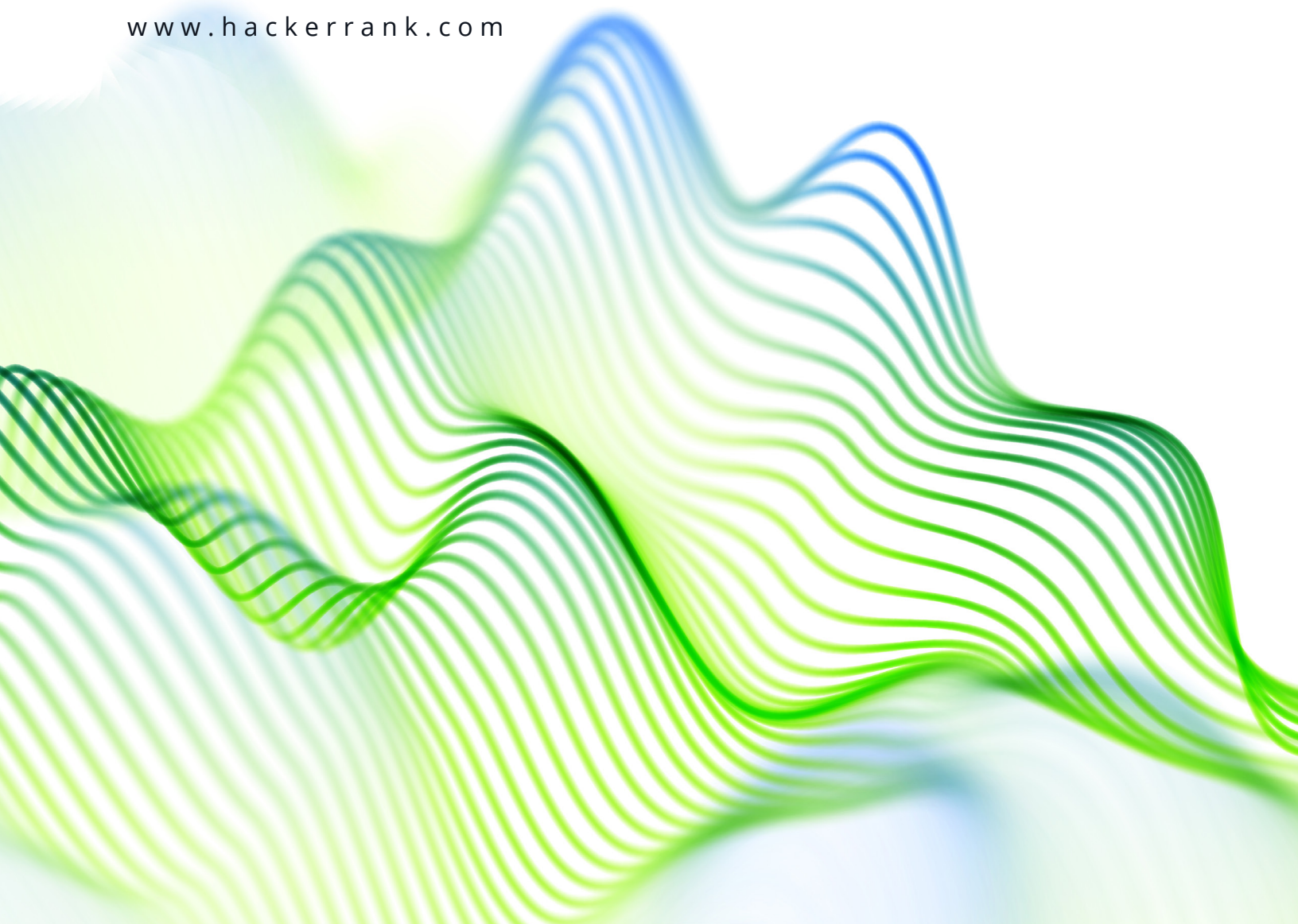# 7 Data-Driven Insights

For Smarter Technical Hiring

www.hackerrank.com

The Path to Alignment

Building a strong recruiting organization starts with building a strong relationship with your hiring managers. Chances are that there's opportunity for you to uplevel your relationships with your engineering partners.

