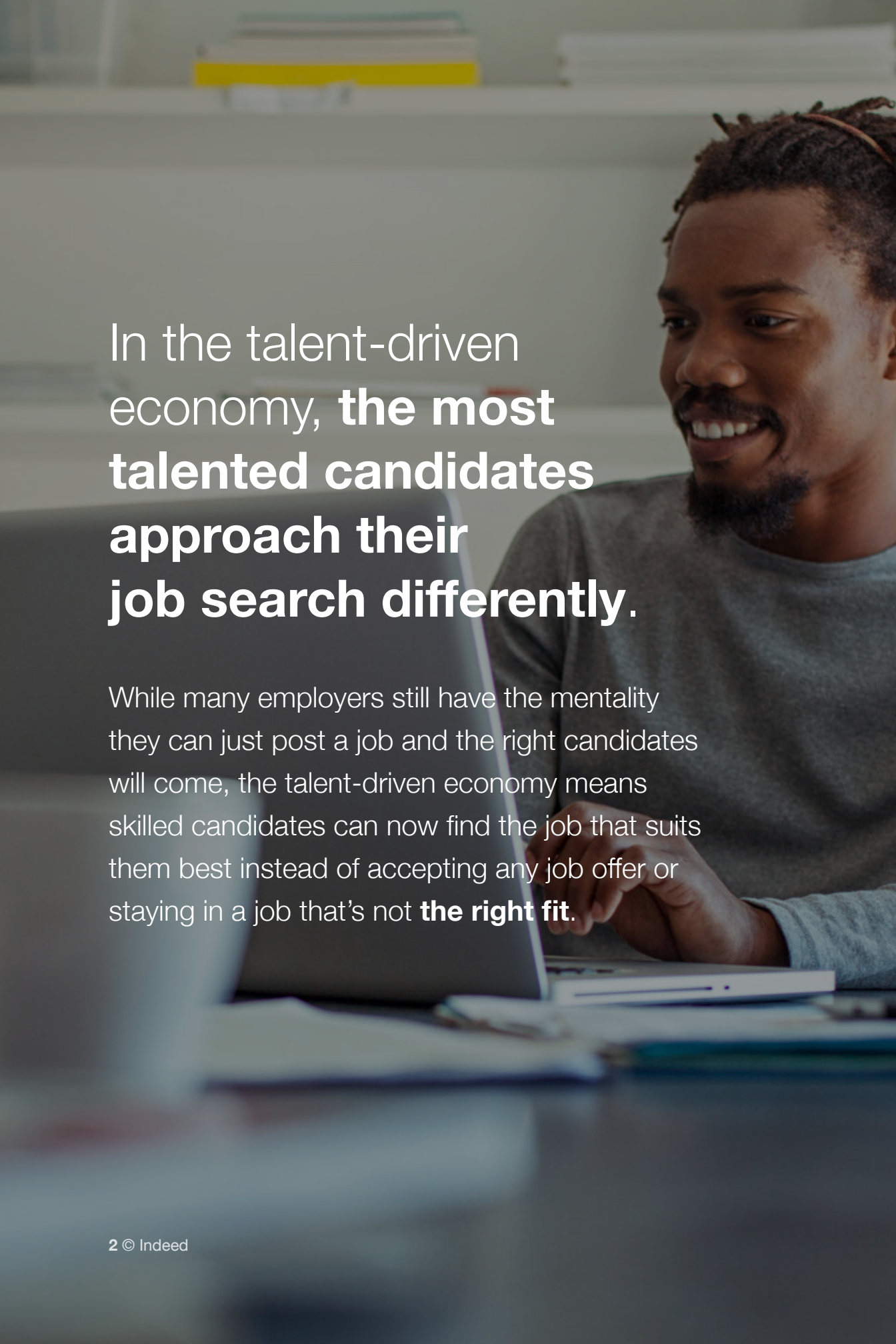**indeed**

The Candidate Persona Toolkit:
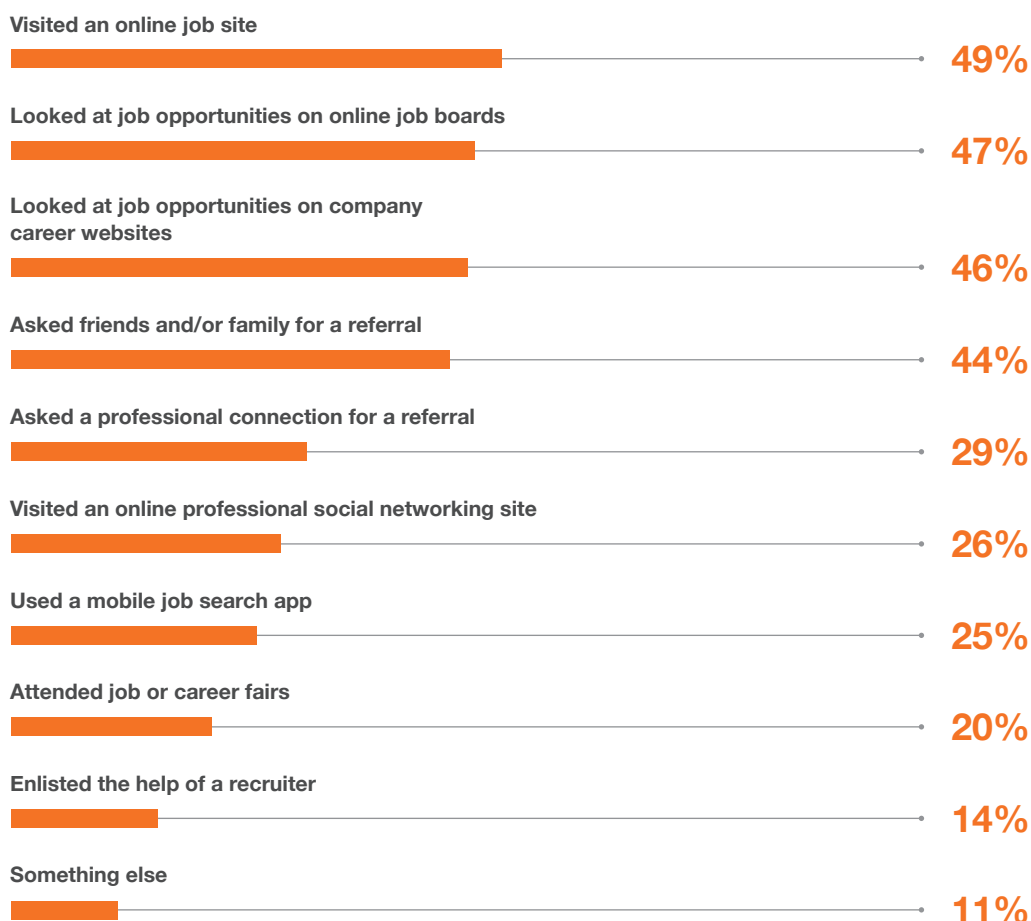
Getting to Know Your Talent Audience

In the talent-driven economy, **the most talented candidates approach their job search differently**.

While many employers still have the mentality they can just post a job and the right candidates will come, the talent-driven economy means skilled candidates can now find the job that suits them best instead of accepting any job offer or staying in a job that's not **the right fit**.

This is also why people are more actively searching for jobs, even the currently employed.

According to a Harris Poll survey conducted on behalf of Indeed, **90%** of employed adults who were hired within the past year took action in their job search six months prior to being hired. At the same time, **71%** of employed adults are either currently looking or open to a new job.

