



GROW YOUR TALENT

**HIRE BASED ON POTENTIAL**

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ROBERT WALTERS

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# POWERING PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONS TO FULFIL THEIR UNIQUE POTENTIAL



**FOR OVER 30 YEARS, BUSINESSES ACROSS THE  
GLOBE HAVE RELIED ON US TO FIND THE VERY BEST  
SPECIALIST PROFESSIONALS.**

Robert Walters, Chief Executive Officer



Our story begins in 1985 when the Group opened its first office in central London. Since then, we have developed into a global specialist professional recruitment group, operating in a diverse range of markets worldwide.

For over 30 years, businesses across the globe have relied on us to find the very best specialist professionals, talented executives have trusted us to help build their careers, and companies have outsourced their recruitment processes to us. It's a success story we're proud of and one that's built on the strength and passion of our people.

As the business continues to expand, we operate with the same commitment to service and quality. Every candidate is treated as an individual with a focus on advising and consulting. It means we continually have the best candidates on the market to offer you.

Although our reach is global, we remain committed to hiring local talent so our people have a deep understanding of the local market and culture. It's what makes us unique and helps us remain a trusted recruitment partner of the world's leading firms.

# NURTURING YOUR OWN POOL OF TALENT

42%

of hiring managers surveyed have never hired a high potential candidate because they lacked the right experience

94%

of hiring managers surveyed say that the employees they hired based on potential are now a valuable part of their team

55%

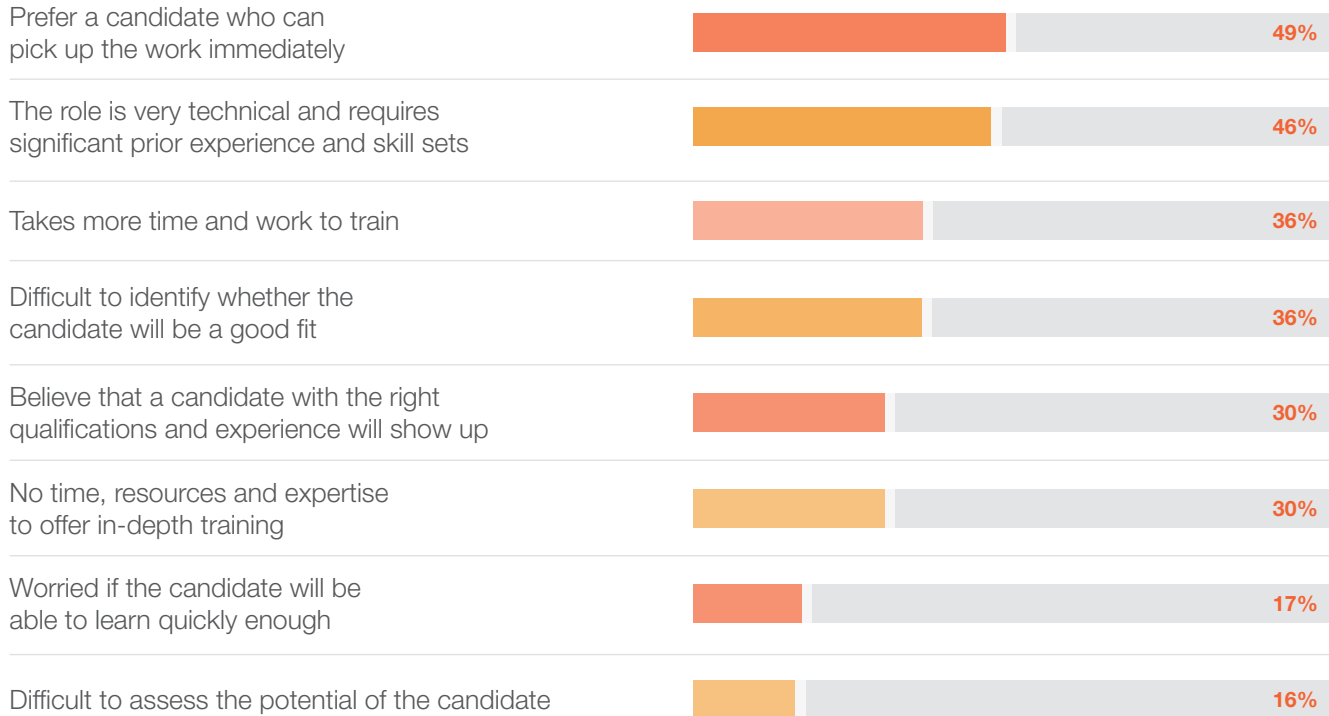
of professionals surveyed felt learning and growth opportunities were more important than higher salaries

