

# Actionable Tips From 8 Talent Executives



# Introduction

Change was the only constant in 2020. For some companies (think: telehealth, food delivery, or streaming services), the COVID-19 outbreak meant rapidly increasing headcount to meet market demands. For countless others, it meant putting hiring on pause.

To see how executives across the country navigated the challenges of COVID-19, Hired launched The Great Rehiring mini-series on our [Talk Talent to Me](#) podcast. In these episodes, host Rob Stevenson sits down with talent leaders from Hired, Dropbox, Oatly, HubSpot, GitLab, Battery Ventures, DoorDash, and SeatGeek—learning what each organization did to evolve during the pandemic.

Here, we've taken the most actionable insights from these conversations and transformed them into a step-by-step playbook for hiring teams. The following pages will help your company not only survive, but thrive, in a changed climate.

Ready to embark on your own great rehiring journey? Let's get started.

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## Lesson 1:

# Let data drive your hiring decisions

### Who we interviewed:

[Listen via Spotify](#)

Hired CEO Josh Brenner shares data-driven insights about shifting candidate expectations, skills-based hiring, and the rising demand for digital transformation.

### Top takeaways:

#### Remote work opens new opportunities

“Not surprisingly, we’ve seen a huge increase in remote hiring,” said Brenner. “Companies have noticed two big impacts: increase in volume of high-quality talent they’re able to find and tap into, and increase in diverse talent pools.”

Data from Hired’s [2021 State of Software Engineers Report](#) shows that 51% of new tech candidates were open to remote jobs as of October 2020. This number skewed even higher among minority groups, for whom remote work eliminates geographic bias and relocation costs. In a Hired poll of 1,300+ software engineers, 54% of respondents described themselves as more productive outside of the office. For 47% of programmers, the best thing about working remotely is not wasting time on commuting—and for 35%, it’s having a more flexible schedule.

The lesson for recruiters? Remote work policies are not a passing fad. By proactively meeting modern candidate preferences, companies can stay competitive in a crowded market—and diversify their talent pools in the process.

#### Skills-based hiring is here to stay

[Pedigree bias](#) has long plagued recruitment, punishing candidates who don’t fit a

predetermined mold and blocking worthy talent from the tech industry.

Today, the tide is finally turning. In an effort to establish more equitable hiring practices, many employers are now looking beyond labels during the sourcing process. As Brenner noted, “Companies are increasingly focused on hiring for skills as opposed to pedigree.”

In Hired’s survey of 1,300+ software engineers, 34% of respondents described themselves as self-taught or bootcamp graduates. Meanwhile, data from Vettery’s online hiring marketplace shows that 46% of bootcamp grads received one or more interview requests from employers—and 9% of all bootcamp grads who made it to the interview stage received a job offer. In comparison, 8% of candidates with a computer science degree were placed after making it to the interview stage, as were 8% of candidates whose highest education is an undergrad degree.

The call to action is clear. Skilled candidates deserve spots on tech teams—whether they attended a bootcamp, attained a four-year degree, or were completely self-taught.

#### Digital transformation is the future

## Lesson 1: Let data drive your hiring decisions

To drive hiring success, many HR teams are adopting digital solutions that streamline recruitment processes. “If anything, the pandemic has really accelerated companies’ need to invest in digital transformations and also their usage of data-driven products that will bring efficiencies to their operations,” explained Brenner.

By implementing automation, hiring teams can fill roles faster: reducing recruiting spend and benefitting the overall business. Reclaimed hours can then be allocated toward personalization, employer branding, and tracking market trends—all of which are essential in attracting top talent.

### Action items:

Offer remote work options, hire for skills (not labels), implement automation to streamline time-consuming processes

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## Lesson 2:

# Evolve your employer branding

### Top takeaways:

#### Make bold moves

Inspired by changing employee preferences and emergent workplace productivity data, Dropbox went virtual-first in 2020. “We like the idea of equalizing employees across the board, and not having that hierarchy of HQ employees versus remote employees,” explained Eghan. By boldly declaring a “digital by default” brand identity, Dropbox has broken down geographic barriers—and made their company more accessible to candidates across the globe.

