



# Inside the Mind of Today's Candidate

13 insights that will make you  
a better hiring manager



# Balancing your hiring instincts with data-driven insights

As a hiring manager, you have great instincts. After all you have hired people before and you know how to tell who will work out and who won't. Most of the time.

But instincts can only take you so far. To be a great hiring manager, you need insights too. Data-driven insights can show you who your candidates are in a way that your intuition cannot. Only data-driven insights can tell you if your candidate hunches are right and if your hiring strategy is sound. The good news we have those insights right here in this report.

## About this report

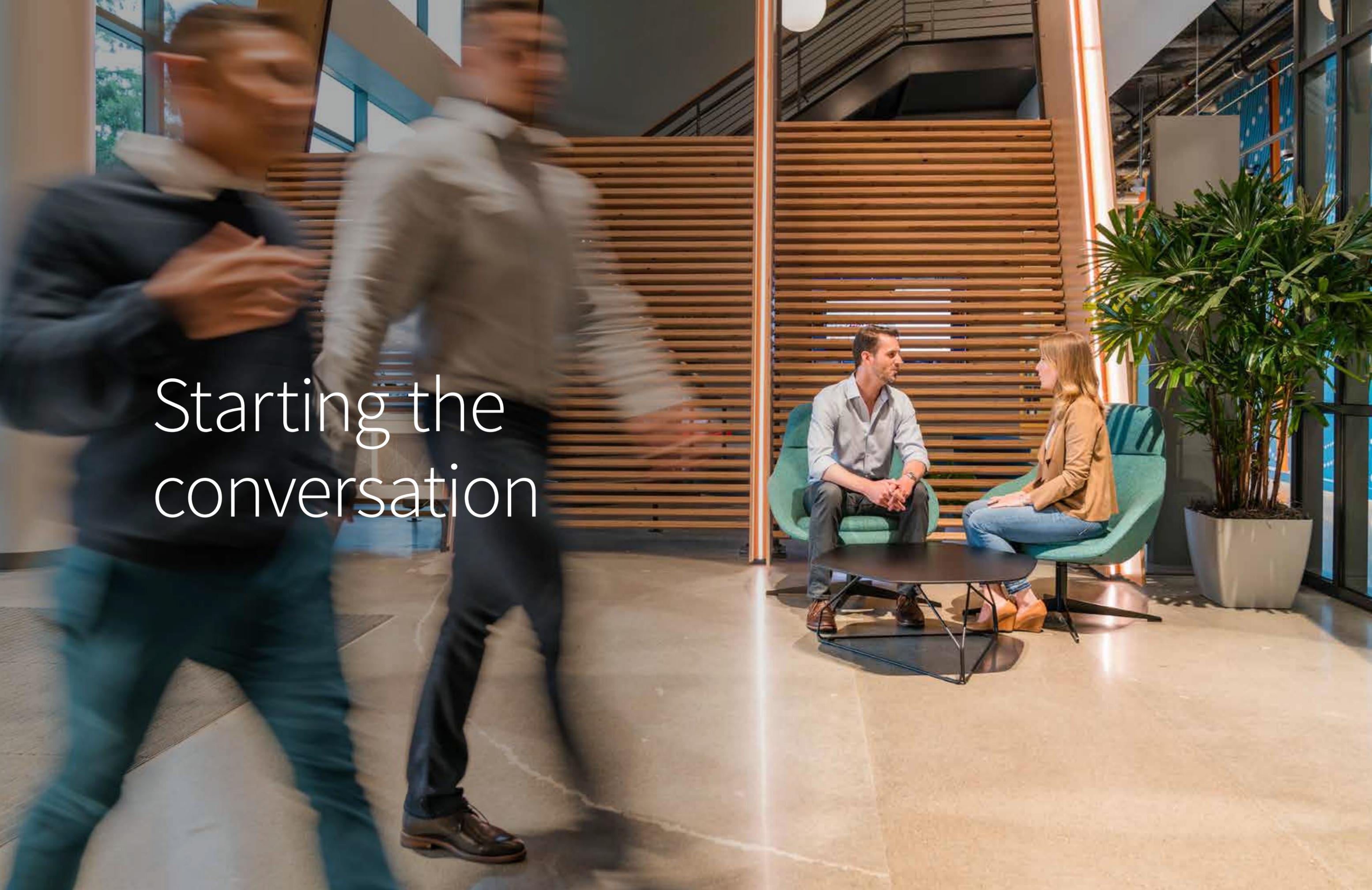
We asked over 14,000 global professionals about their job-seeking attitudes and habits in our annual talent survey.\* We uncovered how they find jobs, what drives them to switch, and what they want at different stages of the process. We then examined the findings through a psychological lens to dig deeper and better understand your candidates and how to engage them. Warning: you might just think a little differently (and more strategically) as a result. Fusing instincts with insights is an opportunity to take your hiring strategy to the next level.

Let's go.

\* See Appendix for full methodology.

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Starting the  
conversation



## Let's start from the top: candidates want to hear from you

Career FOMO (fear of missing out) is a real thing.<sup>1</sup> Candidates want to avoid the bad feeling of losing a dream opportunity, so they're willing to hear you out. They also love praise and favor those who give it.<sup>2</sup> Since your outreach is perceived as a compliment, it makes you more likeable.



