



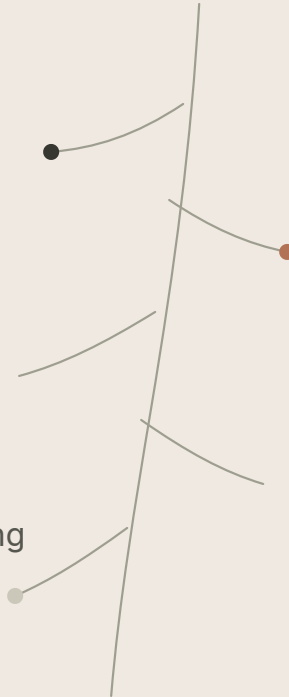
TERRA
TALENT



FOR FOUNDERS BUILDING A HIRING FUNCTION

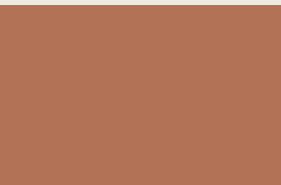
When to Hire Your First Recruiter

The signals that founder-led hiring has stopped being
an advantage.



Developed by Terra Talent, March 2023.

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01



Use founder-led hiring while it is still an advantage

Early in a company, founder-led recruiting is powerful.

The founder usually has more credibility than a recruiter, understands the mission more deeply and can explain why the work matters in a way nobody hired later can fully replicate.

Before adding recruiting capacity, make proper use of the channels that work especially well when founders and the early team run them:

- ☐ referrals from employees, investors and advisors
- ☐ direct founder outreach
- ☐ direct outreach from respected members of the technical team
- ☐ universities where the roles suit early-career talent
- ☐ relevant conferences and professional communities
- ☐ systematic relationship building before a requisition exists

The goal is not one hire.

It is a talent network that exists before you urgently need it.

02



There is no magic headcount

The question is not:

At what company size do I need a recruiter?

It is:

Has recruiting become sufficiently continuous, complex and operationally demanding that founder-led hiring is now degrading either the company or the candidate experience?

Four signals usually answer it.

Signal 1: Hiring volume

A handful of searches each year can often be absorbed by founders and hiring managers.

Several concurrent searches, continuously, are different.

Track:

- ☐ how many searches are open simultaneously
- ☐ how long they remain open
- ☐ how much sourcing each requires
- ☐ how many people move through the process each week

The important variable is not total annual headcount alone.

It is hiring demand relative to the organization's capacity to run the work properly.

Signal 2: Founder and executive time

Count the work that happens outside interviews:

- ☐ market mapping
- ☐ sourcing
- ☐ outreach
- ☐ screening
- ☐ scheduling
- ☐ interviewer coordination
- ☐ candidate follow-up
- ☐ offer management
- ☐ references
- ☐ reporting

Founders tend to underestimate recruiting time because the most visible part, interviewing candidates, is only one component.

When senior people are spending significant recurring time administering searches rather than contributing uniquely to them, recruiting capacity starts to make sense.

Signal 3: Role complexity and market difficulty

Some searches stop being a network problem and become a market-mapping problem.

This happens when:

- ☐ the specialist pool is small
- ☐ the talent sits inside a handful of companies
- ☐ adjacent industries matter
- ☐ titles do not map cleanly to capability
- ☐ candidates are rarely actively applying
- ☐ geography or security requirements narrow the pool

That requires a different skill from founder persuasion.

A strong recruiter knows how to turn an unfamiliar market into a map.

Signal 4: Candidate
experience is beginning to fail

This is often the earliest operational warning.

Candidates wait too long for replies.

Interviews take days to coordinate.

Feedback disappears.

Nobody knows who owns the next step.

Strong candidates quietly leave the process.

Those are not merely administrative problems. They are capacity problems appearing as candidate experience.

In a small technical market, that matters because the candidate you mishandle knows the candidate you are approaching next.

03



Internal recruiter versus agency or search

Do not rely on a static rule such as:

X searches equals the cost of one recruiter.

Prices change. Salaries change. Different roles require different solutions.

Run the comparison using current numbers.

CALCULATE

01 **Expected hiring demand**

Use roles you genuinely expect to open, not the fundraising-plan fantasy.

02 **External cost**

Get current quotes against real searches.

03 **Internal cost**

Include salary, employer costs, systems and tooling.

04 **Executive time**

Internal recruiting still requires hiring managers. External search still requires client participation.

