

# Reversing the Hiring Process

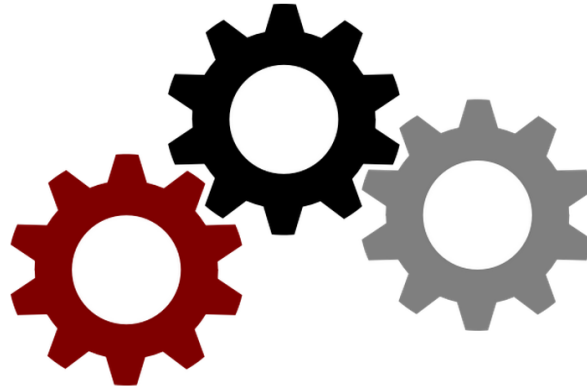
## How to Start with the Decision Maker



## The Step-by-Step Reference Guide

**Warning: This could get you hired.** It's a highly focused job search approach that puts you in charge--you choose which companies to target then strategically work to open doors at each one by applying the principles of human relationships to influence the hiring manager's decision. This guide will show you how to deliver an irresistible message straight to their inbox, positioning yourself as a solution to the problems at the top of their priority list.

## MINDSET SKILLSET TOOLSET



Without the right mindset, this approach simply won't work very well. Before we begin, you should know it takes more than *following* the 4 steps and *using* the tools. The right mindset is essential. It's what gives the skillset and toolset its power and ultimately makes the whole approach work.

### Essential Mindset: **PEOPLE HIRE PEOPLE TO SOLVE PROBLEMS**

This approach can seem intimidating at first, but remember this:

- Companies don't hire people. People hire people. As impersonal as job seeking can feel, never forget that behind every job posting is a real person with a real problem in need of a real solution.
- People don't hire resumes or cover letters or fancy business cards. People hire people who can solve problems. Those things can be important, but they often don't demonstrate how well you can solve the hiring manager's specific problem.
- People don't hire for credentials or years of experience. If you can convince a hiring manager you can solve their problem, it usually doesn't matter if you come up short in credentials or experience. They'll be happy you took the initiative and saved them the chore of having to drudge through dozens (or hundreds) of applications to find a solution to their problem.

**People hire people** to solve **problems**. Allow this mindset to permeate everything you do and your chances of getting hired shoot up dramatically. Your job is this: find some hiring managers with problems you can solve and present yourself as a solution.

### Four Straightforward Steps



## STEP 0 | CREATE YOUR SHORT LIST



**What are you looking for?** It's hard to find something if you can't describe it. The more precisely you can answer this question about your job, the easier it will be to find.

This is step “0” because you haven’t really started your job search until you have a specific answer to the question “what are you looking for?” This is the great paradox of job hunting: the more you know yourself and narrow your focus accordingly, the more attractive you become in the marketplace.

You will be asked this question--what are you looking for?--several times during your job search in one form or another, oftentimes by people who have the power to hire you. Do yourself a favor and develop a clear, specific, compelling answer you can deliver in your sleep.

Use the following items to help define the characteristics of your ideal company and position. Be sure to separate “gotta haves” from “nice to haves.”

### Your Ideal Company

- Commute
- Industry/product/service
- Culture
- Values
- Work schedule flexibility
- Size of company/growth rate
- Fit with career plans
- Benefits
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### Your Ideal Position

- Salary
- Primary responsibilities
- Travel
- Decision authority
- Type of Boss
- Type of Coworkers
- Future growth opportunities
- Fit with career plans
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### **Create Your Short List**

Do some research to produce a list of 20-30 companies that meet your criteria. They do not have to have jobs posted since this approach can be effective for *creating* opportunity (not just competing for it). If you do select companies that are hiring for your ideal position, it will obviously increase your odds.

Start with [LinkedIn's Company Search](#) then learn more at each company's website, [Glassdoor.com](#), [Google News](#), and other company research tools. Learn to use [Google's advanced search features](#) (especially the use of quotes and +/- symbols) to focus your searches.