are open to new job opportunities



are more likely to respond to a hiring manager vs. a recruiter

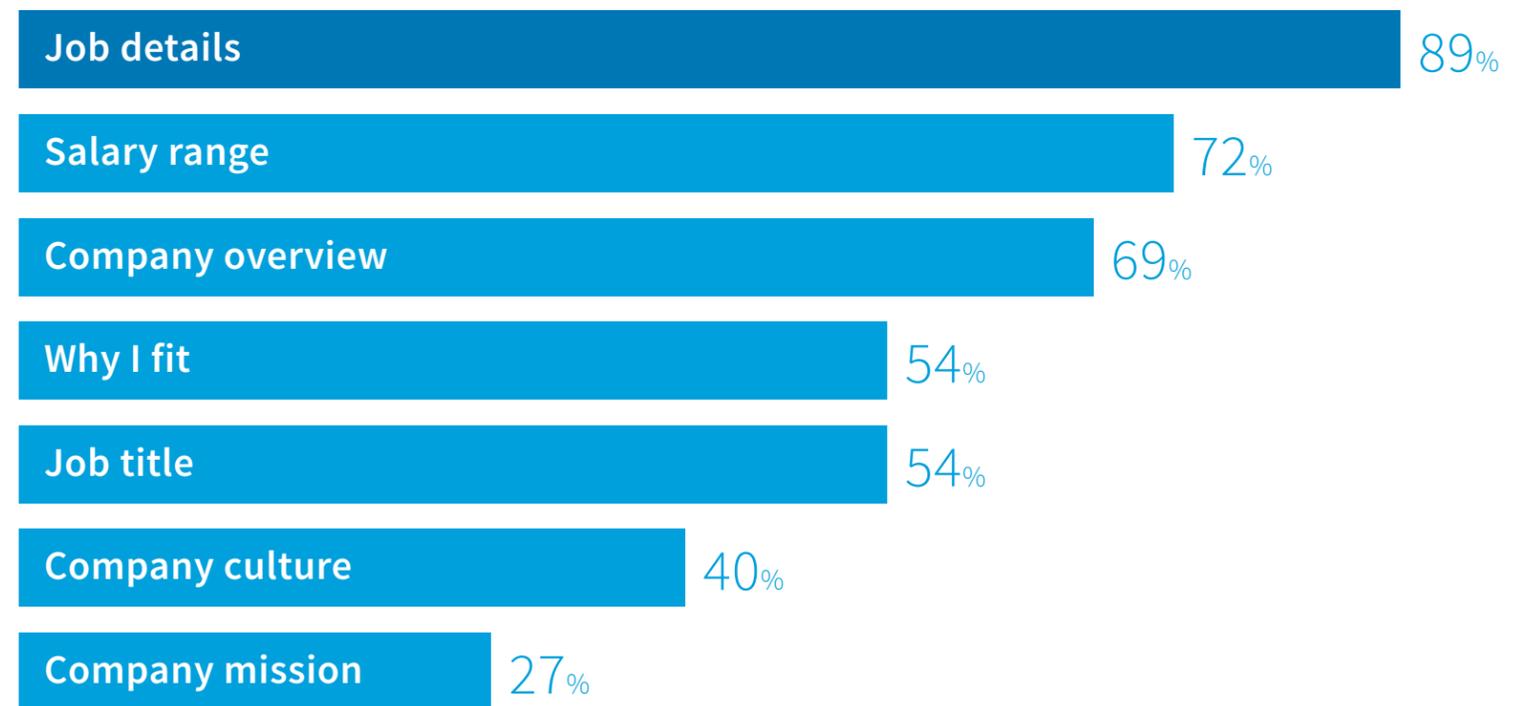
<sup>1</sup> Wilding, Melody. (2016, July 6). Career FOMO: How to Stop 'Fear of Missing Out' From Ruining Your Happiness. *Forbes*.  
<sup>2</sup> Cialdini, Robert. (2009). *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*. HarperCollins ebooks.



# Candidates want lots of information in your first message

Job and salary details top the list for what candidates want to know, and many expect company information too. Use this ranking to gut-check and prioritize the content of your messages.

## Top info candidates want from a recruiter's first message



# 6 science-backed tricks to improve your candidate messaging

		How to do it	Why it works
1	Don't give them everything	Hold back a few enticing bits of information to add intrigue. For example, summarize the role and company but don't mention salary.	When there's a gap between what we know and what we want to know, we feel compelled to seek out the missing information. It's like a mental itch we have to scratch. <sup>1</sup>
2	Make it about them	Address them directly with "You" sentences. For example, "You have the mobile expertise to lead our team" rather than "I have a developer job that pays X."	We pay closer attention to messages with personal impact. Even though only half of candidates say they want to know how they'll fit, <i>all</i> will be more attuned if you present the role in relation to them.
3	Personalize with details	Be specific to show your effort to understand them. For example, "The startup you founded caught my eye" is better than "Your profile is great."	Showing competence is key to a good first impression. <sup>2</sup> When you customize your messages, you demonstrate that you know how to do your homework and that you are in fact competent.

<sup>1</sup> Loewenstein, George. (1994). *The Psychology of Curiosity*. *Psychological Bulletin*, 116, 75-98.

<sup>2</sup> Goudreau, Jenna. (2016, January 16). *A Harvard Psychologist Says People Judge You Based on 2 Criteria When They First Meet You*. *Business Insider*.

# 6 science-backed tricks to improve your candidate messaging *(continued)*

		How to do it	Why it works
4	Sound human	Write like you speak, without jargon and formalities. Be funny, enthusiastic, or whatever traits makes you <i>you</i> . Check for human-ness by reading your message aloud.	Warmth is key to a good first impression too. When you show your human or humorous side, you're more likeable. <sup>1</sup>
5	Strike common ground	Find something you share with the candidate, such as a connection or school. Go for rare if you can, e.g., your shared unicycling hobby rather than your shared U.S. citizenship.	We like people who are similar to us, especially when they are similar in an uncommon way. That's because it gives us the nice feeling of fitting in and standing out at the the same time. <sup>2</sup>
6	Let them do the talking	Once on the phone, ask candidates about their career aspirations, current role, and what makes them tick - then zip it. Listen more than talk.	Brain studies show people are happier when they talk about themselves. <sup>3</sup> When you let candidates talk, they like you more because the pleasure pathways in their brains are activated.

<sup>1</sup> Goudreau, Jenna. (2016, January 16). [A Harvard Psychologist Says People Judge You Based on 2 Criteria When They First Meet You](#). *Business Insider*.

<sup>2</sup> Grant, Adam. (2013, June 24). [6 Ways to Get Me to Email You Back](#). *LinkedIn Pulse*.

<sup>3</sup> Ward, Adrian F. (2013, July 16). [The Neuroscience of Everybody's Favorite Topic](#). *Scientific American*.