It's time to get aligned.

Being aligned doesn't mean you have to have the same goals or hiring approach as your engineering managers. Alignment means understanding their perspectives so that you can better prepare and communicate. It doesn't happen overnight — it's a process of building rapport and agreeing to the right people, processes, and tools to hire the right developers.

In this guide, we draw on research from our 2018 Tech Recruiting Report to show you where there's a mismatch with hiring managers and what you can do to adjust. We'll also show you where there's harmony and what you can do to leverage it. Read on for data-driven tips that will up your tech-recruiting game.

Get in touch with us

Request Demo   **Free Trial**

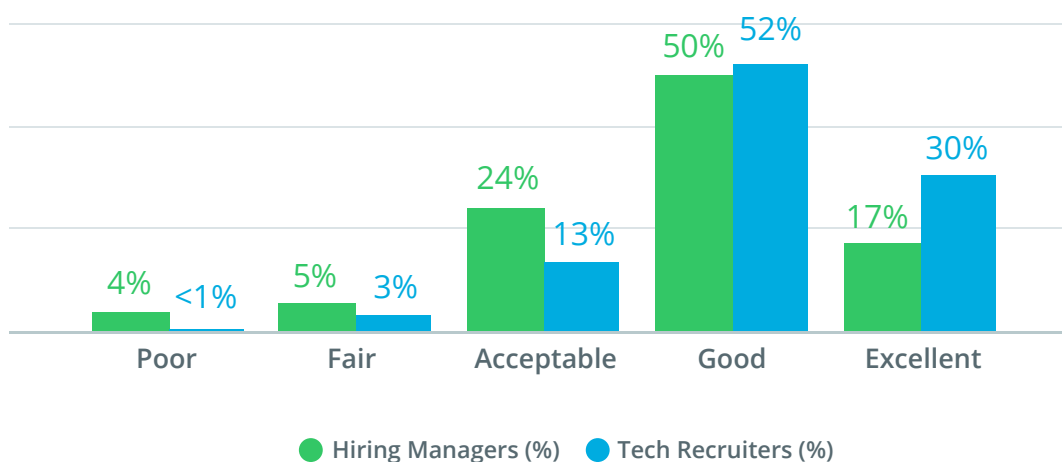Or visit HackerRank.com

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01 Lay the Relationship Groundwork

The health of most hiring team relationships is overall "good", but our data show an interesting discrepancy — engineers aren't as content as recruiters. More hiring managers view their relationships with tech recruiters as 'acceptable' while more tech recruiters view their relationships with hiring managers as 'excellent.'

Knowing hiring managers are less satisfied is the first step in being able to do something about it. Engineers work in complex technical environments and are incredibly strapped for time. This can lead to recruiters feeling out of the loop or ignored.

But you can change this if you take the time to know their world. Invest in understanding the technology and the talent pool, and hiring managers will appreciate you more, you'll like your job more, and you'll make faster and better hires.

How tech recruiters and hiring managers rate their relationships

	Poor	Fair	Acceptable	Good	Excellent
Hiring Managers (%)	4%	5%	24%	50%	17%
Tech Recruiters (%)	<1%	3%	13%	52%	30%

● Hiring Managers (%) ● Tech Recruiters (%)

Source: HackerRank 2018 Tech Recruiting Report

How to Kick Your Relationship Up a Notch

1. Do your Homework

While you don't need to know how to code, you do need to have a basic understanding of technology. Test yourself. Could you explain what your hiring manager does all day to a 10-year old? Even if you're an experienced recruiter, technologies keep changing and growing in complexity. Check out the software engineering daily podcast, TechCrunch Developer News, and Hacker News to stay to stay on top of developer trends.

2. Get Next to the Action

The next-best thing to being an engineer yourself is getting close to one. Have lunch with your tech teams. Go to product meetings. Shadow a programmer. What is exactly JavaScript and how is it different from Java? If you're intimidated, just be honest about your motivation. E.g., "I don't know anything about X but I'm really curious about how it works." Engineers will respect your curiosity because they are fiercely curious themselves.

