

HIRING GEEKS THAT FIT



by Johanna Rothman

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Preface

I first started to hire people in 1979. I was nervous about a developer and almost didn't hire him. My boss asked what the problem was. "He wants to take eight weeks off every summer!" I was so concerned.

"What's the problem with that?" my boss asked

"We have so much work to do!" Clearly, I'm the Nervous Nellie here.

"He'll return refreshed and ready to do great work. He fits with the group. Besides, I take a four-week vacation every year. So does the VP of Engineering. You should try it too, Johanna. You'd be a lot less nervous. Oh, this vacation is a salary negotiation issue. You know how to deal with those." My boss walked away whistling.

I would have made a terrible mistake and missed out on a wonderful developer. He was a great cultural fit and stayed with the group for years.

Since then, I've participated in the hiring of hundreds of technical people over the years, including developers, testers, technical writers, technical support staff, pre- and post-sales applications engineers, consultants, technical leads, and their managers. Since the first version of this book, I've consulted with hiring managers and teams to streamline their hiring approach and unwedge their hiring. I have asked about essential versus desirable skills, elimination factors, and most importantly, cultural fit.

We are correct to be concerned about whether candidates fit into our organizations. After all, it seems as if we never have enough of the right people. When the economy is strong, we think we have too few qualified candidates. When the economy is weak, we think we have too many poorly trained applicants. Why is it so difficult to match candidates to our openings?

Hiring great geeks forces us to recognize and match culture; non-technical qualities, preferences and skills; and finally, technical skills. Knowledge workers adapt their knowledge to *your* specific situation, the context. These technical people, our great geeks, are not just the sum of their technical knowledge; they are the sum of both what they know and how they apply that knowledge to the product.

Interviewing technical people is difficult because we must assess them on how they use their technical skills to benefit the product, how they manage their work, and how they manage their relationships with other people—in our context. It is not easy.

No one is plug-and-play. You need to assess each candidate's ability to adapt. That ability to adapt knowledge and to innovate makes one developer, tester, project manager, or technical manager different from another. You don't have the same group as the company down the street. Your geek needs to be different, too. You need to be able to assess the difference among candidates.

This book will provide you the tools to help. If you are a hiring manager or part of a hiring team, this book can:

- Help you define the problems you have that hiring geeks and/or their managers will help solve.

- Help you know what you want a candidate to do.
- Help you hire people who can perform the required work well.
- Help you screen, evaluate, and hire the right people who fit your organization.
- Eliminate the wasted time and suffering that result from having to fire people who should not have been hired in the first place.
- And, save you time, money, and aggravation every time you hire.

Here's the deal: If you want to hire the right people for *your* team, this book can help you. Let's start.

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