Inspiring the  
application

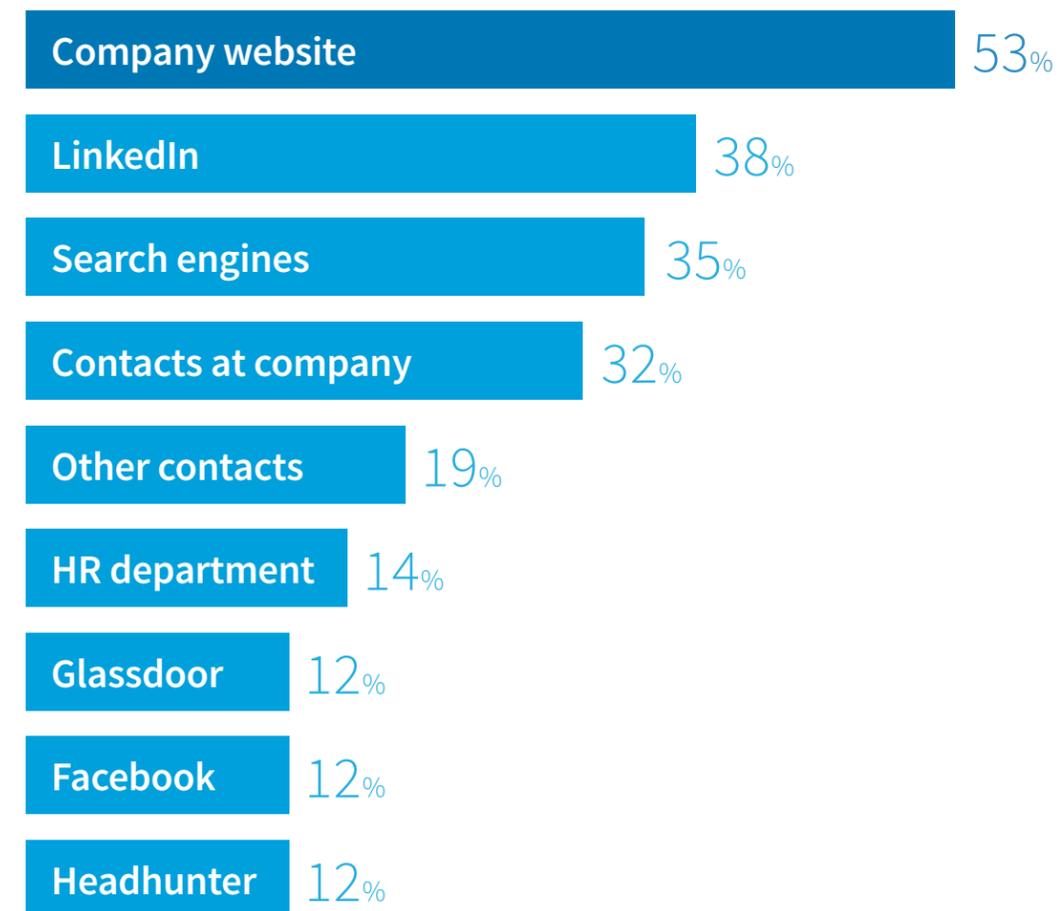




# Candidates spend 1-2 months gathering info before applying

Your company website is the top destination for first-line research followed by LinkedIn and search engines. Candidates rely on your employees as a key resource as well but use other social media and recruiters less.

## Where candidates get information before applying to jobs



# 4 easy ways to attract more applicants to your website

		How to do it	Why it works
1	Invest in your looks	Upgrade images, layout, and copy to make it easier on the eyes. Keep your culture in mind: if you're scrappy, don't make your website too over-the-top.	We favor what's attractive. <sup>1</sup> Just as good-looking fundraisers get more donations, attractive websites get more traffic. We assess visual appeal in milliseconds and judge companies based on it. <sup>2</sup>
2	Give something away	Offer resources and tips to help candidates through your process. See Google's <a href="#">How We Hire</a> , a transparent and detailed look into its process.	We often say yes if we're given something first. <sup>3</sup> If you've ever taken a sample and then bought the item, you can relate. It's not about the value of the offering.
3	Give employees a voice	Feature authentic employee stories and testimonials. Link to your social channels for easy access to external opinions too.	We follow the crowd. <sup>2</sup> We trust the book on the best-seller list and the restaurant with the long line. When employees vouch for you, candidates trust you more.
4	Tell it like it is	Dare to be different by showing real photos and videos, unscripted employee testimonials, and brutally honest job descriptions.	Company websites are all starting to look alike. Since people pay more attention to contrast, <sup>4</sup> not looking like everyone else can attract more visitors.

<sup>1</sup> Cialdini, Robert (2001). *The Science of Persuasion*. *Scientific American*. 284(2), 76-82.  
<sup>2</sup> Hopkin, Michael (2006, January 13). *Web Users Judge Sites in a Blink of an Eye*. *Nature*.

<sup>3</sup> Cialdini, Robert (2009). *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*. HarperCollins ebooks.  
<sup>4</sup> Laja, Peep. *8 Things that Grab and Hold Website Visitor's Attention*.



# How to drive applications through search

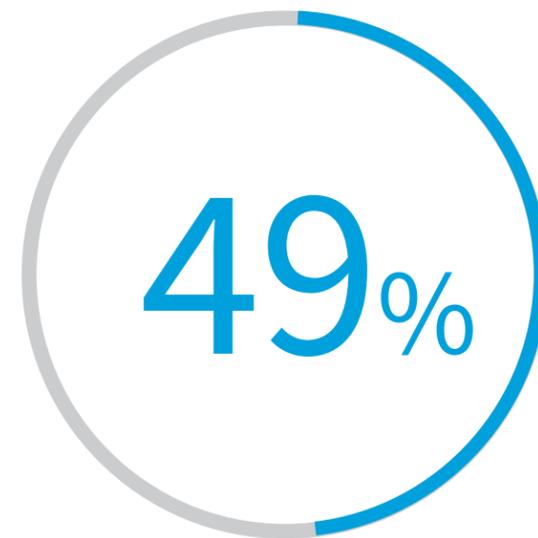
The higher you rank in search results, the more likely candidates will click and apply. Humans are biased to think what's available is most probable too.<sup>1</sup> So when companies rank high, they become more 'available' to candidates and considered more likely to have the right job. Candidates are also swayed by Google's authority so they trust that its top results are indeed most relevant.

		How to do it
1	See where you stand	Just as you Google your own name, do so for your company. Combine it with job titles too, e.g., "LinkedIn software engineer" to see what candidates experience.
2	Optimize your job descriptions	Be sure to optimize your titles and descriptions with keywords your target talent uses. Get started <a href="#">with these eight simple steps</a> .