3. Tune in to Culture and Values

Partner with HR to understand how happy your engineering team is and why. Maybe they love the freedom to work remotely, or the camaraderie of their teams, or access to senior leadership. Knowing what's keeping them satisfied will also help you in conversations with candidates.

Not only will these tips earn you credibility with hiring managers, they'll make you a better sourcer. Greater tech fluency will help you ask more intelligent questions during your searches and pick up on nuances that can give you an edge. Read more on How to Build Trust with your Engineering Manager.

02 Ask the Right Questions

Looking deeper into the research results, we found that hiring managers struggle more with getting aligned on role expectations and skills while recruiters' top issue is getting timely feedback.

Top Challenges in the Recruiter-Hiring manager Relationship

Hiring managers say	Recruiters say
1. Getting aligned on expectations	1. Getting timely feedback
2. Getting aligned on skills	2. Getting aligned on expectations
3. Getting Timely feedback	3. Having changing needs

Most recruiters focus on matching keywords, but not everyone understands what those keywords mean for the team, product, company, and world. That's the level of understanding you need to get aligned with hiring managers, and you'll get there by asking the right questions.

The Art of Asking Questions

The following are key questions to consider before, during and after a candidate cycle.

1. Get Inside the Hiring Manager's Mind

Assess the basics, such as how seasoned your hiring manager is, how urgent the need is, and how busy they are.

- How many engineers have your hired before?
- What does a good recruiting process look like?
- What are your must-haves and nice-to-haves?

2. Understand the Role at Hand

These questions will help you align on skills and expectations. Be sure to push for clarity if anything isn't crystal clear.

- Can you explain, in layman's terms, what the developer will build in this role?
- What are some examples of work that the candidate should have done in the past to demonstrate the skills?
- Why will this developer be excited to be in this role?

3. Refine the Process

Great recruiters keep asking questions after the initial meeting. Soliciting feedback and tweaking the process as you go will keep you aligned. We'll explore more process management tips in the next section.

- Am I sending too many profiles?
- Are you spending less time on unqualified candidates?

4. Keep Asking, "Why?"

When your hiring manager says she needs a front-end engineer with HTML, CSS3, experience with jQuery, and Ruby on Rails, don't stop there. Keep probing until you really understand how those skills translate into impact. Odds are the hiring manager will appreciate you for taking the time to find the right skills, and you'll be better equipped to convince candidates to join.

5. Be Concise

When you're direct with engineers, you're efficient, not impolite. Instead of, "Here's a candidate who does C++, Java, and PHP. Does he work for you?" Simply ask, "Which programming languages are mission-critical?" Relate priorities back to the technology: E.g. "So this Java engineering candidate will help build your next-generation enterprise app?"

6. Go Beyond the Hiring Manager

While your engineering manager is your main source, consider talking to the engineer who previously held the position and/or other members of the team. These discussions will deepen your understanding and help inform your conversations with candidates.

The exact phrasing will depend on your style and your relationship. For more inspiration check out 21 Questions to Ask Your Engineering Manager to Find the Right Candidates.

03 Own the Process

Asking good questions is key to understanding your hiring manager and the role, but be sure to give information too. Our data show that tech recruiters prioritize hiring speed more than hiring managers, so it's on you to establish the timelines and expectations that will keep the process moving.

Top Metrics for Success in Tech Recruiting

Hiring managers say	Recruiters say
1. Quality of skills/fit	1. Quality of skills/fit
2. Future performance	*2. Time to close*
3. Retention	3. Retention

We already know that building your own expertise and getting alignment on expectations and skills will help accelerate the process. Beyond that, here are six more tips for managing your engineers and the process:

How to Have Better Conversations with Engineers

1. Set Data-Driven Expectations

You have lots of institutional knowledge and access to data. Discuss relevant insights such as number of candidates at each stage based on similar past hires. Give them an idea of what's possible based on the market, the budget, and the timeline. Engineers like numbers, so give them some. For example, show them how many candidates you sourced and the percentages at each stage.

2. Reverse-engineer the Process

Engineers are wired to solve problems logically, so talk about solutions by working backwards: For example, "In order to source 15 PHP developers, we should attend PHP Experience, PHP World and International PHP Conference this year."

