project they worked on that was

really impressive or challenging?

5. Areas for improvement / gaps

- What advice would you give to yourself if you were to manage the candidate?
- If we are to bring the candidate onboard, what advice would you have for me to set them up for success in their first 90 days?
- If you were to work with the candidate again, what would be the one area you'd coach them on?

6. [optional] Ask about other areas that may be important to understand depending on the specific candidate and/or role:

- How would you describe the candidate's working style?
- How do they learn new skills?
- Do you have an example of a time you gave candidate feedback? How did they respond?
- What is it like to work with the candidate day-to-day?
- On a scale of 1-10, how would you rank the candidate in terms of work ethic?

7. [Optional] If the reference was a direct report, ask them:

- For how long did the candidate manage you,

and in what capacity?

- What did you like most and least about the candidate's management style?
- How did the candidate's management style help you grow and learn?
- How could the candidate have better managed you and your co-workers?

8. Have them quantify the candidate overall

- On a scale from 1-10, how would you rank the candidate compared to their peers?
- If not a 10, what would it take to get them to a 10?
- Where would you put candidate on a scale of: the best person I've worked with to, top 5%, 10%, 25%, above average, average

As a note, it's important to round down. What we mean by that is, references will rarely speak ill of a candidate, so a mixed reference is usually a bad signal.

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 already.
- Schedule a coffee/lunch/dinner with them before their start date

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.

How to foster a positive candidate experience



Though your interview process is a way for you to assess candidates, it's also a way for candidates to assess your culture, thoughtfulness and organization. In fact, 63% of job seekers will likely reject a job offer because of a bad candidate experience.

Delivering a great candidate experience will increase your close rate and preserve your employer brand. A negative one (e.g. showing up late to an interview, or treating your candidate poorly) can hurt your company's reputation. Candidate experience encompasses all parts of your hiring process, from outreach to follow-ups to interviews to branding.

Every person at the company the candidate interacts with from the first reach out to onsite to hire needs to understand the concept of candidate experience.— here are our top tips to ensure that candidates view your company positively, even if they don't get an offer.

Schedule next steps at the end of a successful interview.

You should know if you want to move the person further through your process at the end of your first call. Spending 3 minutes scheduling your next interview will save you days of scheduling time and emails back and forth.

Here's how a conversation might go:

Hiring Manager (at the end of second interview): "Thanks again for taking the time to connect today! I'd love to invite you to meet the rest of the team onsite next week— would you be interested in moving forward with us?"

Candidate: "Next week sounds great, I'm excited to meet the team. I'm free next Friday."

Hiring Manager: "Perfect! As part of our onsite, we'll have you complete a take-home assessment beforehand. It should only take you a couple hours to complete, and will be due two days before the onsite. Does that work for you?"

In this case, if the candidate fails to complete the take home assessment, or it's not up to par, you can always cancel the onsite.

Simplify scheduling.

Another way to ensure timely follow-ups and no lag in moving top talent through your pipeline, you should make sure of the multitude of scheduling apps out there.

Most startups use one of two options:

- **Calendly:** the most popular scheduling tool. You can create 15 or 30 minute meetings and sync with your video calling program of choice.
- **ATS** (if you have one at this stage): most Applicant Tracking Systems have a scheduling function that allows you to schedule each stage.

Communicate rejections early and thoughtfully.

Responding to unsuccessful applicants promptly with helpful feedback from their interview, can make a lasting impression. Even if you don't hire them, they might recommend your startup to someone in their network. Alternatively, they might be suitable for the role in the future when they have additional skills and experience.

For best-in-class examples of thoughtful rejection emails, check out our [Great Rejection Emails e-book](#).

Make sure team members are aligned on the focus of their interview, and which questions to ask.

Create a shareable doc for every stage of the interview so that the person responsible can quickly learn:

- What they're looking to learn about the candidate at a high-level
- Which questions they should ask and in which order
- Scoring criteria

This will prevent any confusion with the interview panel, which could reflect poorly on your organization. You'll also want to include the candidate's social profiles (such as LinkedIn or Github) so the interviewer can get up to speed on their experience and tailor their questions to their resume.

Put the candidate at ease at the start of an interview.

If you can help candidates be less nervous, you have a better chance of getting clear signal on their abilities, and also their personality.

A good way to do this is to start with a bit of small talk to get them warmed up, or to offer the candidate a quick break if they need a drink or a restroom break (sometimes they might just appreciate taking a minute to re-group). Remember that authenticity and allowing your own personality to shine through interview process gives them permission to do the same.

Know which questions are off limits.

Under no circumstances should you ask clarifying questions around age, sex, sexual orientation, race, color, national origin, religion, genetics or disabilities.

Some other questions that seem innocent but can be intrusive are:

- Where are you from?
- How old are you?
- Aww cute kids! How old are they?
- What year did you graduate?

As your team grows, you'll want to invest in Unconscious Bias training to ensure that everyone in your interview process is up to speed on what's appropriate to ask during an interview process. At Dover, we use [Paradigm](#).

Let the candidate know the agenda for each interview.

If a candidate is passing to the next stage, make sure that when sending follow-ups, you include the agenda or items that will be discussed in the next round of the interview process.

You'll also want to open the interview with a brief agenda and introduction so that the candidate feels prepared and at ease about what will be covered.

For example: "I'm really excited to learn more about you today. I have a bunch of questions I'd like to ask, particularly around the way you think about (insert area here). I'd love to dive right in, but I'll make sure to save some time at the end of the interview to make sure you have time to ask any questions as well. Does that sound good?"

When introducing yourself, describe what you do, and how might you work with the candidate in the role you're trying to fill. This will help give them context on who they are talking to, and why you might specifically be on the interview loop.