#### Clearly define changed policies

Of course, the shift to virtual-first required updated messaging. “Because that’s a somewhat new concept, we had to make sure we explained it properly,” said Eghan. On Dropbox’s revised careers homepage, candidates are now greeted with an explainer that clearly defines the company’s changed policy.

#### Who we interviewed:

[Listen via Spotify](#)

Dropbox Head of Global Talent Brand Mariama Eghan explains how her organization updated their employer branding to reflect a new “digital by default” identity.

#### Showcase company culture in creative ways

For Dropbox, employing a virtual-first model meant retiring old corporate branding approaches. In the past, their careers page had highlighted photos of beautiful office spaces. “We often led with that, because it’s illustrative,” explained Eghan. “We had pink carpets, yellow carpets, orange walls, pink staircases. So there was a lot to work with there across all of our offices. But when we thought about virtual-first and what that means, we’re like: *Okay, well how do you illustrate culture? How do you illustrate what it means to work at this company without using that type of imagery?*”

One step Dropbox has taken is featuring photos of work-from-home setups—whether employees are sitting outdoors in the sunshine or on the couch with a pet beside them. By populating their careers site with new imagery, the brand offers an authentic depiction of the modern employee experience.

### Action items:

Survey employees on evolving preferences, communicate new remote work policies on your careers page, post work-from-home photos to illustrate a virtual-first culture

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## Lesson 3:

# Scale with strategy

**Who we interviewed:**[Listen via Spotify](#)

Oatly VP of HR Chandra Caridi reveals how she more than doubled her organization's headcount in 2020—and why one newly created HR role is her "secret weapon."

## Top takeaways:

### Pave new employee pathways

Oatly's sales surged last spring, as consumers stocked their pantries during the pandemic. Before COVID-19, local coffee shops had been one of the company's primary revenue sources. But with lockdowns in place, that quickly changed. "There were definitely some areas of the business that we had to rethink," said Caridi. Luckily, where one door closed another opened. "There was this major boost to our retail side," she explained. "We really proved to be essential for people in their homes." Looking inside the organization, Caridi was able to move around existing talent to support departments with growing demands. Doing so had powerful payoffs for employee morale. "We were able to avoid any type of layoffs, since other areas of the business were surging," said Caridi.

### Scale with strategy

By the end of 2020, Oatly had more than doubled their headcount. As the company

grew, so did the demand for HR hires. "I was getting spread too thin, and realizing that I couldn't get involved in all the teams as much as I would have liked to," said Caridi. Back in the office, she'd kept a constant pulse on the organization, dropping by different work stations throughout the day. Virtually, this was much tougher to do. Turning an obstacle into an opportunity, Caridi started building a recruiting team to support her efforts—and drive sustained growth.

### Innovate within your organization

To meet emergent needs during the pandemic, Oatly created two new HR roles: HR Business Partner and Employee Experience Manager. Working closely with different teams throughout the organization, HR Business Partners learn departmental needs, conduct headcount planning, and manage hiring budgets. This way, recruiters can devote more time to personalizing the candidate experience. "They can focus on quality—

## Lesson 3: Scale with strategy

getting that interview and process right with all the adjustments of the virtual setup,” explained Caridi.

Oatly’s new Employee Experience Manager has proven to be equally essential. (In fact, Caridi called this role her “secret weapon.”) Looking at the entire employee life cycle, the Employee Experience Manager “maps out all the moments that really matter to keep

people thriving and engaged.” This role has been pivotal during the pandemic, especially through the virtual onboarding process.

Looking ahead, Caridi knows the position will be a permanent fixture at Oatly. “I’m really looking forward to seeing how this role evolves,” she said. “I see this as such an essential component now.”

### Action items:

Offer opportunities for horizontal growth, invent new HR roles to meet changing business needs, commit to elevating employee experience in a remote climate

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## Lesson 4:

# Invest in diversity, equity, and inclusion

### Who we interviewed:

[Listen via Spotify](#)

HubSpot VP of Global Recruiting Becky McCullough shares how her organization spoke up and supported employees during the Black Lives Matter movement of 2020—and why they continue taking a stand today.