3. Supplement "Perfect Fits" with "High Potentials"

Hiring managers often want very niche skills that are hard to find. Push them to consider overall potential too, i.e., the candidate has the brain power and problem-solving abilities to become a 'perfect fit' pretty quickly. Set the expectation that you'll bring in X% perfect-fit candidates, and the rest will only have certain pieces but great overall potential.

4. Hold them Accountable

As you formulate your sourcing plan and timeline, be clear about what you need at each stage. Discuss what should happen if you don't get timely feedback. Whom else can you reach out to? Having these discussions up front makes it much easier to act on them later.

5. Adapt your Communication Style

Ask your hiring managers how they like to communicate and how often, but also observe what they do in practice. No two hiring managers will be the same, so be flexible and adapt accordingly.

6. Keep your emotions in check

Engineers tend to tune out emotional content. As systems engineer Byron Seastrunk explains, "I can't fit emotional content into an equation. I don't see how it improves a situation. If half your words have high emotional content, it's a safe bet that my comprehension and attention are low." Avoid emotional highs and lows during your interactions with engineers to keep their attention.
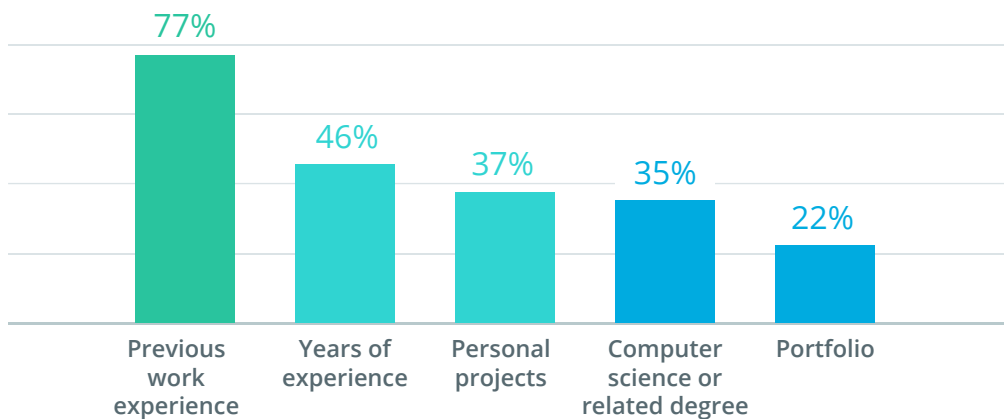
04 Screen for Merit, not Pedigree

There's consensus from both sides that previous work experience is the #1 criteria for assessing candidate qualifications. It's a good sign that selection is less about where candidates went to school or what degree they earned, and more about what they've done and can do.

Most important qualifications assessed prior to onsite interviews

	77%	46%	37%	35%	22%
	Previous work experience	Years of experience	Personal projects	Computer science or related degree	Portfolio

Source: HackerRank 2018 Tech Recruiting Report

But proving technology skills can be tricky. Engineers can't show the proprietary code they're working on to prospective employers. But just as reporters can share their news clips to show off their journalism chops, engineers should be able to show their code. That's why, according to the engineers we surveyed, skills assessments are the #1 way to improve the hiring process.

Resumes don't always deliver the whole picture. We know, for example, that 70% of developers are at least partially self-taught. So, if you're only looking at those with a CS degree, you're missing candidates with the skills your team needs. And when it comes to screening, whiteboard tests are time-consuming and can't be assessed by anyone but a tech guru.

Top Metrics for Success in Tech Recruiting

Hiring managers say	Recruiters say
1. Better skill assessments	1. Improve sourcing
2. Improve sourcing	2. Stronger talent branding
3. Stronger talent branding	3. Better skill assessments

But now technical assessments cut through the resume clutter and can assess technical proficiency at scale. Here's how they can up your recruiting game:

5 Superpowers that Come with Tech Assessments

1. You'll Save Everyone's Time

Technical assessments let recruiters screen candidates at scale and stop more unqualified individuals from reaching the interview stage, freeing up time for engineers to build products.