As economies in Asia accelerate their digital efforts and move towards Industry 4.0, jobs are rapidly evolving, resulting in high demand for professionals who possess a good mix of both technical expertise and soft skills. To ensure they secure strong talent with hybrid skill sets, companies are becoming more competitive with their employer branding, as well as their compensation and benefits packages.

However, this is only part of the solution to the talent challenge. Instead of competing over a small pool of talent, which will only inflate salaries and costs, companies need to actively commit to growing talent pools and invest in nurturing individuals who show high potential. This not only helps secure talented individuals today, it also builds a strong pipeline for the future.

In this guide, we speak with hiring managers and professionals to find out how hiring based on potential can benefit businesses. We also outline how hiring managers can create an effective recruitment process to identify high potential candidates, and how companies can empower these hires to fulfil their unique potential.

# WHY COMPANIES DON'T HIRE BASED ON POTENTIAL



**Wiwik Wahyuni**  
Director, Home Credit  
Indonesia

At Home Credit, we maintain strong collaboration between hiring managers and HR to ensure the speed and quality of our hiring.

When it comes to hiring for positions that are difficult to fill, we find it necessary to go back to the drawing board to review the requirements and explore new talent pools so that we can hire in an effective manner. By working closely with the hiring managers, we've been able to successfully hire the talent we need and groom them for success.





## THE BENEFITS OF HIRING BASED ON POTENTIAL

Although they may initially take a longer time to learn about a new role, I believe hiring candidates with strong potential is often worth it in the long run. Having someone with a different background would bring in new perspectives and ideas which could eventually help make the organisation stronger.

- A country general manager of Getz Healthcare in Asia Pacific

### 1) FILL THE POSITION FASTER – FOR LESS

Professionals with niche skill sets are in high demand and short supply. It may take months to find a candidate who is a close fit for the job description and their salary expectations will often be inflated as they are highly sought after.

Hiring talent who may not fit all the requirements but shows good potential will open up the pool of candidates, without having to pay a premium. While they may not be able to hit the ground running, and may require additional support initially, their willingness to learn will help them get up to speed quickly.



## 2) NURTURE LOYALTY AND MOTIVATION

High potential employees are often curious and eager to explore new things. In fact, these are often the traits that contribute to their ability to learn quickly. By hiring them for a position that is slightly challenging for them, they will remain engaged and driven for a longer time.

Additionally, giving them the opportunity to up-skill themselves will help retain them in the long-run. Employees value companies that believe in them, and a willingness to take the chance and invest in their career will go a long way towards building their loyalty and motivation.