Actions taken 6 months prior to current job among the 90% hired in the past year

Visited an online job site
49%

Looked at job opportunities on online job boards
47%

Looked at job opportunities on company career websites
46%

Asked friends and/or family for a referral
44%

Asked a professional connection for a referral
29%

Visited an online professional social networking site
26%

Used a mobile job search app
25%

Attended job or career fairs
20%

Enlisted the help of a recruiter
14%

Something else
11%

Source: Indeed survey conducted by Harris Poll (Base=Employed but not self employed and hired within the past year, n=853)

To make sure relevant candidates are finding your jobs in the talent-driven economy, **you must be willing to proactively attract them with the most compelling job content and recruitment channels at your disposal**. This starts with having an in-depth understanding of what qualified candidates want and what attracts them to your opportunities.

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What is a candidate persona?

A **"persona"** is a written description of a hypothetical person that represents an ideal employee or candidate for a specific role. It's based on real data, primary research and interviews to uncover the experience, goals, motivations and concerns of your ideal candidate.

Marketers have used buyer personas for years as representations of a business' ideal customers. **They help marketers understand current and prospective customers, and they make it easier** for businesses to craft content and marketing strategies to the specific needs, behaviors and concerns of various types of buyers.

Just like marketers develop buyer personas to attract certain customers, **you can use candidate personas to develop a talent attraction strategy focused on the people you need to hire.**

For example, one of your candidate personas may be "Chris Smith, a quantitative analyst with Python and SQL experience." You would want to understand Chris' educational background, work experience, working environment, his likes and dislikes, his familiarity with various tools and his general working style. Your candidate persona describes Chris in detail, based on top talent in your organization, so you can:

Attract candidates with relevant job content

Provide an engaging candidate experience

Use the most effective recruitment channels

Candidate persona name:
Chris the Quantitative Analyst

Background
Work history, education, location

Status: Currently or recently employed in an analytical or mathematical occupation

Education: Math, Economics, Physics, Statistics or related degree

Career path: Spent 1-2 years at a startup before transitioning to mid-sized company along with a promotion

Location: Based in Dallas or Chicago metro areas and willing to relocate there from suburban area or other key metros

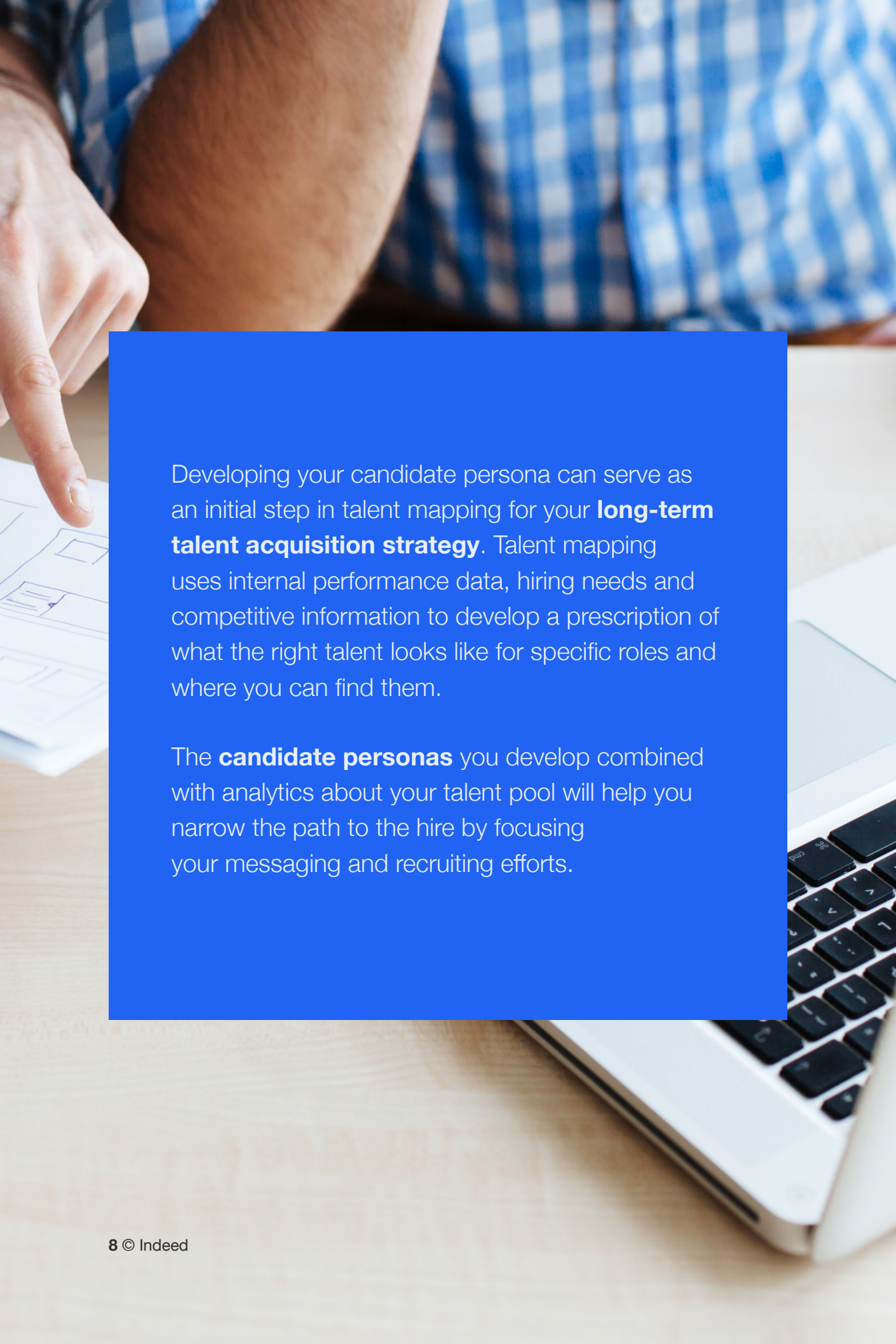**Mannerisms:** Inquisitive and solutions oriented