## STEP 1 | FIND THE PAIN



Every organization and every hiring manager is feeling some kind of pain from some kind of problem. The better you know what it is and how you can help, the more you will stand out.

Pick a company on your short list and try to identify the greatest pain or problem that your future boss might be facing. Pain typically comes from only a few sources--growth, contraction, outsourcing, globalization--but manifests itself in various ways.

- **Job Postings**--This is where the pain is typically easiest to spot. Read the job postings of your target company very closely, and don't just read the jobs you would apply for.
- **Current Events**--Search for the pain in the latest company news via their website, their blog, Twitter, Google News, etc. Use LinkedIn's Company Profile to see what types of folks have recently left and joined the company.
- **Industry Trends**--Find out what's happening in the industry and what your company's competitors are doing. Look at the LinkedIn profiles of several people who work there--what groups do they belong to? Join those groups and learn.

Once you can start making some educated guesses about their top problems, start thinking about positioning yourself as a solution. This is the connection you're looking for--how your background, skills, talent, and interests can meet a critical need. You may not have identified the connection just yet, but the more research you do the better equipped you are to make it in the next step.

### Finding the Pain in Job Postings

When reading a job posting, try to "read between the lines" to find out what the underlying need is.

- Look for what's unique about this job as opposed to other job postings for the same position/title.
- Recurring themes are usually pretty strong clues.
- Remember that very few job postings are written from scratch. You can sometimes pick out which text was copied & pasted and which text was written by the hiring manager or local HR department--look for subtle differences in writing style, verb tense, etc. Pay particular attention to those "few bullets" that seem different from all the rest, especially if they're at the top of a section.

Try it yourself on the following examples. Read each job posting carefully and try to find the pain. Then check your work with the analysis below each one.

### **Example #1: Job Posting for a Field Sales Representative for Google**

The Commerce Sales team plays a critical role in growing Google's new Commerce related businesses, such as Google Offers, through large-scale SMB acquisition programs. Our culture mirrors that of a start-up, as we're working to create and scale Google's next billion dollar businesses. We are a group of high-performing, like-minded team players that thrive on individual autonomy, product mastery and operational excellence.

The role: Field Sales Representative, Commerce Sales

As a Field Sales Representative, you will be responsible for selling Google's Commerce solutions into the small and medium size business segment. In this role, you will become an expert on the suite of Commerce products Google is rolling out, and a critical player in the acquisitions programs targeting SMBs for Google Offers. This role is ideal for self-motivated candidates with excellent sales skills and strong interpersonal skills, who can coordinate closely with cross-functional counterparts in Inside Sales and account management.

Responsibilities:

- Be responsible for the entire sales process from first contact to close
- Effectively manage sales pipeline and develop a strategy for long-term client relationships.
- Understand the marketing needs of SMBs.
- Present and articulate advanced product features.
- Close sales and achieve monthly targets.

**The Pain.** The first two sentences in the job posting above contain "new business," "acquisition," "start-up," and "Google's next billion dollar businesses." The problem that needs solved here is how to break into a new market and take market share away from competitors through a new product or service offering. Anyone that has done something similar will look very attractive to this hiring manager.

### **Example #2: Job Posting for a Software Developer for RightNow**

Do you enjoy solving a diverse set of challenging technical problems? Are you looking for a dynamic, fast-paced environment where you can stand out and showcase your programming skills? We need intelligent and motivated people to help us deliver and improve upon our cool, market-leading SaaS web applications.

As a Software Developer on our Current Engineering team, you will work to quickly troubleshoot and solve technical customer issues by fixing and improving upon our current code base. You'll enjoy working with code across our product suite, and receiving immediate feedback that your technical skills are directly impacting our customers' satisfaction! Our ideal candidate for this position has a real passion for problem solving and debugging code, thrives on change, can easily switch gears to new and sometimes urgent work priorities, and has a demonstrated track record for achieving measurable results in prior software programming roles.

If this sounds like something that you would like to be a part of, then send us a resume today. This is an opportunity to work with cutting edge web technology for a leading SaaS company, alongside some really bright and motivated people.

