



# Driving Quality Candidates in an Increasingly Competitive Job Market

What to do when you're  
getting applications—just not  
the right ones

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# Executive Summary

In this whitepaper:

- 3 common challenges associated with Talent Quality
- Tips and Advice for Addressing Challenges

Description:

It's a common challenge facing many HR and recruitment teams, especially now: not receiving the *right* applications for your open headcounts.

Despite seeing significant interest in a job post, too often teams aren't hearing from candidates who have the right qualifications, certifications, training, and/or relevant experience to be successful. Now, with hiring on the rise across virtually every industry, HR teams are competing even more for talent, creating a hyper-competitive environment—especially for roles with known shortages, such as nursing, hospitality, transportation, food services, and manufacturing.

If your HR or recruitment team is struggling to engage and hire the right talent for open roles, it's time to take a pause and assess your job descriptions, requirements, company offerings, and overall efficiency. In many cases, there could be simple solutions to overcome common challenges such as:

- Lack of qualified candidates applying for your company's niche or specialized jobs
- Gaps in your HR team's processes, leading to candidates being overlooked or relegated to the hiring "black hole"
- Automated processes inadvertently missing more experienced or older candidates who may be qualified for newer roles
- Operating under constant internal pressure to hire within an abbreviated timeframe

By understanding how your team could be unknowingly missing top talent and identifying ways to build your network, expedite key workflows, and keep candidates engaged and moving ahead, you'll be better able to fill roles with relevant, high-performing talent in a fraction of the time.



# Thousands of candidates viewed your most recent job post—and plenty applied. As you wade through the seemingly endless resumes and profiles, it’s clear you’re getting a tremendous applicant response.

The problem? They aren’t the right candidates for the role.

Whether applicants lack the training, years of experience, or, simply, miss the mark qualification-wise, many organizations are struggling with engaging and activating candidates who sync with specific job requirements. For many HR and recruiting leaders, it’s a surprise. In 2020, U.S. unemployment rose to record highs, peaking at nearly 15% in April, and countless job seekers flooded the market. Now, though, we’re experiencing the opposite—with considerably more job openings than there are candidates, finding and hiring top talent is increasingly a challenge.

If your business is seeing abundant job post traffic and applicants but, still, isn’t attracting the right talent, it’s important to take a pause and identify your specific challenges. Consider starting with these common challenges:



**Challenge #1**  
Lack of qualified candidates for niche or specialized jobs



**Challenge #2**  
Candidates being overlooked or relegated to the hiring “black hole”



**Challenge #3**  
Pressure to hire within an abbreviated timeframe

# Challenge #1

## Lack of qualified candidates for niche or specialized jobs

### Symptoms

You're getting plenty of job post traffic and, even, applicants—but they don't have the qualifications you're looking for.

### Diagnosis

Your list of “must-haves” includes at least a few “nice-to-haves,” and that's keeping otherwise qualified candidates from applying. Alternatively, your benefits and perks may not be well-aligned with current industry norms or you simply may not be getting your job posts in front of the right audiences.

### Next Steps

Revisit job posts and eliminate any skills, qualifications, or certifications that aren't 100% essential on day one—and consider on-the-job training to bridge any gaps. At the same time, review your benefits and perks to ensure you're in-step with—or, better, competitive with—other businesses in your industry. From there, consider introducing a short candidate pre-screen and better optimizing your posts to get to the right applicants, faster.

Many industries and roles require significant, specific education, training, and on-the-job experiences. A good example: registered nurses (RNs). RNs require a four-year degree, three-year diploma, higher certification in auxiliary nursing, or an advanced, post-graduate diploma in nursing paired with a degree.

Minimally, it takes two to four years of higher education—and, depending on a facility's needs, roles may require several years of on-the-ground experience or work in a specific department. Obstetrics nurses, for example, must complete two years of on-the-job training and have at least 2,400 hours of obstetrics experience before they can sit for the National Certification Corporation's (NCC) Inpatient Obstetric Nursing certification exam. Nurses who pass receive a certification in obstetrics nursing.