05 **Capability created**

An internal recruiter builds reusable pipeline, process and institutional knowledge. A search firm attacks a particular high-difficulty search. Those are different products.

They are not mutually exclusive

A common model is:

- ☐ internal recruiting for ongoing hiring volume
- ☐ specialist search for the handful of roles where the market is especially thin or the consequences of getting it wrong are unusually high

WHEN NOT TO HIRE YOUR FIRST RECRUITER

A recruiting problem does not automatically mean you need recruiting headcount.

Do not hire one simply because:

- ☐ one executive search is extremely difficult
- ☐ the hiring plan is still speculative
- ☐ roles are not yet defined
- ☐ there is not enough recurring volume
- ☐ hiring managers cannot make time for the process
- ☐ the underlying problem is an unclear organization design

If you have one highly consequential, unusually difficult search and little recurring hiring volume behind it, a dedicated search engagement may make more sense.

If you do not know what roles you need, solve that first.

04



What your first recruiter needs to be capable of

Your first recruiting hire is rarely a coordinator.

They are building a function while simultaneously delivering hires.

Look for:

- ☐ full-cycle recruiting
- ☐ direct sourcing
- ☐ personalised outbound
- ☐ credible candidate screening
- ☐ enough technical literacy to understand the roles
- ☐ hiring-manager partnership
- ☐ scorecards and interview design
- ☐ candidate closing
- ☐ equity conversations
- ☐ process building
- ☐ market intelligence
- ☐ the ability to tell your company's story to somebody who is not already convinced

05



How to assess them

Run a structured process for the person who will be expected to create structured processes.

Source them

Look at companies whose talent functions you respect.

Build a deliberate list rather than relying solely on applicants.

Use founder outreach

For this role in particular, the founder contacting somebody directly sends a strong signal about the importance of the hire.

Screen on evidence

Ask:

- ☐ Walk me through your recruiting process.
- ☐ Show me outreach you have actually sent.
- ☐ Walk me through a difficult candidate you closed.
- ☐ Tell me about a hiring manager you struggled to support.
- ☐ How do you map a market you have never recruited in before?
- ☐ What do you build first when there is no recruiting infrastructure?

Give them a practical

Ask them to build the approach to a realistic mock search.

You are looking for:

- ☐ how they define the problem
- ☐ where they search
- ☐ how they prioritise
- ☐ what they would say to candidates
- ☐ what they need from the hiring manager
- ☐ how they know whether the search is working

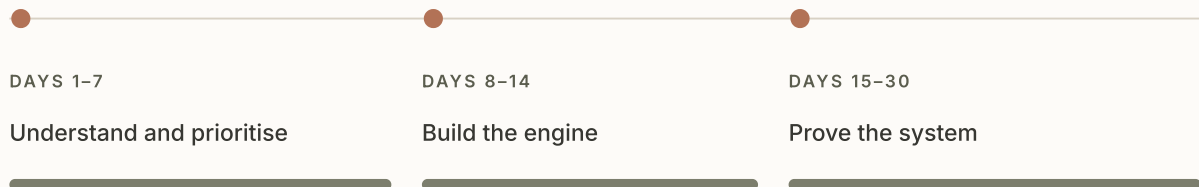
Score consistently

Use the same core questions and evidence standard for every candidate.

06



The first 30 days



Do not spend a month building infrastructure before talking to candidates.

The first 30 days

Three phases, each with a stated outcome. The month should end with a functioning recruiting engine, not a finished infrastructure project.

Days 1-7: Understand and prioritise

The recruiter should:

- ☐ learn the product and technology deeply enough to explain the work credibly
- ☐ spend time with every active hiring manager
- ☐ understand company stage, mission and narrative
- ☐ agree the hiring sequence
- ☐ define the first two roles properly
- ☐ build scorecards
- ☐ identify the immediate operational gaps

By the end of week one, they should know which search matters most and what "good" means.

Days 8–14: Build the engine

Now establish the minimum viable recruiting system:

- ☐ ATS or working pipeline
- ☐ stage definitions
- ☐ interview ownership
- ☐ feedback expectations
- ☐ candidate communication
- ☐ sourcing markets
- ☐ outreach structure
- ☐ reporting baseline

Start active market mapping and outreach on the highest-priority roles.

Do not spend a month building infrastructure before talking to candidates.

