Not Sure How to Grow Your Team? Focus on These 3 Things.

Rather than hoping for unicorn status, you need a plan that takes into account three key elements crucial to growing your team: culture, tech and training.

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Maybe you've just secured a round of funding or onboarded some high-paying new customers. You're excited about this major milestone and can't wait to start scaling your business. Gradually, though, it dawns on you that you aren't exactly sure what that means.

Sure, you've had internal discussions with your team about

people you'd love to bring on, and you've assured investors that a chunk of that fresh cash would be used to hire the best and brightest minds to take you to new heights. But talented people aren't always easy to come by – and you may need lots of them – immediately. Worse still, hiring the wrong people can instantly kill your momentum; and uncontrolled, unsupervised growth can leave you with a company that bears little resemblance to the one you started.

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Now, you might think looking to your competition for ideas is your best move. After all, they're strong players in the industry, so they must be making the best moves themselves, right? Not necessarily. Because, to rise above your rivals, you need to do something different.

Copying your competitors' growth strategies is not the solution. Nor is hiring a Ph.D. Stanford grad to develop your interviewee-valuation criteria. Nor is persuading an insider at multiple Silicon Valley unicorns to proclaim your company the next big thing. No, what you need is a plan, and above all, a plan that takes into account three key elements crucial to growing your team: culture, tech and training.

1. Culture helps you stand out.

Culture means a lot to today's top talent. As a young company, you may not have had time to clearly define your mission, vision and values. But, make the time, because research shows that the most talented prospects will ask you about those aspects of your business to get a feel for the culture in your workplace. In fact, the top 20 percent of candidates, according to Gallup research, will choose a company based on criteria related to culture.

And citing a University of Warwick study that found that happy

workers are 12 percent more productive than the average employee, establishing a culture that makes your team members happy will make you happy, too.

Recognize that the most talented employees aren't interested merely in coming into the office to collect a paycheck. They want to feel that they're making an impact while working with people they respect and enjoy being around. Consider how Starbucks has focused on its larger impact, calling itself a company that's "performance-driven through the lens of humanity."

The company tracks and shares reports on its global social impact, including everything from increasing the percentage of its coffee that's ethically sourced to donating trees to coffee farmers. What is your company doing to be a good steward to the community and world around it? Whatever it is, make sure your prospective and current employees know about it.

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2. Technology lets you do more.

The current labor market is tighter than ever, and that's putting new pressure on young companies looking to grow quickly. As the pool of available talent diminishes, Marc Fischer, CEO and co-founder of Dogtown Media, a mobile technology studio, recommends leaning on artificial intelligence to provide the smarts you can't hire. "AI can pick up the slack and replace the talent that could not otherwise be replaced," he wrote in *Entrepreneur.* "It's not a panacea for all staffing problems, but it can help you boost efficiency and productivity, cut time to market and improve product quality – all without having to make new hires."

In fact, you can find countless tools to help you do more with less, whether you need assistance with project management,

design, marketing or another task. Services like Amazon's AWS AI enable you to add AI capabilities to your applications, even if you lack experience with machine learning. And because AWS is a cloud computing platform, payment plans are pinned to usage, so you can get started on the cheap and scale up or down as needed.

3. Training keeps your team members coming back.

The next Steve Jobs may not be submitting an application to your website, but he or she may already be a part of your team. Offering your employees robust training opportunities can turn them into superstars and make them want to stick around. On the other hand, the failure to invest in employee training ultimately drives 40 percent of new employees away within a year. There are a number of ways to deliver learning opportunities that employees appreciate. Around 80 percent of companies rely on an integrated learning management system (LMS), while others use rapid elearning tools, podcasting or even mobile applications.

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Ultimately, the best teaching method will be one that you and your team decide to use together, so have an internal conversation about what employees are looking for and how different options align with your company goals. And be sure that your training doesn't just cover what your team members need to know right now. Instead, "When you are determining areas for development, you want to train in the direction that your business is going, to be able to tackle problems of the future," Courtney Gacona, TeamPeople's director of strategic communications and marketing, wrote in a recent post.

Growing your business is exciting, but it can be incredibly

stressful as well. Bringing new people into the fold will inevitably change your workplace dynamics. If you focus on creating a winning culture, that change can be a good thing — and move you toward bigger things. Likewise, smart use of technology can help you sustain your productivity while you search for the perfect new hires. Invest in employees' personal growth, so they will still be around when you hit your next big milestone.

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