## 3) INJECT NEW PERSPECTIVES AND IDEAS

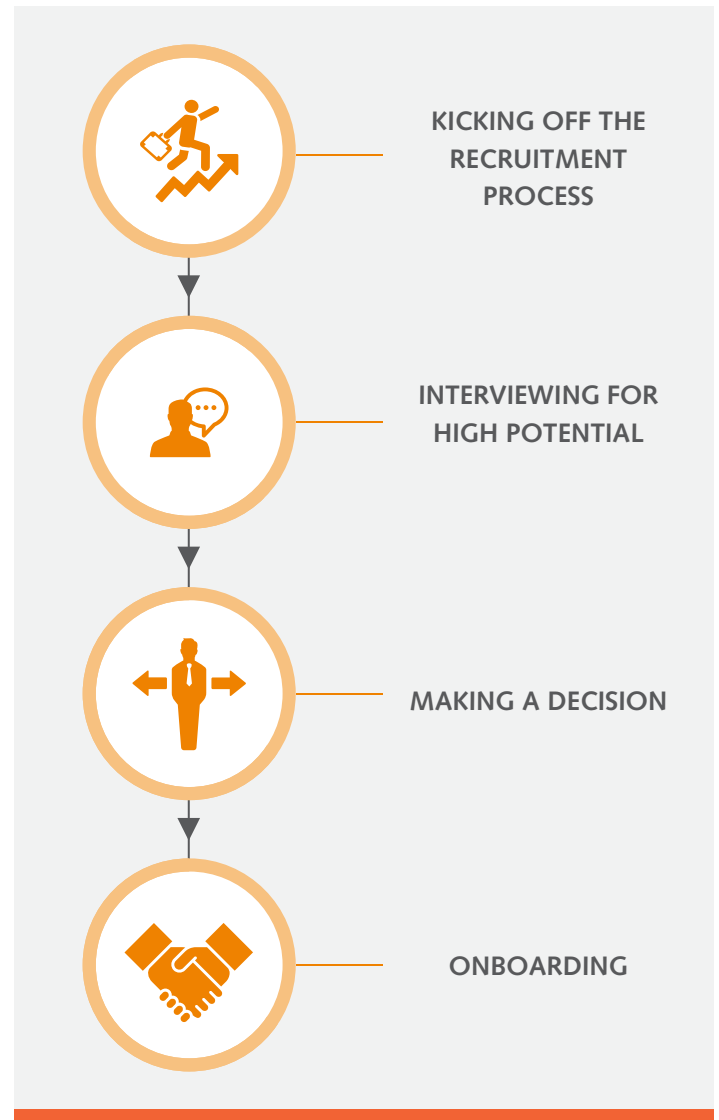
Companies may find that bringing in talent whose profile differs from the hiring manager's idea of a perfect candidate will add diversity to the team.

For example, an e-commerce company seeking a digital marketer should not limit themselves to candidates from the same industry. Even though candidates from other industries such as travel and hospitality may not have the exact skill sets or experience required, they may bring with them fresh views and different ways of thinking about the work and business model.

# BUILDING POTENTIAL INTO EVERY STEP OF THE PROCESS

Hiring for potential does not mean giving up on great candidates who are a 90-100% match for the role – it means being open to candidates who may not be the exact fit for the role.

To do this effectively and efficiently, hiring managers and HR have to be open to the possibility throughout the entire process. Instead of only considering high potential individuals after learning that the “right” candidate isn’t available or exceeds the budget, the recruitment process needs to be set up to include candidates who may not be the ideal fit but have the right potential from the beginning.







**Lester Cruz**  
Head of Consumer  
Banking, CIMB  
Philippines

I applied and was accepted for a product management role in my previous company even though I had very limited experience in that area. I came from a different background of sales, and did not possess all the credentials and technical skills required for the job. However, I believe that my historically strong performance and well-established good work ethic gave the hiring manager the confidence to take a chance on me on the basis of my potential.

The experience I went through not only benefitted me personally in my career, it also made me a much better hiring manager. Previously, I focused more heavily on the individual's technical skills and experience – their background. However, after I was accepted for that role, my mindset shifted and I started to look further, at a candidate's potential and tangible skills which are transferrable to any function.

Adapting this broader and more balanced point of view in hiring has certainly paid off. I was able to acquire talent who performed exceptionally well even though they did not seem to fit the job perfectly on paper. I feel truly blessed to have had the chance to take on a completely different responsibility – this opened my mind and has given me the privilege to extend the same opportunity to many others.