<sup>1</sup> Tversky, Amos & Kahneman, Daniel (1973). *Availability: a Heuristic for Judging Frequency and Probability*. *Cognitive Psychology*. 5, 207-232.

# Social media plays a key role in the application stage

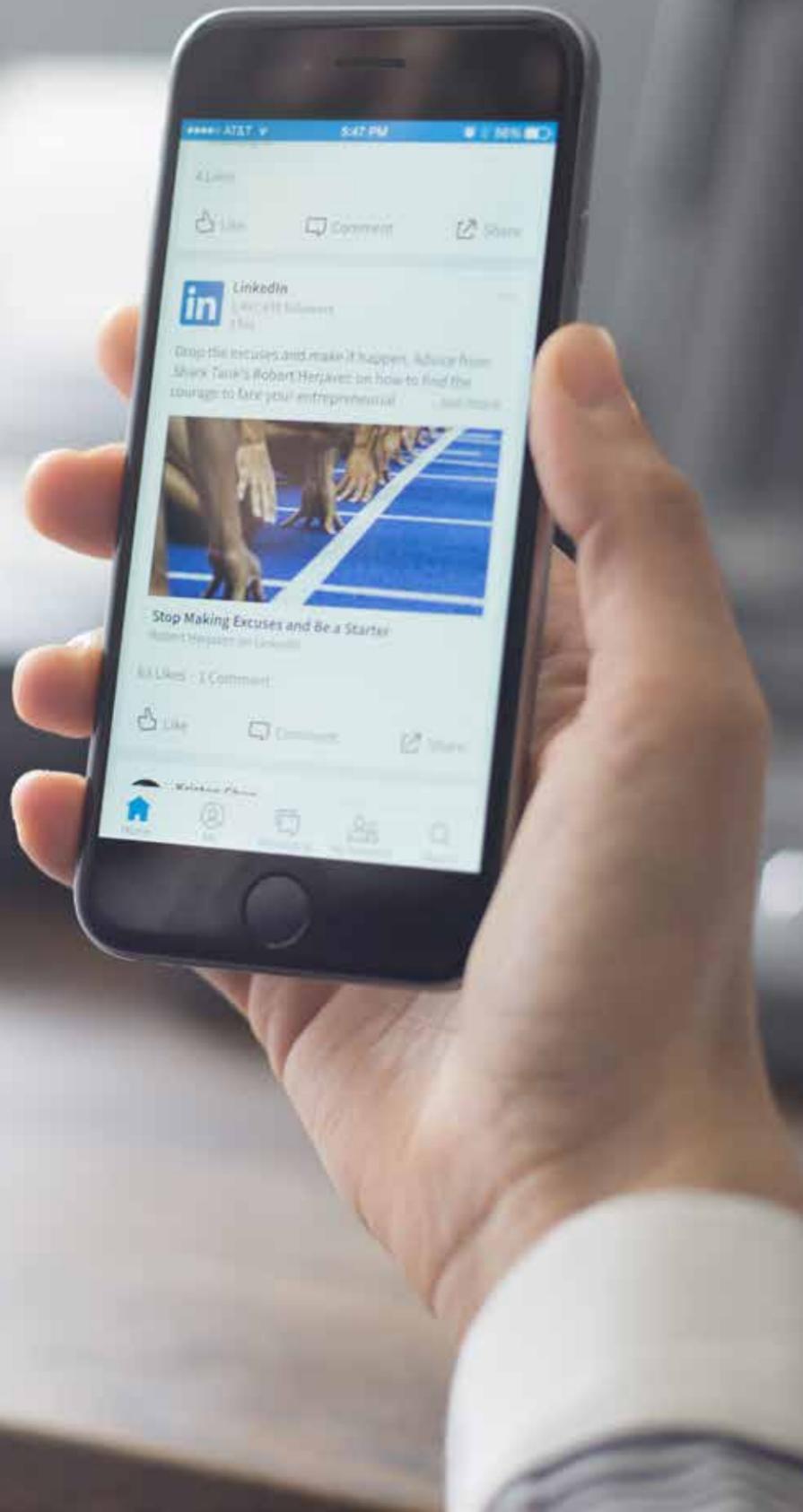
As social media has exploded in the past decade, candidates are using it more and more for job research. LinkedIn is now a pivotal tool for many, so be sure to focus your efforts where candidates are most likely to go.