2. You'll Find Hidden Gems

Referrals and job boards keep you fishing from the same talent pool as everyone else, while skill-based assessments uncover candidates you would never have considered based on resume alone. They give you confidence to gamble on candidates who are imperfect fits or who don't have a complete or updated resume.

3. You'll Diversify your Workforce

If you apply the same restrictive filters that everyone else does — *e.g., candidates should have graduated from Stanford or Berkeley and worked at Facebook or Google—* your sample will be very limited. By democratizing the process with tech assessments, you'll discover qualified talent with much more diverse backgrounds and experiences.

4. You'll Make more Personal Connections with Talent

Technical assessments reduce the scale of your outreach. Messaging 100 candidates instead of 1000 makes it easier to personalize. As a result, you're more likely to grab candidates' attention, get responses, and boost their perceptions of you as an employer.

5. You'll enhance the candidate experience

Code challenges help both the developers you want and those you don't want to find the right job. By giving candidates visibility into the skill levels you're seeking and providing a platform to practice, you're creating an opportunity for them to learn and grow.

WePay Recruiters Win With Coding Challenges

WePay is a fast-growing FinTech company. When demand for software engineers exceeded the bandwidth of its recruiting team, the company looked to skills-based hiring. As a result, WePay recruiters saw:

More Time Savings

Recruiters were able to narrow down applicants to the top 6%. Without the coding challenge filter, recruiters would have had to sift through the other 94% manually.

More credibility with hiring managers

By reducing time spent with unqualified candidates, engineers could spend more time building the product and thus the company more productive.

More talent pool diversity

By focusing purely on coding, the company increased its percentage of female engineers to 50%, well above the industry norm of 15-20%.

" We discovered skilled developers we never would have looked at because of their resumes that were lacking specific technical skills."
- Neal Rosenblum Sr. Director of Talent Acquisition & Employee Experience, WePay

05 Be Ready for Push-back

Your hiring managers may be big fans of white-board tests. Perhaps that's how they've always picked their top performers. Or maybe they're just not familiar with newer coding communities and challenges. If your hiring manager is skeptical of technical assessments, here's how to win them over:

1. Show Them the Numbers

Engineers want hard facts, so grab their attention with data. At VMware, the recruiting team closely tracked the performance of coding assessments vs. traditional phone interviews. Results showed that candidates who completed a HackerRank assessment consistently outperformed those selected by a phone screen.

2. Empower Them to Tinker

Engineers don't like to be told how something works. They have to see it, take it apart, and put it back together. Set up a Free Trial to give them access to tinker with the coding platform.

" We didn't just pick five questions we liked and set a minimum score. We put a lot of time and effort into designing the test, carefully selecting questions and putting test cases on there. We worked really closely as a team and iterated over time. We've been tweaking our HackerRank test for two years getting it ever closer to reflecting the values we have as a company. It's working pretty well."
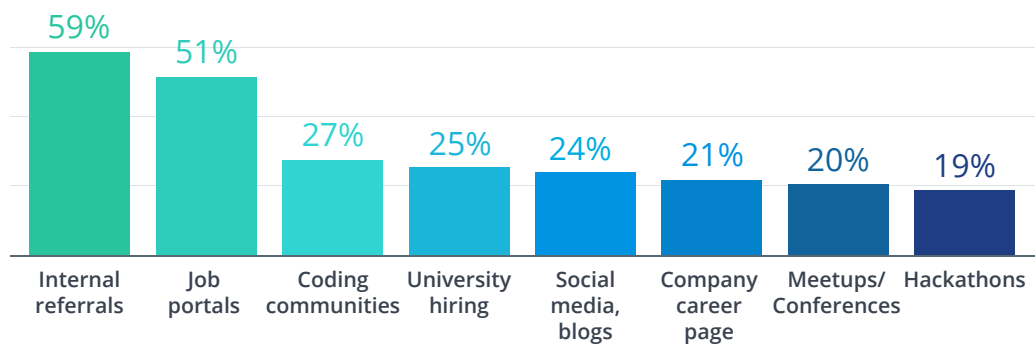- David Kent, Technology Chief of Staff, **Optiver**

06 Think Outside the Referral Box

Recruiters and hiring managers both rely on internal referrals more than any other source when trying to find candidates. Cheers to alignment there. Unfortunately though, over-relying on referrals can lead to shrinking talent pools and a less diverse workforce.