Days 15–30: Prove the system

By the end of the first month, expect:

- ☐ a credible pipeline on priority searches
- ☐ a written market map for the hardest role
- ☐ early evidence about compensation and candidate objections
- ☐ bottlenecks in the interview process identified
- ☐ a clear view of which roles are fillable as currently written
- ☐ a 60 to 90-day recruiting plan
- ☐ hiring managers operating to a shared process

Do not measure success solely by hires in month one.

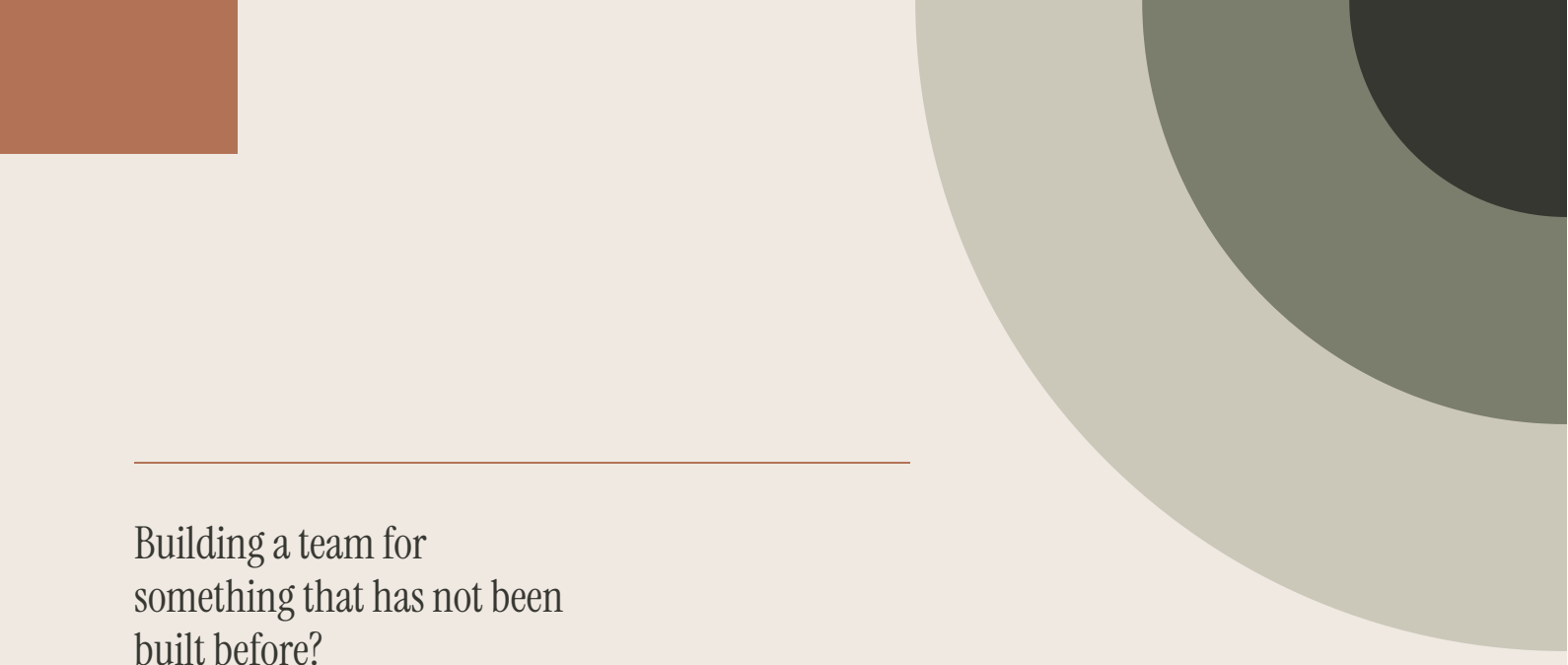
The first month should prove that the company now has a functioning recruiting engine.

07



Common mistakes

- ☐ Hiring a coordinator when you need a full-cycle recruiter.
- ☐ Hiring somebody whose success depended on big-company infrastructure.
- ☐ Expecting recruiting to compensate for badly defined roles.
- ☐ Giving the recruiter insufficient access to hiring managers.
- ☐ Hiring too early for the actual volume.
- ☐ Hiring too late, after candidate experience has already deteriorated.
- ☐ Measuring activity rather than pipeline quality.
- ☐ Treating recruiting as a service desk rather than a company-building function.



Building a team for
something that has not been
built before?

Talk to Terra Talent.

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Developed by Terra Talent, March 2023.



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