Requiring this level of training and certification already limits a candidate pool. In the case of nursing, though, layer on a critical nurse shortage and it's clear why finding this type of candidate could be a significant challenge.

Medical hiring managers, though, aren't the only ones experiencing a lack of qualified candidates. Engineering, high-tech, education, marketing, and other key industries can have significant qualifications tied to even mid- and entry-level roles.

If your job posts continue to underdeliver qualified candidates, ask yourself these questions:

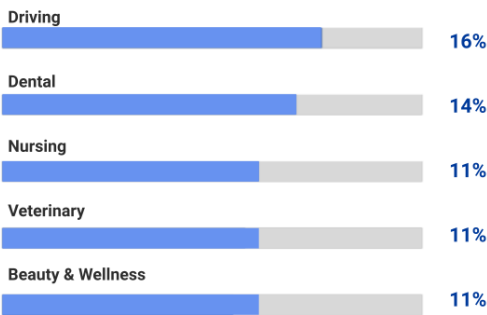
# #1. Do your job descriptions clearly define required skills, certifications, and training versus preferences?

While it’s important to outline the experience, background, certifications, and training required to successfully perform a role, too many “must-haves” may keep even qualified candidates from applying. To overcome this, consider listing only the skills, education, certifications, and experiences that are non-negotiable. Additional preferences—an MBA, for example, or training on more intuitive software and platforms—can be listed as “preferred” qualifications.

Many companies are following this approach. Tesla, Apple, Google, and Netflix don’t require four-year degrees, citing successful business leaders and entrepreneurs who lacked this common qualification. Others have indicated the core skills their organizations require are those colleges and universities typically don’t teach—coding, for example, as well as emerging technologies like AI and machine learning.

To that end, consider benefits like on-the-job training or paid upskilling and professional certifications, as needed. With Indeed searches for hiring incentives up 134% since the beginning of 2021 these additions are particularly well-timed.

Hiring incentives are becoming increasingly common in industries with harder-to-fill and more specialized industries



Indeed, Having Trouble Hiring? Try Offering Hiring Incentives, July 2021

Granted, companies don't have to follow standard benefit norms—competing in today's market often comes down to thinking outside the traditional benefits box. Sixty-eight percent of employees think perks are just as important as benefits like healthcare.

Again, many companies are responding accordingly. Pet insurance—a perk offered by 19% of companies now—is expected to climb to 27% in the next two years. Discount programs, legal services, identity theft protection, and enhanced medical and pharmacy benefits are increasingly popular. Flexibility, again, remains one of the most sought-after perks among U.S. employees.

## Enhanced benefits and perks to consider

More and more, companies are offering creative benefits to current and incoming employees. Some enhanced benefits to consider—and promote—to attract and retain top talent?

- Gym memberships
- Extended parental leave
- Additional company PTO before and after holidays
- Pet-friendly workplaces
- Paid education and training
- Summer hours
- Unlimited PTO

All of this said it's not enough to just have expanded or creative benefits—it's equally important to promote them. While 98% of employers plan to add or enhance at least one benefit, just 4.1% of Indeed job posts reference these added perks. Even if you can't boost your benefits or perks right now, be sure what you do offer is front-and-center in every job post.

## #2. Are you offering what candidates are looking for *right now*?

It's also important to consider the “new norms” in your industry and among specific roles or talent pools. For example, while requiring restaurant staff to return to their core workplace, designers, marketers, developers, and operations teams may be able to work from home or adopt flexible work schedules going forward.

Looking at roles you're struggling to fill, consider benefits like flexibility or, even, an entirely remote schedule, if it's appropriate. Now more than ever, flexibility is a top priority. More than half of current job seekers say working flexible hours is one of the most important benefits when assessing an offer, and one in three say it's a top-three consideration when applying for a new job. If you have an open role that doesn't truly require the employee to be in the office—or in the office full time—mandating it will likely reduce your candidate pool.