Essential Duties and Responsibilities

The Software Developer - Current Engineering will quickly and accurately troubleshoot, debug, fix and resolve customer-related code defects in an independent and autonomous manner. You will collaborate with Customer Support to triage and provide unique solutions to varying customer issues. You will also contribute to new quarterly product release and monthly Service Packs by resolving defects and improving code quality. Other requirements and responsibilities include...

**The Pain.** The first paragraph in this job posting offers no clues, but from the second paragraph on there's a very heavy theme here. This hiring manager has the unenviable task of finding a developer willing to clean up a huge mess left by another developer that probably doesn't work there anymore. This company's primary product line--that is, the primary means through which they deliver value in the marketplace and make money--has a rotten core. It may be a very cool product conceptually or visually, but the buggy user experience is producing unsatisfied customers at an alarming rate and could even be threatening the vitality of the whole company. Think you have the patience, perseverance, interest, and skill to transform this product into a stable, consistent, high quality user experience? Convince the hiring manager of that and you have a great chance of getting the nod.

### **Example #3: Job Posting for an Accountant at Element Funding**

As a result of rapid company growth, Element Funding is in need of someone with a combination of accounting and business analysis experience to work directly with executives at its headquarters location in the Perimeter area and to assist in running the financial aspects of the business. IT support expertise would be considered a plus, but not required. The role involves financial statement and ad hoc reporting, loan accounting, cash management, revenue and accounts payable management, and business modeling covering the following:

- Maintain and update revenue and all expense details, including payroll and commissions
- Assist with preparing P&L statements and commission calculations
- Research and respond to questions regarding P&L statements and payroll
- Ensure accuracy of all periodic reports
- Related office duties

**The Pain.** The first few words tell the story here--rapid growth. Rapid growth is always painful for any company: there's more work to do than employees can handle; systems and tools that worked fine yesterday are unfit for today's higher volumes; and "firefighting mode" has become a new norm that nobody wants. More and more people are working late just to keep up, and to make matters worse the recruiting process of finding, screening, interviewing, selecting, and eventually training a new person is an enormous burden for a hiring manager that's already stretched far too thin to be effective.

Notice also the need for "business analysis" experience, to "work directly with executives," and to "assist in running the financial aspects of the business." That's peculiar language for a non-CFO, non-management, staff "accountant" role. Further, this hiring manager has also tossed in the need for "IT support expertise." In an accountant? It sounds like the hiring manager here--perhaps one of the founders of this rather small company--has been doing it all and needs someone to take over the books. If these assumptions are accurate and the company's growth continues, this position could turn into "Accounting Manager" or possibly "CFO" in a few years.

Convince this hiring manager you can help ease today's growing pains while establishing an accounting practice capable of handling even more growth, especially if you have accounting experience at a larger firm, and you'll get his full attention. Good with computers, too? You'll probably get a job offer too.

#### **Example #4: Job Posting for a Software Application Developer at NCR**

The developer is responsible for the implementation of a solution or parts of a solution to meet the stated specifications and architecture. The developer performs software design, programming, testing, support and documentation of their software to the agreed standards and quality guidelines and in accordance with the relevant processes.

##### Key Areas of Responsibility

- Design, develop and maintain software solutions.
- Create and execute unit, integration and performance test plans.
- Evaluate customer requirements: feasibility, compatibility, impacts, risks and time required to implement.
- Create design materials and initiate reviews with more senior members when necessary.
- Write documentation to describe program development, logic, coding, and corrections.
- Validates software design and solution to the project requirements.
- Practices proper source code control, development procedures and coding best practices.
- Capable of using various debugging techniques and tools to efficiently resolve software problems.
- Networks with other project members. Uses a team-player attitude, and openly assists others.
- Provides training to other developers or customer. Shares and communicates technology or procedural information with other developers
- Plans and organizes work commensurate to project objectives and schedule.

**The Pain.** This one is less obvious and requires previous experience on a high quality software team to guess where pain probably is. The second bullet is a characteristic of more mature software development teams. Most developers in the world today know they're "supposed" to do unit, integration, and performance test plans, but in reality relatively few of them actually do it as a regular part of their job. That bullet alone indicates this hiring manager's software team is either fairly mature or would like to become so. Let's keep reading to find out.