follow companies on social media to stay aware of jobs



say LinkedIn played significant role in recent job switch



# 3 ways to get social media working for you

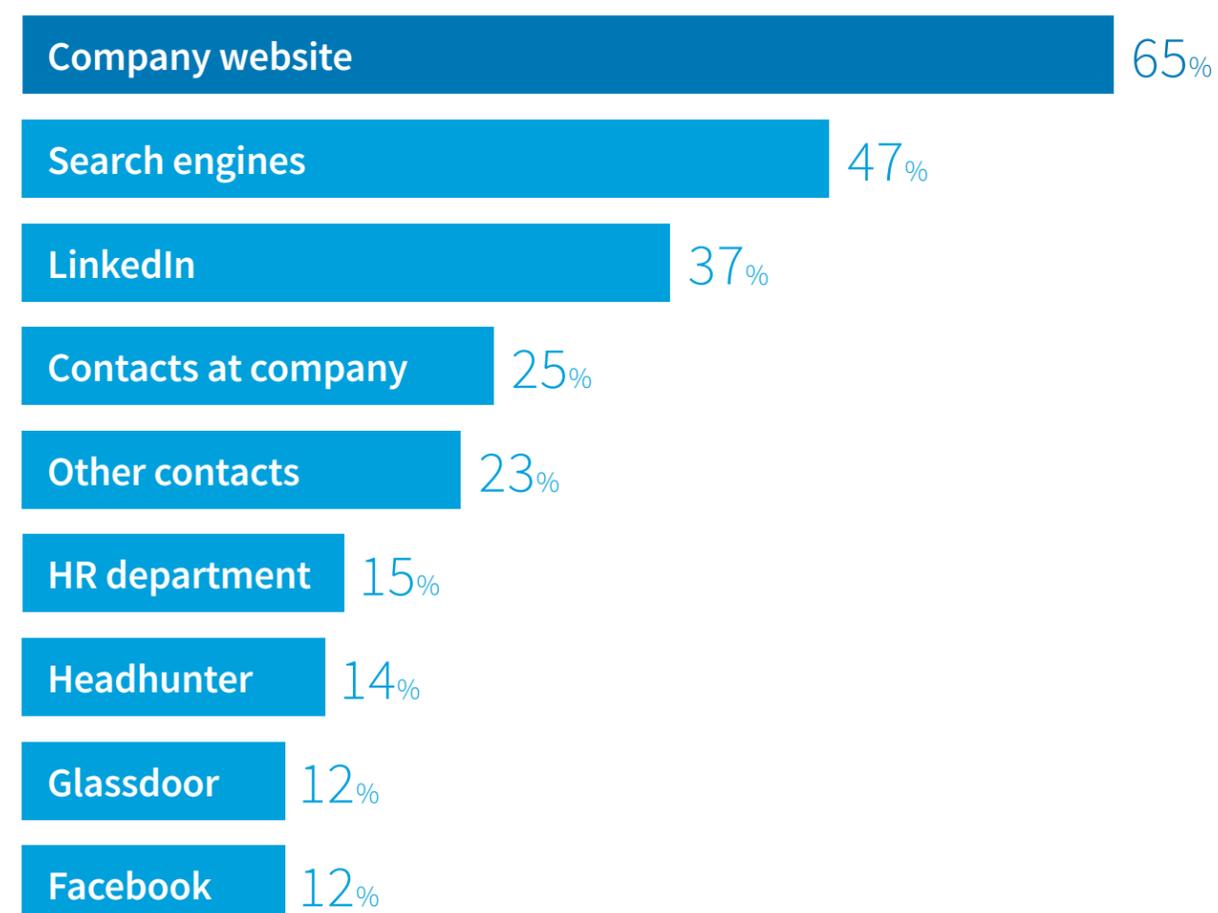
		How to do it	Why it works
1	Grow your followers	Add your company's LinkedIn follow button to your digital properties and your email signature.	Followers are the digital version of a long line at a restaurant. Having many attracts even more and gives the impression you're doing something right as a company.
2	Engage your followers	Use status updates to inform, educate and entertain candidates. Mix in job postings as half your followers are following you for just that reason. Check out <a href="#">HP's status updates</a> for inspiration.	We favor the familiar. We buy the product from the ad over the one we've never seen. Similarly, it is cognitively easier for candidates to apply to a company if they've engaged with its content before.
3	Mobilize your employees	Ask employees to be active and show them the value. Get started with these <a href="#">five tips</a> and see <a href="#">examples of how employees can help</a> .	When your employees are active on LinkedIn, candidates trust you more. Each positive interaction signals you're a good employer.

# Candidates do even more research to prepare for interviews

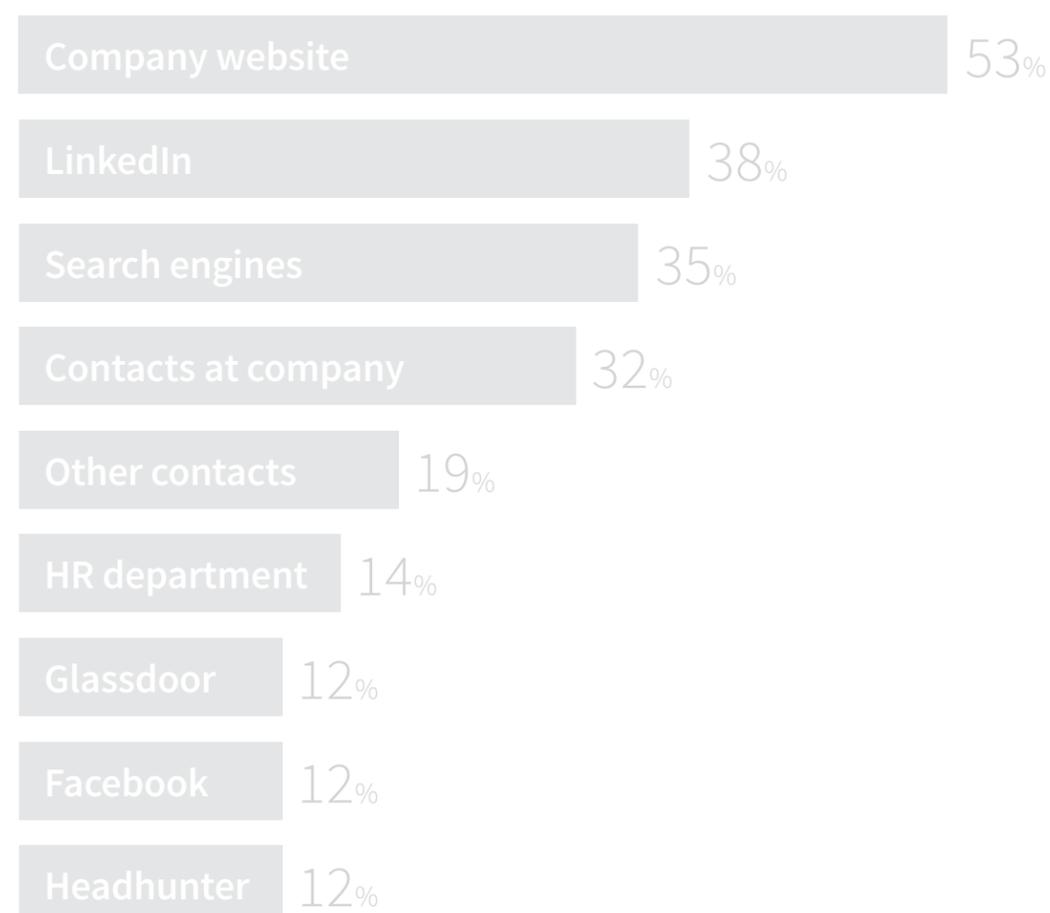
As interviews draw near, candidates do more research on company websites and search engines. They use LinkedIn steadily throughout the process while their reliance on other social platforms and recruiters remains low.