# KICKING OFF THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS





**Fauzi Ibrahim**  
Former Head of  
Metasearch (Asia),  
Expedia

When I joined my previous company, Expedia, in a metasearch position, I was slightly apprehensive. My background was in data analytics and I had no experience in the industry and could only carry forward the functional experience I had. However, Expedia assured me that it would be fine, so I agreed to try out for the role.

I saw opportunities for improvement within my team, and I amended the algorithm to cater for nuances in the data and travel seasonality. My newly designed algorithm accelerated the growth from approximately 20-25% year-over-year to over 100%. Internally, we had to evaluate the overall company strategy especially given the upcoming forecasts.

I am incredibly grateful to Expedia for seeing the potential in me and giving me the chance to explore such a niche area. I stayed in Expedia for over four years before moving on to Chubb. While the reason for leaving was purely personal, I would have stayed because the culture was amazing and the business was challenging.



# KICKING OFF THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

The question I always ask myself or the hiring manager is: What organisational problems are we trying to solve? What impact do we expect the candidate to have?

This doesn't apply to just strategic roles – the challenge can be operational, such as managing overload. By understanding the problem and the impact we expect the individual to bring, we can then identify suitable candidates with clarity. We will have a better sense of the attributes, skill sets or experience that are crucial, and the ones that are less essential. It is not always as obvious as – have they done it before?

Having this mindset allows us to be more open-minded and consider candidates from diverse backgrounds, which really opens up the pool of people we can tap into.



**Susan Chen**  
SVP - Head of Talent  
Management, OD &  
International People & Culture,  
GOJEK

## 1) MAKE SURE THE JOB DESCRIPTION IS REALISTIC

This does not mean creating a new job description from scratch. However, before advertising a position, it is important to understand what is available on the market for the budget and timeline. Look on job boards, social channels such as LinkedIn, and talk to your talent acquisition team and recruitment consultant to find out more about the market. This will provide a better understanding of the approximate size of the talent pool, the skills available, as well as the salaries candidates are asking for.

## 2) IDENTIFY THE “MUST-HAVES” AND “NICE-TO-HAVES”

Understand what is crucial to a role and which skills or experience are secondary requirements. For instance, is it absolutely necessary for the developer to have experience coding in more than one language? Can they pick up the other skills or experience on the job? Knowing which requirements are not essential will allow CVs to be screened more efficiently while still leaving room to allow for high potential hires.

## 3) BE OPEN TO CVS NORMALLY PASSED OVER

Candidates with a long gap between jobs or who have changed jobs multiple times in recent years are often passed over in the first round of screening. However, it may be worthwhile to look deeper and try to understand the reasoning behind these “flaws”. The gap may have been for valid reasons, such as family circumstances or changes in management.

#### **4) LOOK FOR SIGNS OF GROWTH OR PROGRESS**

Don't just look at the number of years of experience and the skill sets a candidate has. Do also check how long it has taken the candidate to succeed in a role and to pick up new skill sets. A candidate with many years of experience may seem good initially but if they have been stagnant within a role over the past few years, there may be issues with their performance. Look out for signs of progression within a company and other achievements such as being a representative at industry conferences or speaking opportunities.

#### **5) WORK CLOSELY WITH A TRUSTED RECRUITMENT PARTNER**

Hiring good talent with niche skill sets can be challenging and it can often be hard to spot candidates with strong potential. A recruitment consultant who works closely with a company and understands their business needs will not only be able to advise on the talent pool available and help narrow down the list of "must-haves", they will also be able to help with the first round of CV screening – ensuring good matches for the requirements, or candidates who display strong potential to perform well in the role.





# INTERVIEWING FOR HIGH POTENTIAL



**Rod Strother**

Former Vice President,  
Brand & Marcomms/  
Digital Experience,  
StarHub

I was the managing director at an agency when I was headhunted to establish and manage an in-house digital team. I'd almost gotten to the end of the entire interview process when suddenly, I started to question myself on whether this was the right role for me, and vice versa. While I had digital experience, I didn't know if it was going to be enough.