Other bullets indicate the team is probably on the small side, since several of the "areas of responsibility" listed for this role are frequently the responsibility of other roles on larger teams (e.g. reviews with senior managers, writing documentation, training others.) Additionally, the bullet "Validates software design and solution to the project requirements" is an improper use of the word validate. The difference between *validation* and *verification* are fairly well established in the software engineering and quality management professions. It's just another clue that this hiring manager is looking to step up his game and needs some help. If you had the ability to pick these things out of this posting, the chance you could help solve this hiring manager's top problem is pretty good. Now you just need to open some doors at that company.

#### **Don't Stop at the Job Posting**

Remember that these are educated guesses drawn from a single job posting reviewed in isolation. Your research of other job postings by the same company, the company's current events & track record, industry trends, etc. as well as information from insiders in the next step will all help you confirm or refine your assumptions.

## STEP 2 | MAKE SOME FRIENDS



The best information and most powerful referrals come from people inside your target company. Don't know any? No problem.

In this step your goal is to have a nice, friendly chat with 2-3 employees of your target company. If you know people who know people there, that's obviously where you should start. But if you don't, no worries. The following technique for connecting with insiders is very effective--with success rates as high as 70%.

Use LinkedIn's search box to find your target company (change the drop-down to "Companies") and pull up their Company Profile.



This page shows any connections you might already have there. If you have 1st or 2nd tier connections, start with them. If not, click on

How you're connected to <b>The Coca-Cola Company</b>	
1	1st Connection
280	2nd Employees in your network
12,851	Employees on LinkedIn

the "Employees on LinkedIn" number and look for a few current employees with whom you share a common background, interest, or LinkedIn group.

You don't need to know them personally since most folks tend to respond favorably to a direct message when it's short, friendly, and to the point. It doesn't matter much what position they have since you're really just hoping to learn about the culture, although the "closer" they are to your desired position the better.

### Sample Contact Emails

If you know someone who knows someone at your target company, you could ask them to refer you, like this:

*Subject: Request to connect with <Firstname Lastname>*

*Hi George,*

*As we discussed recently, I've become quite interested in pursuing a position at XYZ Corp. Turns out you are connected to someone who works there, <Firstname Lastname>, and I wonder if you can put me in touch with him. I'm not looking for a referral or recommendation; I'd just like to chat with him to learn more about the company itself. It seems he's new to the company, as I would be, so his perspective and recent on-boarding experience with them is all I'm after.*

*Would it be appropriate for the 3 of us to have lunch together sometime soon? If not, a quick phone call should do the trick. I'd like to keep it as easy as possible.*



Thanks,  
- Jimmy

If you are “cold contacting” someone who works at your target company, identify something you have in common that you can lean on, like this:

*Hi Bill,*

*I just moved to the Atlanta area and I'm interested in learning more about XYZ Corp. After noticing that you and I have quite a few things in common (PMP, OD/change management focus, gymnastics) I just had to reach out.*

*I wonder if you'd be willing to chat for 10 minutes about the company and/or the local OD scene.*

*I can be reached at (XXX) XXXX or email@domain.com.*

*Hope to speak with you soon!*  
- Jimmy

Your objective is to get their 10-minute perspective on the company and make a friend in the process if you can. Be patient: this step can take a week or more, but it's always worth it.

### **Conversation Starters**

Consider using these types of questions during your brief meeting. This is plenty to fill up 10 minutes:

- What's it like to work there?
- What do you like best about it?
- What do you like least?
- What type of stuff does the company celebrate?
- How are you organized?

If things seem to be going well and it is appropriate to extend the meeting or focus your questions further, the following types of questions can give you some really useful information. Just be careful--you asked for 10 minutes of their time so don't overdo it. Your goal is to make a friend, and that definitely won't happen if you obviously only care about yourself. A good relationship is far more important than good information, so don't get that part backwards.