## Where candidates get information to prepare for interviews

### Interview stage



### Application stage



# You can set your candidates up for success

		How to do it	Why it works
1	Explain your interview process on your website	Get inspired by companies doing it right. McKinsey & Company has an <u>'Interviewing' tab within its Careers section</u> complete with videos and tips, and Google's website has <u>an entire section devoted to its interview process</u> .	When you make your process transparent, you become more trustworthy and likeable. Remember that giving away something too (information in this case) can increase your influence power.
2	Stand out by being a trusted resource yourself	Set clear expectations, a timeline and sample questions. Go beyond what's required and delight candidates with useful information. Consider the <u>Google recruiter who sent a detailed 'cheat-sheet' to a candidate pre-interview</u> .	Humans like to feel in control. It's directly tied to our sense of well-being. <sup>1</sup> Helping candidates prepare gives them a sense of control, so in doing so they will like you and your company more for it.

<sup>1</sup> Fischer, Ronald & Boer, Diana (2011). What is More Important for National Well-Being: Money or Autonomy? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 101(1), 164-184.



Nailing the  
interview experience



# Candidates want the interview process to be brief

It generally takes two to three months for candidates to move from application to hire. During that time, they have three interviews on average and most are satisfied with that number.

The average candidate experiences

2-3

months from  
application to hire

3

number  
of interviews

84%

satisfied with  
number of interviews

# 2 golden rules for your interview process

		How to do it	Why it works
1	Don't underestimate the power of moving quickly	Use 2-3 months as a benchmark. If your company takes four months to hire, tighten up your process so you have a better shot at making an offer first.	We'd rather avoid a loss than receive a gain. <sup>1</sup> A candidate is more likely to take the first of two equal offers because the risk of losing both feels worse than the benefit of getting both. A job offer now is worth two in the future.
2	Don't overburden candidates with too many interviews	Use three as a guide when evaluating your interview number. <sup>2</sup> If you're putting candidates through 13, you're turning them off.	Fewer interviews keeps candidates feeling fresh and excited about your company rather than drained. Plus if your process is efficient, they'll assume your company is too.

<sup>1</sup> Kahneman, D. & Tversky, A. (1992). *Advances in prospect theory: Cumulative representation of uncertainty*. *Journal of Risk and Uncertainty*, 5 (4): 297-323.

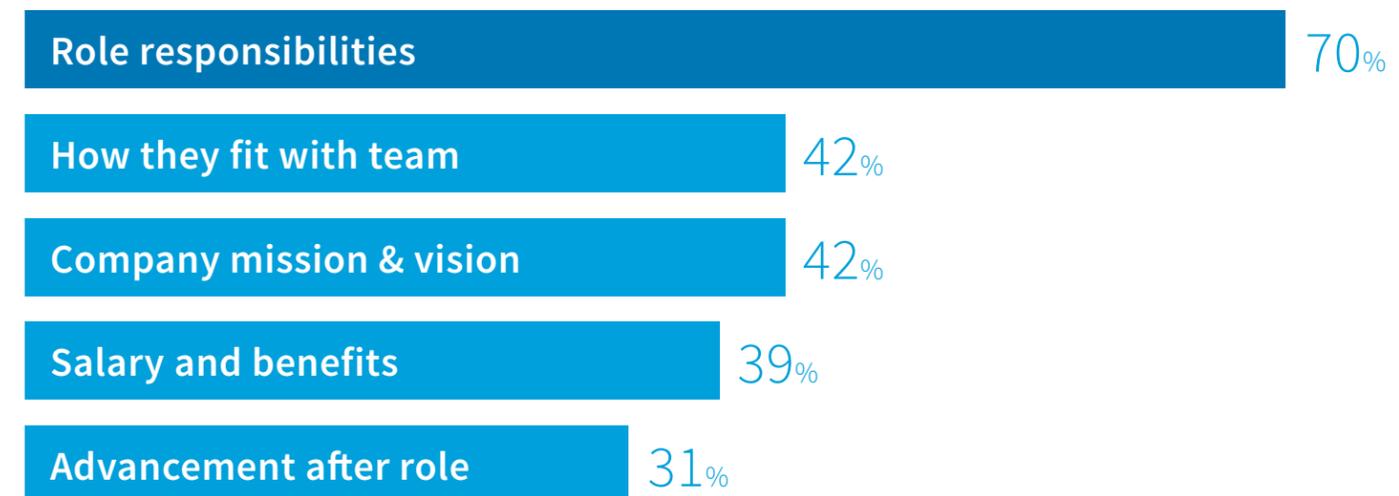
<sup>2</sup> Google's research also shows the optimal number of interviews is low - four.



# Candidates want the scoop on the role from interviewers

Candidates are evaluating you too so try to give them what they want. Role responsibilities are by far the hottest topic on their minds, so be sure to cover them.

What candidates say was most useful to hear from interviewers





# Make sure your bases are covered

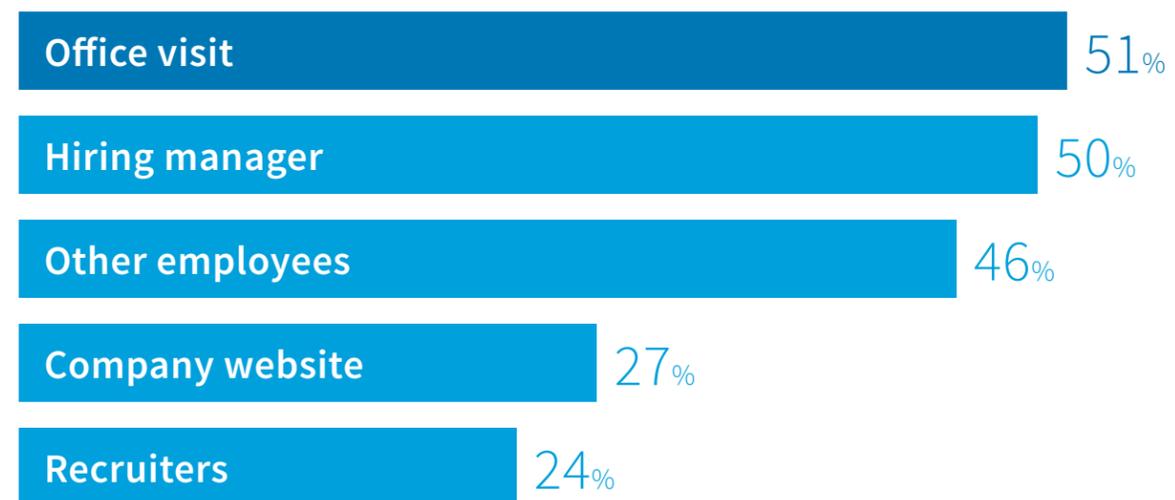
		How to do it
1	Know your company story cold	Practice explaining your mission and vision so that it's compelling to the right candidates.
2	Assign topics to different interviewers	Divvy up the responsibility so you can cover each area more thoroughly.
3	Leave time for questions	Don't grill candidates up to the last minute. Watch the clock so they don't feel rushed.