I reached out to a recruitment consultant – not the one responsible for the placement – who I'd known for a number of years and he gave me some great advice. He told me that if the company believed in my potential, then I shouldn't be short-changing myself either. He also said that the role would completely transform my CV as people would no longer associate me with being “the agency guy”.

Along with coming to Asia, it was certainly one of the best career decisions I've made. I was given the chance to not only take on a global opportunity but also step into a fully digital role. I learnt a lot and eventually went on to develop a holistic brand approach to social media for the company. We set up the very first Centre of Excellence in Singapore for Lenovo. The experience allowed me to expand my career and rebrand myself as a specialist digital marketer on the brand side, and to this day, I'm still incredibly grateful for the opportunity.



# INTERVIEWING FOR HIGH POTENTIAL

My main objective of an interview is to really understand what the candidate is looking to achieve in their life and career, and whether there's a good match between their personal goals and Ascender's company objective and values. This match is the critical factor I'm looking for.

Every role is going to have its own unique challenges and I believe that intrinsic motivation is key to keep employees going in the long run. This is why I place so much importance on what the candidate seeks in working at Ascender. If an employee is working towards their personal and career goals, then the person will be motivated to learn and strive for success.



**Noa Miyajima**  
Head of Asia Sales &  
Account Management,  
Large Enterprise,  
Ascender HCM

## 1) GO IN OPEN, TRANSPARENT AND HONEST

It has been determined the candidate isn't the best fit for the role, but they may not know that yet. It is best to ensure everyone has the same expectations about the role right from the start. The hiring manager should gently let the candidate know their honest thoughts, and how they are willing to give them a chance based on their high potential. If the candidate continues to show interest in the role, it is a sign of commitment and resilience – two traits required for a high potential hire to succeed.

## 2) LEARN ABOUT HOW THEY LEARN

Learning will be a big part of the job for an employee who was hired based on their potential. When asking about their past experiences, find out about how they navigated past challenges, and their thoughts on how they could have done better. Hearing how they reflect on these situations will provide insight into how they communicate with other people, how self-aware they are, and their ability to grow from experiences.

## 3) WATCH HOW THEY REACT UNDER STRESS

The role will certainly be tough and stressful at times and it is important the candidate can thrive and grow under pressure. To see how a candidate will perform under stressful, unexpected situations, ask them scenario-based questions as these are difficult to prepare for. For a client-facing role, these could be questions such as, "If a client came back to you near the end of a project asking to change the brief, what would you do?"



#### 4) KEEP IT FOCUSED ON THE FUTURE

Hiring a high potential candidate is all about investing in their future so it is crucial to know how they fit into the company's plans and vision. For example, a bank hiring developers or engineers to create more user-centric digital experiences should be open to candidates who have strong interest in doing the same – even if they don't necessarily have the relevant financial services background. This employer-employee relationship will be built on common goals, giving both sides greater commitment to making it work.

#### 5) FOCUS ON TEAM AND CULTURAL FIT

For a candidate who doesn't meet all the requirements, the ability to gel well with the team and culture is even more important than ever as they will rely heavily on the team's support in their early days. Take the time to talk to the candidate and thoroughly understand their working style and ability to collaborate with others. Holding group interviews with other team members could help provide insight into how the candidate interacts in a group setting, and reveal whether other team members share the same belief in the candidate's potential.





# MAKING A DECISION



**Junior Toh**

Senior Officer, Client  
Management, HSBC

I left my previous job because I felt that my learning had become stagnant. I transitioned from a back office role to a front office position and my team, which was newly set up then, was very supportive. None of us had quite the exact experience for the role as it required an unusual mix of skill sets but we constantly provided support for one another and learnt together.