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Flexibility, though, is just one example. Different industries and job types have different norms or pervasive priorities that hiring managers should be leaning into to best engage top candidates. Paid sabbaticals, childcare benefits, and even support caring for aging parents can entice top-tier candidates.



## #3. Are you optimizing your job posts?

Taking a “set-it-and-forget-it” approach with your job posts may mean the right candidates aren’t seeing your message. Using optimization technology like Indeed’s objective-based campaigns can ensure posts align to your goals, including who’s seeing your opportunities.

Using objective-based campaigns, employers can target specific, relevant job seekers, delivering ad placements on and off Indeed. This ensures job posts reach the right candidates with the right skills, even if those candidates don’t initially engage on Indeed.



# Challenge #2

Candidates being overlooked or relegated to the hiring “black hole”—and finding other work

## Symptoms

You’re losing top talent because it takes weeks—or longer—to move from application to interview to hire.

## Diagnosis

Your applicant review process is inefficient, and candidates are getting lost in the HR “black hole”—and finding other jobs at companies that screen, interview, and hire faster.

## Next Steps

Introduce internal assessments to weed out less-than-qualified applicants, and be sure job posts give an authentic, day-in-the-life so candidates understand what they’re really applying for.



Often, when HR, recruitment, and talent acquisition teams receive an influx of resumes, it takes time to sift through and identify qualified candidates. Just 4% of candidates say they typically hear back on applications within one day, while 44% say they generally hear “within a couple of weeks of applying.”

While it’s understandable hiring teams want to ensure they’re identifying the most qualified and relevant candidates, dragging the search process on for too long can lead to another challenge: top talent getting scooped up by other, faster-moving companies.

This “black hole” is common, especially with HR resources stretched. At the same time, these lags can be detrimental to finding and hiring the right candidates—62% of professionals lose interest in a role if they don’t hear from the employer within two weeks of applying. By three weeks that number jumps to 77%.

## The impact of the “black hole” on employer branding

The challenge, though, isn’t just losing an individual candidate. Sites like Glassdoor and Indeed welcome interviewee reviews and ratings. Many candidates who waited weeks or even months to connect on a role—or who never heard back post-interview—may have less-than-positive things to share about their candidate experience. This can have a negative impact on your employer branding and can impact recruitment even more.

Integrating assessments or pre-screening during the initial application process can help curb at least some of this lag. By immediately eliminating less relevant candidates early on, hiring leads can focus on a tighter pool of more qualified applicants, identifying potential hires faster and easier. From here, be sure to engage top candidates as soon as you spot them—don’t wait to have a certain number of prospective interviewees identified or you could wind up with the same lengthy lags and “black hole” drop-offs.

Beyond assessments, be sure your job posts are honest, authentic, and portray a true “day in the life.” By including specifics about the role including clear-cut responsibilities, day-to-day needs, and other critical duties, candidates who don’t fit the desired mold will likely move on from your job post to another opportunity that’s better aligned.

Likewise, don’t be afraid to be direct. While, again, you don’t want a required qualifications list that overwhelms potential candidates, you do want to be clear on what *is* needed from day one. If you need a certified OB RN because they will be managing a team of nurses or will oversee the most critical cases, say so. If a digital marketer needs experience with social pay-per-click (PPC) because they’ll be overseeing millions in PPC budgets, say so—and indicate only candidates with these qualifications will be considered.

# Challenge #3

## Pressure to hire within an abbreviated timeframe

### Symptoms

You're feeling the pressure to extend an offer to curb the impact of open headcounts—or to ensure that headcount isn't lost in potential budget cuts. And that's leading to “bad hires.”

### Diagnosis

You don't have a strong enough “bench” of top talent—people who you've engaged over the weeks, months, and even years who could be good assets to the team.