# Candidates want to see your culture in action

The top interview challenge for candidates is not seeing the work environment. Since office tours give them a glimpse into your culture, make them part of the interview experience.

## Top ways candidates learn about company culture



# Let candidates look behind the scenes

		How to do it	Why it works
1	Show off your space	Invite candidates to office tours, open houses and/or lunches. Or simply walk around your workspace after interviews.	There's no substitute for the sights, smells, sounds, touch, and even tastes of your company. <sup>1</sup> Experiencing your culture first-hand forms more vivid memories and better judgements about fit.
2	Go virtual	Use virtual reality and live video to help bring your space to life for candidates.	When in-person tours can't happen, it's better to stimulate candidates' visual senses than no senses at all.

<sup>1</sup> Grohol, J. (2010). 8 Tips for Improving Your Memory. *PsychCentral*.



# Access to leadership and prompt feedback sweeten the experience

To kick your interview experience up a notch for candidates, know what they want the most: to meet your company leaders and to get the right communication.

## Top 3 things candidates want from the interview experience



Conversation with leadership team



Prompt follow-up



A sense of how they performed

## 2 simple ways to delight candidates

		How to do it	Why it works
1	Have them meet your leaders	Ask your leadership to meet candidates one-on-one or at least be available for a quick introduction.	Remember the power of authority to influence. Just as hiring managers can boost candidate response rates, company leaders can improve candidate acceptance rates.
2	Give interview feedback promptly	Call candidates on the phone and have a candid discussion about how things went.	Feedback helps candidates improve as professionals. Promptness helps them feel in control. Give them both and they'll like you more for it (even if you reject them).



# One bad interview can cost you

People are more sensitive to negative information than positive, so bad interviews hurt more than good interviews help. Nowadays with social media, a bad interview can cost you more than one candidate and can even lose your company big bucks.



of candidates say a bad interview experience makes them lose interest in the job

# Here's how to stay out of trouble

		How to do it	Why it works
1	Show basic respect	Set expectations with candidates beforehand, i.e., how many interviews, when, and with whom. Make sure interviewers <u>come prepared</u> , are on time and don't do things like eat lunch or check email.	Our sense of self is driven by how others treat us. When we're treated respectfully, we feel valued. Nailing the basics makes candidates feel good about themselves and like you more.
2	Schedule interviewers wisely	Have your best interviewers meet with candidates first and last in the process and put everyone else in between.	We remember the first and last events in a series better than those in the middle. <sup>1</sup> If you start and end strong, candidates may be more forgiving of a poorer experience in the middle.

<sup>1</sup> Ebbinghaus, Hermann (1913). *On memory: A contribution to experimental psychology*. New York: Teachers College.

Closing  
the deal

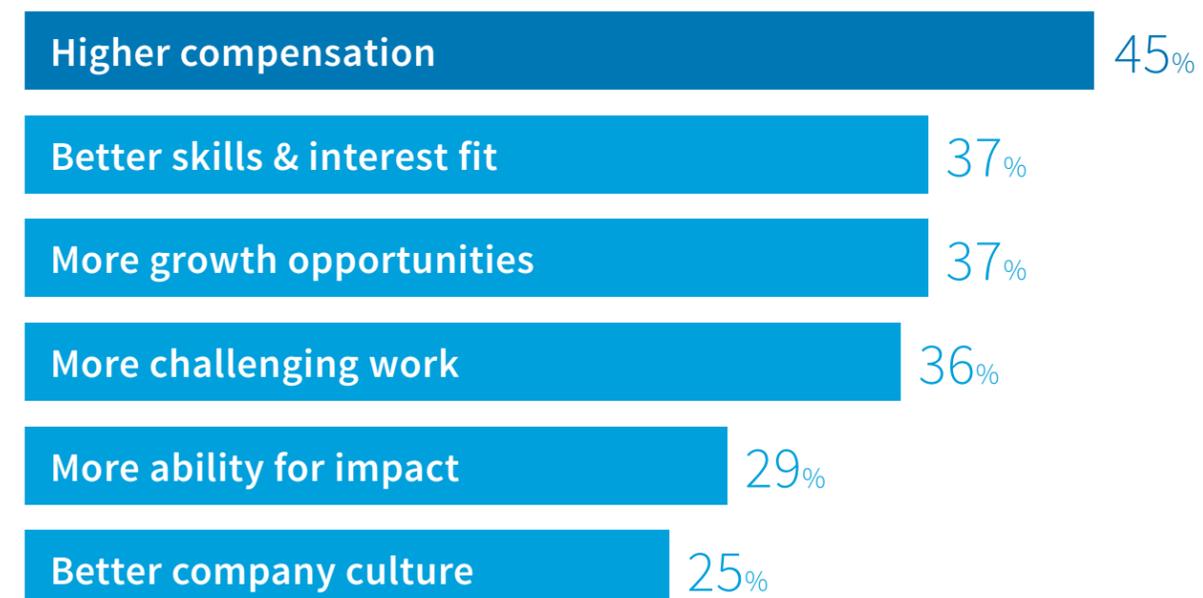




# Compensation is the main reason people switch jobs

There's no question money talks. Salary often drives career decisions because people assume they'll be better off with more income. However, intrinsic motivators like fit and growth opportunities are also crucial.

## Top reasons for job change



# Professionals say salary is most important but science says otherwise

Research shows that more income brings more happiness only up to about \$75,000 per year and then it taps out.<sup>1</sup> And while money is a great motivator for mechanical tasks (e.g., making widgets) it can actually hurt performance in creative or complex tasks.<sup>2</sup>

		How to do it	Why it works
1	Don't over-rely on salary to hook candidates	Focus on how your job or company is a better fit, offers more challenge, growth, impact, and/or a better culture than their current role.	We feel a boost when our income rises, but we acclimate quickly and soon it doesn't please us as much. <sup>3</sup> Money may give candidates a brief high, but it's not what makes them loyal employees.
2	Take money off the table	Pay fairly and competitively. Put salary aside during discussions <u>by asking candidates what would represent a 30% non-monetary but meaningful increase to their career.</u>	Research shows that the best way to use salary is to simply pay enough so that it's a non-issue. <sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kahneman, Daniel & Deaton, Angus. *High income improves evaluation of life but not emotional well-being*. PNAS. 107(38), 16489-16493.

