

REMOTE WORKERS

Going Virtual: Hiring the Right Team for Remote Work



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As the digital world is making the real world smaller, more companies are moving away from the traditional office space and allowing employees to work remotely anywhere in the world. While this approach can cut down on overhead costs like rent and utilities while simultaneously allowing for location expansion and flexibility, it isn't easy.

Five years ago, when we decided to start our own business, we knew it would be risky, especially since our vision was to start a location-independent company. It was a serious challenge to find the right team because while many companies

operate with telecommuting staff from various locations, very few have an entire workforce operating across five continents in multiple time zones while servicing clients in more than 100 countries. So, learning to manage and recruit for our virtual business was particularly complicated but turned into a success. Here are our tips to recruit excellent talent in a virtual context.

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Hire only people with significant work experience. While new college grads bring tremendous energy and enthusiasm to an office environment, virtual employees need to possess both professional experience and personal maturity to work independently. During interviews, we ask people how they would go about solving a problem they haven't had before. If the response is to "ask us" before trying on their own, we know they aren't going to succeed in a virtual context. The obvious disadvantage to only hiring experienced professionals is higher staffing costs. However, workers with a virtual sensibility understand that while their past achievements would have them earning a higher salary in a traditional office, when virtual, the bigger dollars are offset by the lifestyle benefits of working remotely and the cost savings from not commuting into a big city. We have been able to hire extremely qualified people that may have been out of reach if we had a traditional office setup.

Make every hire a *trial* hire until you determine fit. Because it's so hard to assess a new hire remotely and it's so important to have the right team, we invite new staff to join us on a 60-day trial period to ensure fit before officially welcoming them to our clan. During the trial period, each person has specific goals -- no nonsense, concrete, solid goals that are designed to show us how they work with the team, their ability to get things done independently and their expertise on the subject matter. If there is any doubt about a trial employee after that 60-day mark, we don't deliberate but quickly let them go. We believe that one "bad" hire can bring the whole team down, so we take no risks. A virtual company, especially a service-

based company like ours, is all about people integration and output.

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Put barriers in the process of hiring new people. We only want to spend time and energy recruiting people who really want to work with us and who can add value to our business, so we have devised ways to exclude others from the process upfront. Our staff has described our hiring process as a quest for the “magic gauntlet”

Before scheduling interviews, we require applicants to go through a series of assessment questions to learn more about their personality and skill set. Since our professionals are accountants, we have a test to show us how they handle stress, a practical knowledge test and two practice tax returns. Only then do they get invited for a series of four in-depth interviews. Additionally, we set up a few fail-safe tests along the way. For example, we require a cover letter and resume, and if any applicant (regardless of credentials) doesn't supply both then we don't review their application. Why? Because if they couldn't follow the simple instructions to try and get the job -- it's a smart bet they won't follow instructions if they actually *got* the job!

Ultimately, the secret for success in building a virtual workforce is to find the best individuals to form your highly-skilled, self-motivated professional team – and the way to do that is by recognizing that virtual is very valuable to the right people.

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