

FROM THE MATCHMAKER'S NOTEBOOK

# Hiring shouldn't feel like *speed dating* *in the dark.*

*What candidates are really thinking — and what the best hiring leaders do differently. A short, honest field guide for the leaders who are tired of guessing.*

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A MATCHSTICK FIELD GUIDE · 2026 EDITION

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For:

Founders, CEOs, and hiring leaders  
who want the lights on.

RECRUITING DONE DIFFERENTLY.



## A LETTER TO START

# We sit in the messy middle. *So we hear it all.*

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Recruiters live in the in-between. Between candidates and companies. Between "we'll circle back" and radio silence. Between the polished résumé and the real person underneath it.

It's a strange vantage point — and a useful one. We hear what candidates say when companies aren't listening. We see what companies do when candidates aren't looking. And over hundreds of searches, we've noticed something simple: **the best hires don't come from the best job posts. They come from the clearest processes run by the most honest humans.**

This guide is a distillation of that view from the middle. It's short on purpose. You're busy, you're hiring, and you don't need another 40-page whitepaper telling you what you already suspect.

What you'll find instead: five signs you might be hiring in the dark, three shifts that turn the lights on, a handful of field notes we've collected from years in the seat, and a quick self-assessment to help you know where you stand before your next hire.

Read it with a pen. Argue with it. Share the parts that sting. And when you're ready for a real conversation about a real role — you know where to find us.

*With clarity,*

THE MATCHSTICK TEAM



# Five signs you're *hiring in the dark.*

*Hiring blindness is quiet. It doesn't show up as a crisis — it shows up as a slow leak. Here's how to spot it.*

**1****You're describing "fit" — but nobody on your team means the same thing by it.**

Fit isn't bad. Vague fit is. If three leaders interview the same candidate and walk out with three different definitions of what a good hire looks like, you're not screening. You're voting.

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**2****Your pipeline is big and your finalists are thin.**

A hundred résumés isn't a good sign — it's a symptom. Volume without quality usually means the role is written for a crowd instead of a person. And the right person isn't in that crowd.

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**3****Your reference checks always come back "fine."**

If every reference sounds like a warm shrug, you're missing the real signal. Great hires inspire real enthusiasm. Lukewarm references aren't neutral — they're a no in a polite voice.

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**4****Your last mis-hire caught everyone by surprise — except the people who worked with them.**

Bad hires rarely explode on day one. They leak slowly: missed deadlines, off-brand decisions, a team that quietly stops bringing their best. If your process can't catch that before the offer, the process is the problem, not the people.

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**5****The role has been open longer than you'd publicly admit.**

Time-to-hire isn't vanity. It's a cost. Every week a critical seat sits empty, someone else on your team is quietly absorbing the work — and that someone is usually the person you can least afford to burn out.



# Three shifts that *turn the lights on.*

We've run enough searches to know: the leaders who hire well don't have magic instincts. They have three habits that change the game.

## SHIFT ONE

### Define *great* before you define the job.

Most job descriptions list tasks. The best ones describe outcomes — what this person will have accomplished by month six, what "excellent" looks like in practice, what a bad year would feel like. If your team can't finish the sentence "we'll know this hire worked when..." without squinting, you're not ready to post the role yet.

## SHIFT TWO

Run a *disciplined process*, not a popularity contest.

## Want to know more?

*We can't wait to share it with you.*

The rest of the guide includes:

- Two more shifts that change how you hire
- Seven truths from the hiring front
- A 7-question self-assessment
- An honest breakdown of what makes us different

[Get the Full Guide →](#)