We Only Hire the Best – And Other Lies Killing Your Delivery Timelines

In the high-speed world of software development these days, bosses are always keen to make out that they only hire the best. Top talent only. No compromises on quality.

But here's the thing: this is only further sabotaging your delivery timelines, demotivating your teams, and costing you money, much more than you realize.

Walk into any engineering team stand-up that is running late, and you'll probably hear the same excuse: We're still hiring.

And if you ask why, the answer usually comes with a hint of pride: We only hire the best.

On the surface, it sounds noble. Who wouldn't want A-players building their product? But behind the scenes, this mindset is one of the stealth killers of modern software delivery.

Let's dissect it.

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The Perfect Hire Myth

It's true that a great developer can outshine numerous mediocre developers. But this demand for unicorn candidates—six languages proficient, monolith scalers overnight, and available to start right away—leads to one thing: hiring paralysis.

The hunt for mythical best engineers creates unrealistic expectations that paralyze hiring processes. It's tough to recruit software engineers. There are few skilled engineers relative to the enormous demand for them, yet employers preserve false expectations. They wait months for the legendary 10x developer as deadlines pass, projects go nowhere, and the existing teams burn out filling gaps.

Worse, though, this perfectionism creates a cancerous cycle:

- Endless interview loops that frustrate candidates.
- Too much emphasis on algorithmic puzzles that aren't relevant to real work.
- Dumping excellent engineers for unexplained reasons (e.g., not a culture fit).

Meanwhile, rivals who prioritize practical hiring get quicker, release earlier, and shift more easily.

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Perfectionism Is a Luxury You Can't Afford

Here's the brutal truth: your customers don't give a damn about how elegant your backend architecture is if your product is three months late.

Perfection is generally mistaken for performance by hiring managers. However, in engineering, progress beats perfection. The MVP that ships is better than the masterpiece that never leaves staging.

This does not mean lowering the bar. It means being realistic about your needs: do you need a full-stack expert or someone who can unblock your mobile launch next week? Does your must-have list include four frameworks your current stack doesn't even use?

Hiring needs to be strategic, not idealistic.

Process Paralysis

Hiring the best usually means having the worst process.

We've seen companies design gauntlets that are the equivalent of SAS training: timed take-home assignments, six-hour whiteboarding sessions, algorithm tests that would make a Google engineer blink. By the time the candidate reaches round five, they've already accepted an offer elsewhere—or worse, they ghost you entirely.

It's not that good engineers can't pass tough interviews. It's that good engineers won't. They have options, and if your process is bureaucratic, insulting, or simply takes too long, they'll go somewhere else.

A good hiring process filters out bad candidates. A great one attracts good ones.

Culture Fit or Culture Freeze?

The other myth that gets added to hiring the best is the mythical culture fit. What does that even mean?

Too often, fit is shorthand for feels like us—someone who thinks like us, works like us, jokes like us. That's not a hiring strategy. That's a clique.

The best teams aren't clones. They're diverse, argue productively, and question assumptions.

If every applicant is passed through the same tight filter, don't be surprised when your team isn't innovative—or worse, when it can't retain talent that doesn't feel seen.

How to Fix It: Smarter Hiring for Faster Delivery

1. Define What Actually Matters

Stop evaluating engineers on trivia. Focus on:
- Problem-solving in real-world scenarios (e.g., debugging, system design).
- Collaboration and communication skills.
- Growth potential (can they learn, not just recite algorithms?).

2. Streamline the Process

- Cap interviews at 3-4 rounds. More than that is just ego.
- Use take-home assignments sparingly (and pay for their time).
- Make decisions fast. If you're unsure after 4 hours of interviews, the problem isn't the candidate—it's your evaluation criteria.

3. Invest in Onboarding & Mentorship

It's okay to hire good enough engineers if you support them. Put them with seniors, provide them with good docs, and allow them to ramp up.

4. Focus on Retention

The simplest way to eliminate the chronic hiring headaches? Keep the talent you already have. Care about listening to your engineers, preventing burnout, and creating growth trajectories.

The High Price of Only the Best

1. The ongoing recruitment cycle.

Most engineering teams spend months interviewing candidates, rejecting highly qualified engineers for trivial faults, and embarking on yet another search—only to ultimately settle on someone no more qualified than the earlier candidates.

Example: A startup delayed an important product release by 6 months while they searched for a Google-level backend engineer for a year—only to have the person they hired leave after 3 months due to unmet expectations.

2. The Burnout Domino Effect

When positions remain unfilled, current engineers take on the additional workload. The outcome?

- Slower development of features (since everyone's spread thin).
- Additional bugs & technical debt (as rushed work cuts corners).
- Increased turnover, as burned-out engineers resign.

A study by Haystack in 2023 discovered that 62% of engineers had thought about quitting their jobs because of unmanageable workloads from short-staffed teams.

3. The Innovation Freeze

Excellent engineering isn't about coding—it's about creative problem-solving. But when groups are constantly short-staffed:

- No time for R&D → Stagnant products.
- Junior engineers don't develop without guidance.
- Without experimentation, others will pass you by.