Experience
Responsibilities, types of projects

Level: 3-4 years, entry-to-mid level

Requirements: Experience with statistics, predictive modeling and visualization tools and business knowledge

Projects: Business analytics solutions and data aggregation methodologies

Developing your candidate persona can serve as an initial step in talent mapping for your **long-term talent acquisition strategy**. Talent mapping uses internal performance data, hiring needs and competitive information to develop a prescription of what the right talent looks like for specific roles and where you can find them.

The **candidate personas** you develop combined with analytics about your talent pool will help you narrow the path to the hire by focusing your messaging and recruiting efforts.

This toolkit will provide **best practices for persona research** and help you organize your findings to create your own candidate personas.

How to create your candidate persona

Traditional buyer personas are created through research, surveys and interviews of a business' target customer. Research for your candidate persona can include analysis on current employees, prospective hires and others who might align with your ideal hire. Your findings will help you optimize your job content, become expert marketers for your employment brand and build a strategic sourcing pipeline.

Here are five ways to uncover insights to apply to your candidate persona:

01

Identify trends in top performers

Who are your top-tier employees? If you track performance data in your HR information system, you can look for trends in the experience, background and career paths of your most high-potential employees for specific roles.

Look for patterns in:

Education: Academic institutions, certifications and degree level

Location: Mobility, relocation patterns and concentrations of employees from specific areas

Experience: Industries, company size for past roles and length of time in each position

Using this data, you can **identify your ideal candidate** based on the experience, background and location of top performers and apply those findings to your candidate persona for future hiring.

02
Use your own hiring data

Which recruitment sources are giving you the best applicants and hires? Source data is another key metric to identify how your best candidates find your jobs. **Compare your top sources of hire to those for your top-tier employees** so you can make informed recruiting decisions and focus on the channels that drive the best hires.

Many applicant tracking systems (ATSs) collect this data during the application process, but the default behavior of some ATSs is to ask job seekers how they found out about a job as the candidate is applying. Job seekers often are presented with a drop-down menu during the application that sometimes has hundreds of choices to select from.

This type of manual tracking may lead to insufficient hiring data, making it impossible to accurately measure the effectiveness of your online recruitment sources. Fortunately, most ATSs offer automated candidate source tracking so you can accurately track the source of your online applicants.