The journey wasn't easy. Not having the experience required meant that I didn't understand a lot of the more technical terms. I had to learn a lot of new concepts and ideas – and I had to learn them quick. It was tough but learning was what I sought when I left my last job.

I joined the company four years ago, and two years ago, I was transferred from the Malaysia office to the Singapore office where I had to readjust to a new team and culture. Every day presents a new challenge but I'm still constantly learning – and I appreciate that a lot.



# MAKING A DECISION

## TRAITS TO LOOK OUT FOR IN HIGH POTENTIAL CANDIDATES

1



Willingness to learn

2

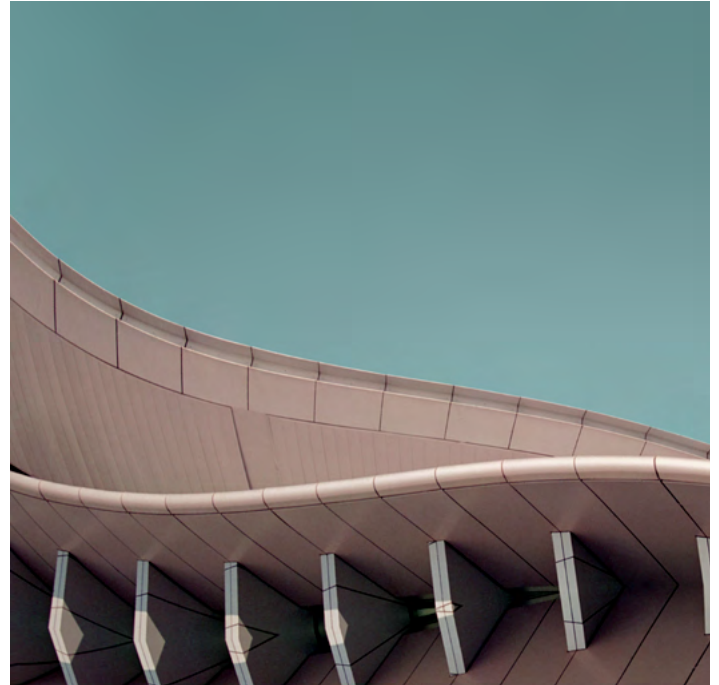


Motivation

3



Engagement



**Teresa Hai Duong Le**  
People Development,  
Central Group Vietnam

In my experience, it's extremely rare to find someone who is a perfect, 100% fit for the role – I'd say that this happens less than 1% of the time. Even if someone has done a similar role before, the working environment and culture will definitely be different, so there is still going to be some learning and adjustment along the way.

This is why we prefer to focus on finding people with an entrepreneurial mindset who have the passion, the agility to grow and adapt, and who are able to collaborate well in a start-up mentality. Businesses evolve and change, and we want someone who is a good fit for our culture and values, always looking to learn and not afraid of challenges.





## DON'T KEEP WAITING

While it may be tempting to keep sourcing and interviewing until the right candidate comes along, it is essential to not unnecessarily draw out the process. High potential candidates will have offers from other companies that recognise their value. Set a reasonable deadline after the interview process, evaluate your options thoroughly, and come to a decision on who will be hired.



## TAKE A CHANCE ON POTENTIAL

Keep in mind that a high potential candidate may never feel exactly “right” as they were not a 100% fit. It is natural to have worries and doubts about the experience and skill sets of the candidate, but if they have the right learning attitude and aptitude, and can fit in well with the team, it may be worthwhile to take a chance on the candidate. Before they start, also consider asking the candidate what they would need to succeed, and offer support for any certifications or training they may require.



**Manindra Shrestha**  
Head of HR, Royal  
Bank of Canada,  
Malaysia

At RBC, we believe the potential of a candidate is more important than experience, which is why we have a focused early talent strategy, while being open to looking at alternate talent for our lateral positions. This is fundamental to building future skills and creating a future ready workforce.