Most effective sourcing methods for tech recruiting teams

59%	51%	27%	25%	24%	21%	20%	19%
Internal referrals	Job portals	Coding communities	University hiring	Social media, blogs	Company career page	Meetups/ Conferences	Hackathons

Source: HackerRank 2018 Tech Recruiting Report

Technical assessments can come in handy here by leveling the playing field. When you do bring in referrals, standardize their evaluations and interview processes just as you do with other candidates. Keeping the focus on candidates' skills rather than who brought them in will limit biases and expand your talent pool.

On Sourcing Tech Talent Beyond Referrals and Job Boards

1. Get out There, Virtually

Join online developer communities and forums like Github and HackerRank. Ask questions, comment, engage. Update your social media profiles to reflect your knowledge and expertise working with technical talent.

2. Get out There, Literally

The internet can be sourcing gold, but good 'ol fashioned networking still has its place. Leave your desk. Attend conferences. Ask people to coffee. When every recruiter is running the same online searches, the human touch can be what moves the needle.

3. Amplify your Talent Brand

When your company's reputation as a place to work is strong, sourcing is easier and faster. The more you can leverage your talent brand to attract developers, the more you'll attract the right candidates to your jobs and the easier it will be for them to accept your offers.

07 Boost your Talent Brand

When it comes to talent branding, recruiters see its impact more than hiring managers do. This is problematic because you need buy-in from your engineering managers in order to shape your brand for the better.

How to Work With Engineers to Build Your Talent Brand

1. Don't Reinvent the Wheel

Audit what your engineers have already created, e.g., blog posts, videos, and conference presentations. Repurpose it in collaboration with Marketing and/or other stakeholders and you won't be adding to their to-do lists.

2. Get Buy-in From the Top

It will be much easier to get leadership on board when you can show you don't have to take engineers away from writing code. Ideally your engineering leadership can publicly support talent branding to set the example.

3. Identify your Champions

Not every engineer wants to write a blog, make a video, or post on social media. Find out what people are doing already and see where strengths and interests lie. Tap the eager beavers and build momentum from there.

4. Audit Social Profiles

Review your and your hiring managers' professional profiles. Do they convey your technical expertise and reflect your company culture? If your office is fun and laid-back, your tone should reflect that. The more specific you can be, the better you'll be able to persuade the right engineer to apply to your job.

5. Put Job Descriptions to Work

Customized job descriptions are key to qualified applications. Be specific enough to attract the right candidates and turn off the wrong ones. Resist copy-pasting: you'll either sound like every other company and not stand out, or you'll stand out in a bad way and deter talent from applying.

6. Do Candidate Outreach as a Team

When emailing or messaging top prospects, ask your hiring manager if you can drop their name or if they'd reach out themselves. Candidates will be more likely to respond.

7. Track, Measure and Align

Engineers like data, so track your efforts and measure your progress. If you launch an engineering blog or reboot your job descriptions, measure the impact so you can learn and adjust.

The Takeaway

Getting aligned with engineering managers isn't a one-time exercise. Start by doing foundational research, asking the right questions, and leading your engineers through the process. Sync further by screening candidates via skills-based assessments, sourcing creatively beyond referrals, and strengthening your talent brand.

Following these tips will ease tension with engineering managers and make you a more satisfied and productive recruiter. That's a win for you, your candidates, and your company.

Still want to learn more?

Read: 21 Questions to Ask Your Hiring Manager
Read: Tech Talent Brand Guide
Listen: How David Kent of Optiver Scales His Engineering Team

HackerRank

Match Every Developer to the Right Job

HackerRank is a technology hiring platform that is the standard
for assessing developer skills for over 1,000 companies around the world.
By enabling tech recruiters and hiring managers to evaluate talent objectively
at every stage of the recruiting process, HackerRank helps companies hire
skilled developers and innovate faster.

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