## Top takeaways:

### Take a stance on important issues

As civil unrest swept the country, HubSpot refused to remain silent. “Candidates notice the companies that are speaking up and the companies that are choosing to say nothing,” explained McCullough. “The phrase, ‘Your silence is deafening’ is more true than ever.”

In years prior, HubSpot had avoided taking public stances on potentially controversial matters. “As a company, we have struggled with this historically,” said McCullough. “We’ve experienced things that have happened in the world politically and intentionally chosen not to take a stance over the years.” But in 2020, they knew this needed to change. “If we chose not to say anything, our entire BIPOC (black, indigenous, and people of color) community would notice that,” said McCullough. “And that’s not the community we want to create.”

### Cultivate open communication

Instead of staying silent, HubSpot started sharing Black Lives Matter messages, hosting internal events, and conducting feedback sessions with minority employees. “We wanted to provide remarkable resources and a place where our employees could feel safe,” said McCullough.

### Walk the walk

As the Black Lives Matter movement gained momentum, HubSpot realized: *We've been talking the talk for a while, but not consistently walking the walk. This is our year to do it.* Beyond expressing their stances internally, the organization wanted to be held publicly accountable for investing in diversity, equity, and inclusion. To that end, HubSpot published an [open letter on Medium](#) in June 2020, putting their action plan out there for all to see.

## Action items:

Speak up about important issues, seek honest feedback from employees, create communities where staff members feel seen and supported

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## Lesson 5:

# Adopt an outbound approach

### Who we interviewed:

[Listen via Spotify](#)

GitLab VP of Global Recruiting Dave Gilbert explains how 2020 allowed his organization to eliminate their “Apply Now” button—and why a fully outbound strategy has been the secret to hiring success.

## Top takeaways:

### Identify high-impact roles

GitLab was in hypergrowth mode during early 2020. Then, COVID-19 struck—and hiring slowed. In the months following the outbreak, departments had to be highly intentional about which jobs they prioritized. “Each group had the opportunity to go through an exercise with our Financial Planning and Analysis (FP&A) team and think about their highest priority positions,” explained Gilbert. Ultimately, defining departmental needs helped GitLab pinpoint high-impact roles that would add immediate business value during the pandemic.

### Adopt an outbound approach

With a whopping 12,000 to 20,000 inbound job applicants per month, GitLab was inundated with candidates—and ready to reimagine their hiring practices. The first step? Eliminating their “Apply Now” button: a move that Gilbert admitted is “almost unimaginable”

for most recruiting teams. “All organizations pretty much have historically operated by that same playbook,” he explained. “You have an application system, you market your roles, you try to generate large volumes of applications, and then you hire the best people through your interview and assessment process.” In 2020, GitLab completely flipped that formula.

### Operate with intention

With fewer roles to fill and more time for personalization, GitLab saw the pandemic as the perfect opportunity to invest in outbound sourcing. This approach allowed them to tailor job searches and truly pinpoint the best talent for each position. Best of all, it gave the company a chance to connect with candidates who may never have submitted applications on their own. Looking ahead, GitLab is excited to continue reaping the rewards of outbound sourcing. “We’ve been really pleased with the results thus far,” said Gilbert.

## Action items:

Make a list of hiring priorities, invest in outbound sourcing, personalize candidate communications

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## **Lesson 6:**

# **Overcome analysis paralysis**

### **Who we interviewed:**

[Listen via Spotify](#)

Battery Ventures Talent Partner Kelly Kinnard shares the state of hiring across her organization's portfolio—and emphasizes the value of resourcing outside experts to recruit for one-off senior roles.

### **Top takeaways:**

#### **Overcome analysis paralysis**

When COVID-19 struck, many startups stopped in their tracks. Fast forward one year, and recruiting activity has picked back up across the Battery Ventures portfolio. “I’m seeing a tremendous amount of hiring across our portfolio, which is great,” noted Kinnard.

#### **Bridge critical skills gaps**

As businesses grow, so do their needs. “It’s not realistic, in most situations, that the team that grows a company from \$0 to \$15M is the same team that can grow it from \$15M to \$50M, and then \$50M to \$100M, and through an IPO,” explained Kinnard. In identifying organizational gaps, companies can tailor their search to find candidates who will take their business to the next level.