Many times, we tend to limit the talent pool by having very specific requirements. Don't forget that skills can always be learnt while talent is innate. The biggest hiring dilemma has always been whether there will be a better suited candidate if we wait longer. We strongly believe the return on investment is greater in the long run by hiring a candidate with potential, however, a bad hire can also be costly. Therefore, we need to take a calculated risk and find the right balance and this can be achieved through following a rigorous recruitment process.





# ONBOARDING



Group customer  
development manager  
at a multinational  
beverages company

My company is very supportive of cross-functional transfers and it's given me the chance to try out several new roles that I had almost no background in. I was initially in a data insights role, was transferred to a new product development (NPD) role, and now I'm in the customer development team.

One thing I've found extremely helpful is that teams are always supportive. They don't judge someone new for not knowing something, even if they are in a managerial role. It's always okay to ask questions – in fact, the more questions you ask, the better, as that helps you learn faster.

It's that kind of culture that has kept me in this company for nearly five years now. I've learnt so much and gained so much exposure. I want to go back to insights some day and leverage all the experience I've learnt in NPD and customer development, and my company supports this. It's great to have a company that trusts me and believes in investing in my career.



# ONBOARDING



1

## COMMUNICATING WITH THE TEAM

When a high potential candidate has accepted the offer, it is important for the hiring manager to communicate with their team and set the right expectations. Particularly with mid-level to senior hires, team members may expect the new joiner to know what they are doing immediately – despite this being a tall order, even for a hire who met all the requirements. It is important to give the team the background and context of why the company has decided to hire the candidate and encourage the team to be supportive and patient while the new hire picks up the skills required for the role.



2

## A ROBUST ONBOARDING PROCESS AND SUPPORT SYSTEM

Transitioning to a new environment and role is never easy and this is going to be even more challenging for someone hired based on their potential. For the new employee to perform well, they will require thorough onboarding and strong support from the team. Assigning a buddy or a partner who is familiar with the role will help. It is also important for the hiring manager to state their expectations clearly from the start. There will be a lot of challenges for the new hire to navigate without having to guess what is expected from them.



3

## PROVIDING TRAINING COURSES/WORKSHOPS

Relying solely on the team to provide all the support and training may take a toll on them. Invest in your new employee and send them for external training workshops or courses that can bring them up to speed quickly. Better still, organise training for the entire team so more experienced employees can also refresh and brush up on existing skills while learning something new as well.





**Kim Truong**  
Talent Manager,  
Frasers Law  
Company

I didn't have any background in talent acquisition for the legal industry and this was a newly created function for my company as well, so it was a new challenge for both of us. Given the situation, there wasn't a structured training programme that explained to me exactly what I had to do. I had to figure it out myself.

However, the entire business has been very helpful and supportive. The legal industry is very specialised and there are many terms and concepts that I don't understand but everyone has been encouraging in my learning journey and that has motivated me to pick things up faster and do my best for the company.



**Atul Gaur**  
HR Director –  
Malaysia/Singapore,  
L'Oreal

When hiring for potential, it's not just about the candidates – it's also about your culture and environment. Without a safe environment where people can learn and grow, hiring someone who isn't immediately able to take on the role would be like throwing the person off the deep end of the pool. You first need to have a strong culture of grooming and investing in people. This involves having a supportive team and a nurturing, growth-oriented culture.

With that in place, you can then start to examine what potential means to you – and who you should be considering in case you are unable to find a candidate with all the required skill sets and experience.



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# THANK YOU & METHODOLOGY

## Thank you

We would like to thank the following companies for their help and contributions in making this guide possible:



We would also like to thank Fauzi Ibrahim, Junior Toh, Rod Strother, and others for providing their personal insights, as well as the professionals surveyed for their opinions.

## Methodology

This guide was published in October 2019. The advice put forth within this publication are based on the insights gained from interviews with the 13 individuals featured, as well as external research. The statistics are based on a survey with 3,500 professionals and 1,200 hiring managers across South East Asia

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