### Next Steps

Focus on building a strong network of talent—even if you don't have roles for them (yet). This can happen through college and university connections, engaging industry organizations, starting or building out your employee recruitment program, and continue recruiting for key roles once spots are filled.

Losing talent isn't the only problem with a lengthy search process. Open headcount can have a significant impact on team morale, productivity, and efficiency—not to mention your bottom line. A “bad hire” can cost your organization up to 30% of that employee’s first-year salary. The longer the role remains open, the greater impact it can have.

In other instances it's not just about the losses—it's about departmental leads ensuring headcounts and related expenses are secured, even if only temporarily. If budget cuts are looming, open headcounts are often cut before seated employees.

Given these challenges, hiring managers and HR leaders may be pressured into making quick hiring decisions based on the current candidate pool. While in the moment this may seem like an optimal approach, an abbreviated search and applicant vetting may lead to a “bad hire”—and that leads back to another open headcount.

## Creating a constantly evolving talent “bench”

To overcome this challenge, focus on building out a constantly evolving network of talent—people who could be assets to your organization, now or in the future.

Even if you don't have open roles or opportunities for these individuals, engaging them, sharing more about your company, and understanding their desired next steps and career objectives can help you build a roster of go-to talent should the right roles present. This is especially critical for niche industries or if you frequently find yourself hiring for highly specialized positions.

Colleges and universities can be an ideal first step in building out your potential-hire network. Many have department chairs who can point you towards high-potential graduates and undergraduates, or student-led organizations that attract engaged, active leaders with an eye on career next steps. By building strong connections with these individuals and groups, you can easily create a mutually beneficial relationship—you become a direct access point for internships and recent-graduate hiring, while the schools can help flag premier talent.

Other potential network-boosting partners? Professional or industry-specific organizations. Not only does this enable you to target and engage professionals in specific areas of work, but also to create a better culture of diversity and inclusion. Working with women in technology groups or minorities in business associations, for example, can boost both recruiting and ensuring you have a broad, representative talent pool.



## Implement an employee recruiting program

You can also tap in-house experts: employees with similar roles and responsibilities. Many professionals have connections from previous jobs, social contacts, or have access to industry groups and threads—and, with that access, can help promote open headcounts and share more about life within your company.

These types of referral programs can simplify recruitment and hiring—and can lead to better retention and employee success. Because your current teams best understand organizational culture and day-to-day demands, they can best articulate the employee experience. At the same time, from this vantage point, they're also often best equipped to identify people who would be optimal fits within your workplace. That said, employee recruitment may also inadvertently lead to homogenous hiring—be mindful to ensure programs don't deter diversification.

As a result, referral hires tend to be happier in the role, with less attrition and a better understanding of company needs on day one. They also tend to be more engaged—they know someone within the organization and can tap them for questions, concerns, and other early-stage learnings.

To maximize the impact of your referral program, consider high-value incentives—additional paid time off (PTO), financial compensation, public recognition, and other perks.

## Never stop recruiting

It's important to keep engaging high-potential talent for traditionally high-demand roles. Between new talent turnover in the double digits and organization-specific needs, this talent will likely be needed sooner rather than later.

## Next steps: bring in a pro

Before reimaging your benefits and accelerating your bench-building activities, consider tapping a third-party to strategize and simplify your deep dive. Contact Indeed to learn more about how, together, we can dig into Glassdoor reviews, Indeed Company Pages, open job posts, and industry trends to determine how your organization stacks up—and what you can and should be doing to better attract quality talent for your open roles.

Alongside the Indeed team, your team will dive into current response rates—both quantity and quality—as well as essential benchmarks to know and work towards. With this roadmap in place, your organization will be better equipped to engage and secure top talent. Plus, you'll have a clear-cut plan that, together, we'll iterate and evolve as the market shifts and your business needs change.

It's a better approach to streamlining and enhancing your talent search—and a smart approach to ensure you always have the right candidates when and where you need them.