#### **Know what you don't know**

When hiring for one-off senior roles, HR teams should consider resourcing contract recruiters and agencies. “I don’t think it’s realistic for internal talent teams who are primarily focused on recruiting at the more junior level...to lead and run and do the equivalent of a retained executive search,” explained Kinnard. “They don’t have the network. They don’t have the background. That’s when you go out and you pay a retained executive recruiter to come in who has the Rolodex, the network, the expertise.” At the end of the day, she emphasized, it’s important to know what you don’t know.

### **Action items:**

Don’t let inaction stall innovation, find (and fill) organizational gaps, resource contract recruiters or agencies when hiring for one-off senior roles

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## Lesson 7:

# Look for learning opportunities

**Who we interviewed:**

[Listen via Spotify](#)

DoorDash VP of Talent Matt Valentino shares how he scaled his recruiting team from 50 to 150 people in just seven months—at the height of COVID-19.

## Top takeaways:

### Stay curious

When Valentino started working at DoorDash in June 2020, he made an effort to meet as many departmental heads as possible. At the end of each conversation, he'd always ask: *Who else should I meet on your team?* This allowed him to quickly learn business needs across the organization. He also dug up historical information, taking notes on where the business has been and where it's headed. "I found myself in a wormhole of watching recorded all-hands meetings," recalled Valentino. "If you have the curiosity and you're aligned with the mission, you find ways to learn very quickly."

### Set the right ratios

In 2020, DoorDash set a new 2:1 ratio of

sourcers to tech recruiters. "The main push was a large ramp up in engineering hiring," said Valentino. By doing a bulk of early outreach and engagement, sourcers set recruiters up for a smoother recruitment process. So far, the switch has been met with positive results—from Q3 to Q4, DoorDash doubled their volume of tech hiring.

### Flexibility is key

When building out DoorDash's recruiting team, Valentino intentionally looks beyond labels like "specialist" or "generalist." As he explained, "I try to remain flexible and focus on core competencies. I think recruiting—the technical side of it—can be learned. You're only *not* something until you are. You're only not a recruiter until you get the experience."

## Action items:

Meet with different departmental heads to learn every aspect of the business, watch old all-hands meetings, focus on core competencies during the vetting process

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## Lesson 8:

# Lead with transparency

### Who we interviewed:

[Listen via Spotify](#)

SeatGeek Director of Recruiting Jamie Sterrett explains how her organization bounced back in Q3 of 2020—and why transparency is key in both internal and external brand communications.

## Top takeaways:

### Manage expectations

In March 2020, SeatGeek made the difficult decision of putting hiring on pause. When recruiting ramped back up in Q3, Sterrett had to manage team expectations. “There was a bit of scrambling to ‘turn hiring back on,’ but anyone who works in hiring knows you can’t turn it on overnight,” she explained.

When bouncing back, it’s important to ask: *How long will it really take to start seeing hires?* Considering this question up front can combat misconceptions among your recruitment team. By studying historical data, HR leaders can also understand how many roles recruiters are able to handle—and prevent potential burnout.

### Communicate clear priorities

Sterrett’s team knew they couldn’t open every single role at once. Instead, they asked: *What are the most critical jobs we have to lead with?* Prioritization allowed them to remain present at every stage of the recruitment process, from pipelining to interviewing.

### Lead with transparency

“We’ve been really up front and transparent about our business, why we’re hiring again, and why we feel confident in continuing to grow the business right now,” said Sterrett. During candidate conversations, SeatGeek has also made a point of highlighting new offerings, like their \$1,000 work-from-home stipend. “Emphasizing what we’ve done to make sure that we’re taking care of employees is something that’s been super important for us,” said Sterrett.

## Action items:

Study historical data to set realistic hiring timelines, address candidate concerns up front, proactively highlight remote work offerings

## **Employ your potential**

The past twelve months were defined by change. Fortunately, tech companies are no strangers to innovation—and as you rethink recruitment, Hired is here to help.

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