



Hiring in the Time of Coronavirus: How to “sell” candidates in a virtual environment

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In Part One of this series, we emphasized the importance of continuing to advance the ball on mission-critical hires and how to adapt the hiring process given remote conditions. In this article, we focus on another question many of our clients have asked: We made the offer; now how do we “sell” the candidate in a virtual environment?

Our research shows that many managers fail to sell candidates effectively in normal times, so the task can seem insurmountable under virtual conditions. But there is hope, and all we need to do is look to pop culture to find it. In the Netflix reality show *Love Is Blind*, strangers who can only talk to each other (i.e., not see each other) fall in love and get engaged. And while this is a bizarre way to meet your future spouse, it does reveal a truth about human motivation: there are unique issues or values that each of us holds dear, and you can win someone over by showing how what you value ties to what someone else values. So in this moment where the ubiquitous playbook of “wining and dining” a candidate is no longer an option, you can overcome this obstacle by uncovering what motivates them and then adapting the selling process to this new virtual environment.

How do I identify which one or two factors will most influence the prospective hire’s decision making?

Simply put, hiring managers who fail to identify what matters most to a prospective hire will fail. It’s no different than gift giving – the most treasured gifts are those that resonate deeply with what the recipient values. We have developed a simple framework of the key motivators for selling candidates, and this framework remains the same even during times of crisis – the five Fs: Fit, Family, Freedom, Fortune, and Fun.

- **Fit** ties together the company’s vision, needs, and culture with the candidate’s goals, strengths, and values. “Here is where we are going as a company. Here is how you fit in.”
- **Family** takes into account the broader challenges of changing jobs and recognizes that big career decisions involve a candidate’s full family. “What can we do to make this change as easy as possible for your family?”
- **Freedom** is the autonomy the candidate will have to make his or her own decisions. “I will give you ample freedom to make decisions, and I will not micromanage you.”
- **Fortune** reflects the stability of your company and the overall financial upside. “If you accomplish your objectives, you will likely make [compensation amount] over the next five years.”
- **Fun** describes the work environment and personal relationships the candidate will make. “We like to have a lot of fun around here. I think you will find this to be a culture you really enjoy.”

While all of these areas are important in selling, we find that for each candidate, one or two factors matter most. A recipe for success is to sell the prospective hire on what they care about and deemphasize what they don’t care about. If you overemphasize money with someone who cares the most about the impact they can have on the company (i.e., Fit), then you will lose them.

In fact, the selling process really begins well in advance of when you have extended an offer. You should keep track of the questions they ask about the company at each step in the process as it gives insight into what matters to them. Once you have made the offer, you need to engage them frequently until the candidate makes a decision. When you have those touch points, ask questions and probe to get at the heart of the issues that matter most. Here are some examples:

- What excites you most about this opportunity?
- What gives you pause about this opportunity?
- What have you learned about us since your last couple conversations?
- How will you decide between our offer and [other alternative offers or existing company]?

How do I make sure I address the most relevant factors?

Once you have started to uncover the factors that matter most to the candidate, develop a plan, involve the right people, and be persistent in your outreach.

- **Plan:** Develop a closing plan that addresses the key factors and outlines how you will address those areas. The plan should have a minimum of four to five actions for each selling criterion. Remember that the candidate will need to hear a consistent message many times to address the issue and confirm that the opportunity meets their criteria.

- **People:** Identify future peers and other leaders who can help to sell them on the factors that matter most. Be thoughtful about who to include and prepare them with the key points to land and the additional questions to ask. One of our clients seeking to hire a chief revenue officer had selected a candidate whose primary factor was Fit. Specifically, he wanted to better understand if his potential peers would be supportive of transforming how the sales team engages with the product team. To address this concern head-on, the CHRO set up one-on-ones for the candidate and the two product heads of each business unit to learn more about each other and share more about the vision they had for collaboration.
- **Persistence:** Most managers undersell more often than they oversell. Keep the pedal to the medal until they say no. Persistence is even more critical in this virtual environment. A good rule of thumb is for the company to have at least one touch point every two days.

How can we demonstrate that there is a strong Fit and the right culture (Fun) with only virtual interactions?

Fit and Fun are two areas that will likely require additional creativity in a virtual environment. Without the opportunity to meet in person, a candidate may feel that it is harder to get a sense of how his or her goals and ways of operating will fit into the culture of the team and company, so you'll need to be even more proactive on this front. Here are a few ideas that can help to get over that hurdle:

- Schedule group videoconferences with two or three leaders on the team, where the candidate has time to get to know them and to ask questions. Encourage them to do this as a virtual coffee or a virtual happy hour and minimize distractions.
- Have a virtual lunch with the candidate using videoconference technology and a personal touch. Find out what their favorite takeout food is and have it delivered to their home in time for the meeting. Even better, try to do this with the candidate and their partner, so that they also have the opportunity to see what makes your company so special.
- Share videos of recent town hall meetings or even better invite them to sit in on town hall meetings. This gives them a chance to understand the questions that are coming in during this time of uncertainty and spotlights the culture of the organization.
- Offer to have them speak with trusted but more junior high potential leaders and frontline managers so they can get a real sense for how the organization operates.
- Send the leadership books that best articulate your organization's values. At ghSMART, one of the books we send all new hires is Carol Dweck's *Mindset*, because even though the people we hire are seasoned professionals, one of the values we embrace is having a growth mindset, or, in the words of John Wooden, "It's what you learn after you know it all that counts."
- Consider taping portions of a leadership team meeting to share with them (being cognizant of how much confidential information you want to divulge).

Principles to remember in “selling” senior executive hires virtually:

Do:

- Identify the one or two factors that matter most to the candidate, keeping in mind the 5 Fs (Fit, Family, Freedom, Fortune, and Fun).
- Maintain regular communication with the candidate, ensuring at least one touch point every two days.
- Get creative on how you sell them on Fit and Fun.

Don't:

- Overemphasize issues that are not important to candidates, as this could turn them off.
- Worry that you will come across as too “passionate” of a suitor as managers undersell far more often than they oversell.