4. The Reputation Trap

Painful, slow interview processes scare off good candidates. Engineers talk to each other. If your interviews are legendary for:
- 6+ rounds of leetcode puzzles

Painful, slow interview processes scare off good candidates.

- Weeks of ghosting after final rounds
- Random rejections (not a culture fit)

...word spreads. Soon, even strong candidates avoid you.

The 3 Biggest Hiring Fibs (And Why They're Incorrect)

Lie #1: We just cannot afford to reduce our standards.
Reality: Your high bar is often subjective, random, and outdated.

Google's initial hiring (brainteasers, GPA emphasis) was subsequently demonstrated to be ineffective—they discontinued it.

Netflix famously prioritizes practical skills over academic pedigree.

Identify what truly matters for the job (e.g., debugging, teamwork, system design) and interview for that—not trivia.

Lie #2: A Poor Hire Is Worse Than an Unfilled Vacancy
Fact: An empty seat always costs more.

Math: If one senior engineer's work = £10K/month, then a 6-month gap = £60K lost—on top of the cost of burnout to the team.

Hire well enough, then spend money on onboarding. Most bad hires fail because they are not supported, not because they lack skill.

Lie #3: We'll Know 'The One' When We See Them
Reality: Perfect candidates don't exist.

The best engineers are not flawless—they are coachable, adaptable, and self-driven.

Many A-players were B-players given the right opportunity.

Look for potential and cultural development—not necessarily off-the-shelf expertise.

How to Fix It: A Smarter Hiring Playbook
1. Streamline Interviews (Without Compromising Quality)

- 3-4 rounds maximum (after that, you're being indecisive).

- Replace leetcode with real-world problems, like debugging this API or optimizing this query.

- Standardize assessments by using scorecards to reduce bias.

2. Speed Up Decisions

- Establish a 48-hour rule for feedback after interviews.

- If unsure after 4 hours of interviewing, the issue is your process—not the candidate.

3. Recruit for Potential, Not Background

Good engineers adapt. Look for:
- Problem-solving intuition.

- Want to learn.

- Collaboration skills.

Example: Shopify's engineering department notoriously looks to hire by potential—not history.

4. Invest in Onboarding & Mentorship

- Pair new recruits with seniors for the first 3 months.

- Document tribal knowledge (so ramp-up isn't a guessing game).

- Set definite 30/60/90-day goals.

5. Measure What Really Matters

Track:
- Time-to-hire (goal: < 3 weeks from first interview).
- Offer acceptance rate (if < 50%, your process is repelling talent).
- Retention at 12 months (if < 80%, your hiring or culture is flawed).

The Bottom Line

Only hiring the best is a fantasy that backfires more often than it succeeds. The real competitive edge?

✅ Hiring competent engineers fast.
✅ Supporting them with great onboarding.
✅ Retaining them with strong culture.

Stop letting perfectionism cripple your timelines. Build a team that ships—not one that's forever waiting for a unicorn.

Ready to Build a High-Performing Engineering Team?

At Carson Harris Associates, we specialize in connecting companies with top-tier software engineering talent—fast. From backend architects and DevOps pros to product-focused full-stack engineers, we understand what it takes to deliver real business value, not just code.

If you're stuck chasing unicorns while your roadmap burns, it's time to change tack. I help teams hire real engineers—fast, skilled, and actually available. Let's talk before your competitors ship what you're still interviewing for.

Don't let perfectionism stall your progress. Partner with a firm that knows how to deliver.

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About Us

Carson Harris Associates was founded by Simon Carson in 2004 as an executive search firm specialising in UX/UI, software engineering and app development.

Simon has over 30 years of experience in the industry, having served previously as the Sales Director of US based, Management Search International. As Managing Director of Carson Harris, Simon oversees our business development and client relationship management, and is on hand to provide one to one guidance on all aspects of the hiring process.

Our delivery teams are based in London, Dublin, and Nairobi, and our consultants have hands-on experience in their specialist fields.

With collaboration always at the heart of what we do, our partner companies now range from startups to globally recognised brands.

At Carson Harris, we've got a proven track record of consistently securing desired outcomes for the companies we work with.

Generating CVs and portfolios is the easy part of recruitment. Understanding the talent behind them is where Carson Harris excels. We give our partners solutions rather than options.

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Testimonials

"We've been using Carson Harris for over five years now, since our early startup days, and they've been an integral part of our journey. From the outset, they became our first choice for product and UX roles—two areas that are absolutely crucial to the success of our company. Their deep understanding of our needs and ability to deliver top-tier talent has been key to our team's growth"
Hemal Vaghela

"Carson Harris have been on our PSL for many years and always one of our first go to's for software devs and UX designers. They build proper relationships and the calibre of candidate they provide is always top notch. I've dealt with dozens of agencies over the years and Carson Harris will always be one of my favourites for the professionalism they provide as well as the relationships I've built with them. Could not recommend them more highly!"
Sarah Lamontagne

" I have used Carson Harris for both perm and contract placements and wholeheartedly recommend them. I always feel incredibly well taken care of and like I am their number one priority. The quality and speed of the short-listing is unmatched and the way they understand how to pitch my company and to manage the candidate flow is great. No-nonsense, refreshingly honest recruiters."
Adina Kuse