- Any idea why the position is open?
- Do you know who's hiring this position? (you want their name)
- Is the company growing? (yes/no) What kind of challenges has that caused?

At a minimum, you'll get an insider's perspective that confirms (or denies!) your research from Steps 0 and 1. Sometimes it leads to something more--especially if they like you--such as a follow-up meeting over coffee or lunch to build the relationship further. If you really hit it off, it could even lead to a highly valuable endorsement from an existing employee to your future boss.

Try to talk with 2-3 people inside your target company before moving on to the next step. Chances are you'll get some great information from one or two of them and build some relationships in the process.

## STEP 3 | OFFER PAIN RELIEF



Skip the resume black hole and send a pain letter directly to the hiring manager.

**Locate the decision maker.** Find the most likely manager, director, VP, etc. that would be hiring the position you're looking for using LinkedIn's advanced people search filters for current title, current company, and location. Finding this person can be more challenging for large companies, but even if you end up guessing wrong chances are the recipient will forward the message you'll send to where it needs to go--especially if it's a good one.

The search criteria below was intended to find the head of the PMO at Coca-Cola in Atlanta, and narrowed a network of millions down to only 3 people:

Find People | **Advanced People Search** | Reference Search | Saved Searches

Keywords: <input type="text"/>	Title: <input type="text" value="pmo"/>
First Name: <input type="text"/>	<input type="text" value="Current"/> <input type="button" value="v"/>
Last Name: <input type="text"/>	Company: <input type="text" value="Coca Cola Company"/>
Location: <input type="text" value="Located in or near:"/>	<input type="text" value="Current"/> <input type="button" value="v"/>
Country: <input type="text" value="United States"/>	School: <input type="text"/>
Postal Code: <input type="text" value="30084"/> <input type="button" value="Lookup"/>	
Within: <input type="text" value="35 mi (55 km)"/>	

If you have a small LinkedIn network you may not get very good search results. In that case, you can try one or all of the following:

- Use Google to search the LinkedIn site by adding the site: option to your search criteria. For example, "site:linkedin.com coca cola pmo atlanta" turned up the same people (but more) via Google that the LinkedIn search above did, although with Google it's not as precise.
- Quickly expand the size of your LinkedIn network by connecting to LinkedIn's "super connectors"--people with many thousands of 1st tier connections. Use groups like TopLinked.com or reach out to "LinkedIn Open Networkers" (LION).
- Pay LinkedIn for a premium account that offers names that would otherwise be hidden, more detailed profile views, and additional search criteria. Their "Business" account is \$25/month.

**Find their email address.** If the hiring manager's email address is not on their LinkedIn profile or company site, you can usually find it by assuming they use the same generic format as other employees at the company. Check their Contact Us page or do some targeted Google searches (e.g. "email microsoft.com") to find any other employee's work email address. If your "most likely" hiring manager's name is "Bill Gates" and you see "kjones@microsoft.com" in one of the search results, send your message to bgates@microsoft.com. If you can't find the format, guess!

**Look for a Hook.** Find out everything you can about the hiring manager. Use LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Google, etc. Search for their name (using quotes), their email address, and other relevant people, companies, or topics you find they are connected to. You're looking for a good hook for your message--something that will grab their attention and give them a reason to keep reading the message you're about to send them. Once you've got a hook, you're ready to write a pain letter.

**The Pain Letter.** A pain letter is a better version of a cover letter courtesy of [Liz Ryan on Glassdoor.com](#). It is a very compact, to-the-point message with 3 components:

- **The Hook**--Something to grab their attention.
- **The Pain**--The specific pain they're probably suffering from or problem they need solved.
- **Your Relevant Example**--A brief but compelling example of how you've successfully solved that problem in the past. Not your whole resume. Not your credentials or list of skills. A *brief*, compelling example of you in action--how you solved a real-world business problem.

This is no place for templates or boilerplate text. You are crafting a *personal* message, highly focused to accomplish a very specific purpose--get a meeting with the hiring manager. Each pain letter needs to be hand crafted for that decision maker based on your research about them and the company. The better it is, the higher your chances of getting that meeting.