ATSs with automated source tracking can automatically identify where candidates are coming from, removing the burden from job seekers of having to manually tell the employer where they found the job posting. This makes the application process easier and gives you more reliable source data you can apply to your candidate persona.

03

Interview colleagues and hiring managers

The people at your fingertips—recruiters, hiring managers and talent acquisition leaders—have a good grasp on the employees they need and what each role requires. When you do a thorough candidate overview with this group, dive into the responsibilities of the role, the qualities of someone who can do the job and the priorities and personality traits that align with your company culture.

You can also use these interviews to uncover more information about potential candidates and why they would want to work for you. **This can provide useful insight you can apply to your hiring process to deliver a more engaging candidate experience and targeted messaging.**

Relevant questions to ask colleagues and hiring managers

What questions do candidates ask most often during the hiring process?

What might keep someone from accepting an offer at our company?

What are the professional priorities of your ideal candidate?

What types of challenges do they hope to solve with their work?

How can a position at our company help them meet their professional goals?

04

Interview your talent base

Next, interview your current employees. This should be a mix of top performers, promising new hires and, if possible, candidates who expressed interest in your company but ultimately chose to work somewhere else. **The goal of these interviews is to find out what matters to these employers**, what interests them, what fears and worries they have and how and why they were attracted to your company and the role.

Relevant questions to ask your talent base

Background:

What are your day-to-day responsibilities?

What are your short-term and long-term career goals?

How do you spend your time outside of work?

Professional and personal goals:

What is most important for you to be successful in your job?

What do you wish you had more of?

What would make your job more enjoyable?

Career motivations:

What information do you use to make career decisions?

What publications do you read? Who do you consult?

What other factors affect your career decisions?

While interviews will be the most effective way to gather specific stories about your talent audience, many employers use surveys to assess engagement and identify opportunities in the employee experience. **Combine survey data with actual interviews** to uncover trends about how top candidates find your job openings, identify with your talent brand and perceive you as a potential employer.

05

Keep an eye on hiring trends in your industry

What do you want to know about people in specific occupations? General labor market data on the nuances and particular behaviors of talent in a certain job or occupation category can give you a good picture of where and how you can further hone your candidate persona.

But before you dig into the data, identify the questions you want answered, like:

What's the average level of education for people in this occupation?

How often do they change jobs?

How do they search for jobs—which devices and channels?

What types of jobs are they looking for?

What job searches are trending in my industry?

How and where are competitors posting job openings for the same positions I'm hiring for?

You can use the following sources to identify labor market trends that affect the segment of the workforce that's most relevant to you.

Bureau of Labor Statistics (bls.gov): Get salary data, career information, growth rates and more for hundreds of occupations.

Indeed Hiring Lab (indeed.com/hiringlab): View real-time data on job seeker behavior, employers' job postings and job search patterns of highly skilled candidates.

Industry Employment Trends (indeed.com/jobtrends/industry): See which jobs people are searching for and clicking on most in your industry on Indeed.

Your candidate persona template

Pull out the trends from your research to put together a plausible representation of the ideal candidate for your role. Use the following template to organize your research and share findings within your organization.

Download the template here

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Responsibilities, types of projects

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How to use your candidate persona

When combined with talent mapping, your candidate experience and evaluating recruitment channels, your candidate personas can help you target your efforts to focus on the highest-value talent acquisition strategies. Here are a few ways you and your talent acquisition team can use your candidate personas:

Create alignment among your hiring managers, recruiters and talent acquisition leaders.

Adjust your job description so it aligns with the voice of your company and the cultural fit you're trying to attract.

Evaluate your recruitment sources to ensure you're investing in the ones that present the best opportunity to find people that align with your candidate persona.

Identify new sourcing opportunities based on the behaviors and career paths of top performers.

Brainstorm targeted recruiting messages and employment branding ideas that incorporate your candidate experience and recruitment funnel.

Questions

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