Dover

Selling and closing

Selling and closing

If you're a founder, 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. We'll also dive into benefits, and compensation.

In this section:

1. Understanding candidate motivations
2. Closing in discovery conversations
3. Closing during the interview process
4. Making an offer

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.”

The Five F's of Candidate Motivation

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Fit


Family


Freedom


Fortune


Fun

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?

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Compensation

Compensation best practices

As a founder, figuring out how to set and navigate compensation early on is critical to the ongoing success of your business and motivation of your employees.

One of the most common mistakes we see early on is founders setting compensation for early employees pretty subjectively. It might be based on gut instinct of what might be fair for the position, what runway you have available, what the candidate asks for, or some combination of all three.

Compensating employees well has a number of benefits for your team, too:

- Increase employee loyalty and retention
- Increase employee motivation and productivity
- Positioning yourself as an equitable, and transparent employer

As the Great Reshuffle continues, outcompeting on employee compensation or benefits can be a key factor in their decision to join.

Here are our top 4 tips for acing a compensation strategy as your startup scales:

1. Align on a compensation philosophy.

A “compensation philosophy” is a stance on compensation that explains the “why” and creates a framework for consistency. It can be useful as a talking point during compensation negotiation conversations as well.

Some other questions it might help you answer are:

1. How can our team have conversations around compensation in a safe, equitable way?
2. What are the tradeoffs we are incurring by making our compensation philosophy? Think about where you’re targeting higher equity over comp, or trading comp for other cash incentivized benefits (like free lunch, or home office stipends)
3. Will our company pay for performance, or pay for fairness?
4. How might a remote employee’s status impact salary as it pertains to geographic benchmarking?
5. How often will we review the compensation data (i.e., conduct a market adjustment)?
6. How do we calculate the band or range for each level



2. Use a comp dataset to make your offers.

Once you’re aligned on a compensation philosophy, you’ll want to use a comp dataset to make an offer. At Dover, we used **Pave**. Another popular option is **Option Impact**. There are pros and cons to each, which we’ll briefly describe below.

- 1. **Option Impact** is a free startup compensation dataset. Option Impact allows you to pull compensation data specific to attributes of your candidate (e.g. title, job level) and your startup (e.g. funding status, industry, location, etc.).
 - **The big caveat is that in order to gain access to Option Impact, you have to self-report cash and equity compensation** for each of your employees by filling out a survey every six months. Since you can’t fill out the survey out of their update period, so there can be up to a 6-month lag-time to gain access. In the meantime, most VCs should have access to Option Impact, so you can ask them to pull the data for you. If not, try to find another founder who has access.
- 2. **Pave** connects directly with your ATS, HRIS or Cap Tables to provide real time data. This means you never have to re-upload salary data, and you can get instant benchmarking

results. This is especially key as the recruiting market is changing rapidly. Since you might not have an ATS at your state of hiring just yet, Pave might be a better option in the future. It also allows you to administer bonuses and equity refreshers during merit cycles with recommendation and approval workflows.

Benchmarks are typically broken down by departments, job families, seniority levels, locations, and company stages (valuation, capital raised, employee count). Each benchmarking platform defines their job levels in different ways, so you’ll want to make sure you’re examining the right tier before making an offer.

Some roles will have both Base Salary and Incentive Pay (e.g. sales commissions or customer success bonuses), so you’ll want to look at total target pay.

For equity, you’ll want to look at % Total Equity, which is how you should be benchmarking and explaining equity to candidates.

For a more in-depth discussion on building compensation bands, we recommend checking out Pave’s guide [here](#).

3. Build a talk track for framing your offers to candidates.

Having a consistent compensation philosophy will allow you to communicate your offer transparently and effectively. While the philosophy may only come up in compensation review discussion, or negotiation conversations, it’s something you should incorporate into your offer and publish to the company once someone has joined your team.

In your offer letter, you might present your compensation philosophy like this:

At Dover, we want to reward people fairly for their meaningful work and to pay competitively versus similar work at companies like ours. We anchor above market on cash for startups at our funding valuation (75th percentile).

With that in mind, we’re excited to offer you a few options in salary and equity, which we think are really generous offers.

We really encourage you to do your own research and find data points for startups at our stage to see for yourself whether our offer is fair. And if you’re seeing something different, let us know!



Source: Pave



4. Know what your levers are for negotiation.

While in your early stages, negotiation might simply not be possible for your startup, the more you grow, the more you'll run into negotiation conversations. This is also true as more compensation benchmarking data becomes available to candidates, and many states legally require companies to post salary ranges directly on job descriptions.

While negotiation will be handled differently based on your company structure, and leadership team, there are a few best practices we've employed at Dover:

1. **Uncover how the candidate prioritizes cash vs. equity**, so any adjustments to compensation are along the dimension the candidate values most. Consider trading equity for cash or vice versa rather than just increasing one or both.
2. **Whenever possible, get your candidate to verbalize that they will accept your offer** if you're able to meet them at their ask. Try saying something like "assuming we can get close to this, are you ready to sign?"
3. **If your candidate asks for something out of band, never commit to it on the spot.** Have a reason for being noncommittal (e.g. aligning

with your co-founder or the board).

If there truly isn't room for negotiation (which might be the case if you're a seed company or hiring your founding team), you could respond with a few clarifying statements:

- We want to be fair to everyone we've hired so far, so unfortunately, we don't have much room for negotiation.
- It's important that we're thoughtful about our offers and don't do anything too out-of-band so we can continue to make generous offers to future candidates that come after you. After all, we all want to work with the best people possible.
- From your perspective, this is a good thing, because it gives you peace of mind that candidates after you won't receive a better

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