<sup>2</sup> Pink, Daniel. (2009). *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*. New York, NY: Riverhead Books.

<sup>3</sup> Blackman, Andrew (2014, November 10). *Can Money Buy Happiness?* *The Wall Street Journal*.

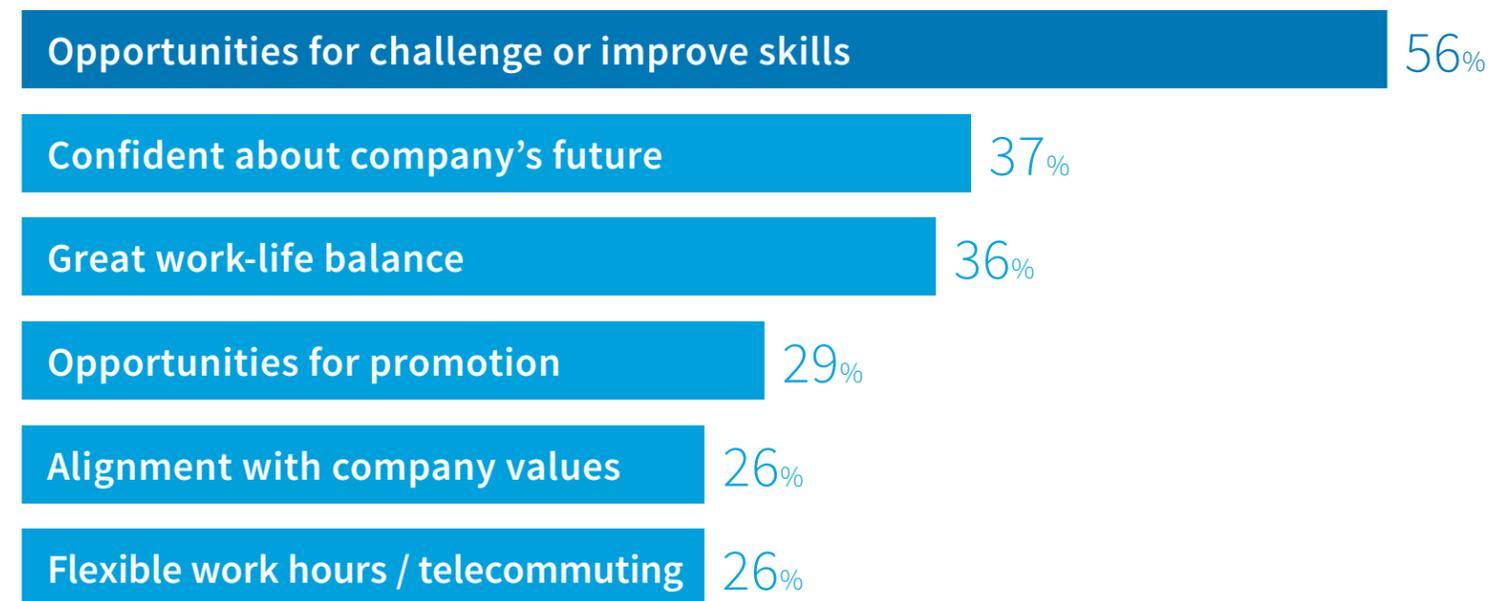
<sup>4</sup> Pink, Daniel. (2009). *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*. New York, NY: Riverhead Books.



# Professionals stay at their companies because of growth opportunities

When professionals feel they are learning and growing, doing something meaningful, and controlling how they work, they're less likely to leave.

## Why candidates stay where they are\*



\* Data based on the 37% of respondents who plan to stay at their company more than three years.

# How to tap into candidates' most basic needs

Our data align with what the science says. Research shows that once money's off the table, we're driven by three things: autonomy, mastery and purpose. Autonomy is the desire to direct our own lives, mastery is the desire to learn and get better, and purpose is the desire to make a difference or contribution.<sup>1</sup> These three needs are what motivate candidates to stay at their companies or leave, so keep them in mind when negotiating.

		How to do it	Why it works
1	Assess how much work freedom you can offer	Dial up flexible hours, telecommuting and overall work-life balance.	Candidates want a say in where and how they work, whom they work with, and/or what they work on.
2	Know how your role can challenge and transform	Highlight the paths to new skills, more responsibility, and promotion.	Candidates want interesting and challenging work that transforms them.
3	Tell your company story in an inspiring way	Know your mission and values and why the role is critical to the team, company or beyond.	Candidates want their day-to-day to be about something bigger than themselves.

<sup>1</sup> Pink, Daniel. (2009). *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*. New York, NY: Riverhead Books.

Conclusion



# Key takeaways for better hiring at every stage

Knowing what candidates want and why they want it helps you make better decisions. When you combine the insights in this report with the instincts you're already using, you'll do your best recruiting.

1	Starting the conversation	Know that some candidates prefer to be contacted by hiring managers, so take advantage of that. When you do reach out, balance the candidate's desire for lots of information with our science-backed tips for getting a response.
2	Inspiring the application	Help candidates discover your company and roles by investing in where they go for information - mainly your website, search engines, and LinkedIn. Empower your employees to help you recruit and step up your game by becoming a better information resource yourself.
3	Nailing the interview experience	Keep your interview period short, offer candidates a chance to learn about the role and the culture, and show them basic human respect. Having leadership meet with candidates and following up promptly with feedback will further boost their interview experience.
4	Closing the deal	Avoid using salary as your main selling point. Money will influence certain circumstances, but it won't give you loyal employees. So long as your offer is competitive, focus on ways candidates will learn and grow, have control over their work, and/or feel a sense of purpose.

# About the survey

For this report, we surveyed two different populations across 20+ countries in April of 2017. These survey respondents are all LinkedIn members who were targeted based on information and recent activity from their LinkedIn profile.

6,536

global professionals were asked about their experience on the job and to project into the future.

7,788

recent job switchers were asked to recount their experience for their most recent move between companies.



# Geographical distribution of the survey sample



# About LinkedIn Talent Solutions

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