### **Pain Letter Example #1**

In response to a Product Manager job posting, I did about 2-3 hours of research to come up with the bullets below then sent a pain letter directly to the hiring manager (VP of Marketing). 2 hours later I had an appointment with him for coffee which led to a second meeting over lunch. He worked with his chief operating officer for several weeks to figure out where I could fit into their company.

#### Hiring Manager Details

- Lives in Roswell, GA (Facebook)
- Wrote a book (Google > Amazon)
- He and the COO previously worked together at BTI<sup>1</sup> (corporate site/LinkedIn)
- He was a key player in the development of BTI's iPhone app (Google > video on vimeo.com)

Thanks for reaching out - sure, I could go for coffee. Let's pick a place in Alpharetta. I can probably meet this Tuesday for 30-45 minutes if that works.

Paul

-----Original Message-----

<sup>1</sup> Names of people and organizations have been changed.

Subject: Passion for wellness & technology

Hi Paul,

I recently downloaded BTI's health navigator on my iPhone and got pretty jazzed about the "human-friendly" use of technology and how well it provided exactly what was needed almost immediately. I have a passion for leveraging technology to make people's lives better so I did a little searching to see who was behind this little gem and this video <link> led me to you. Looks like you and FitHealth are interested in providing similar high-leverage wellness products via the web, and I'd really like to learn more. I think I'd be thrilled to be a part of that.

As an agile product manager for a software solutions provider to the public sector I had sole responsibility for carrying a new product vision from inception through full implementation into the daily operations of more than 300 organizations that use it today. I had a blast working with executives and would-be users to define the roadmap. Over the next 3 years I oversaw & coordinated the efforts of our distributed team of 25 to ensure we released a superior product about every 5-6 weeks. In the end, our user base was 2X larger than expected and the CEO called us the most successful product team in the 11-year history of the company.

Since we're both in Roswell, I wonder if you'd like to meet up over coffee or lunch sometime soon to discuss further. I can be reached at this email address or my cell, (###) ###-####.

Cheers,

- Jimmy

[linkedin.com/in/jimmyparker4](https://www.linkedin.com/in/jimmyparker4)

## Pain Letter Example #2

This one is directly to the Director of Project Management, who happened to have a book listed on his recommended reading list on LinkedIn that I was very familiar with--Patrick Lencioni's Five Dysfunctions of a Team. In my research I got the sense they really needed someone who knew how to build and maintain relationships with their clients. After meeting with him, he said I was the most qualified candidate he's interviewed and intended to bring me on board to lead the next project that came in.

Hi Troy,

I was struck by XcelSoft's unique business model upon learning about it recently from an article in CIO magazine <link>. Your cross-sourcing innovations and agile approach to CMM/ISO 9001 must have provided significant competitive advantages over the years.

I couldn't help but wonder how the combination of H1B visa debates, apparent "leveling off" of insourcing/outsourcing trends, and overall economic downturn have had an impact. Either way, I'm certain no one can afford to lose existing business and would not be surprised to learn that wise management of client relationships is a top priority for XcelSoft right now.

When I was leading a large custom ERP project with a similar company, we were very intentional about building our relationship with the client based on two key objectives:

- High team performance using principles from Lencioni's Five Dysfunctions of a Team with our geographically separated team of about 25 folks, and
- High trust relationships using relationship-building frameworks from FranklinCovey

We doubled our user base and grew revenue 24% with that same client. I went on to act as an internal coach and facilitator to help promote similar results with more than 20 other teams within the company.

I'd love to get on the phone or meet with you in person to chat about managing client relationships at XcelSoft. Since I'm right around the corner from your office, I wonder if you'd like to meet up over coffee or lunch sometime soon to discuss further. I can be reached at this email address or my cell, (###) ###-####.

Cheers,  
- Jimmy

[linkedin.com/in/jimmyparker4](https://www.linkedin.com/in/jimmyparker4)

### Final Thoughts

Once you've sent your pain letter, don't delay--pick another company and repeat steps 1-3. The waiting game produces nothing but anxiety, and your time and talent is more valuable than that. The more you follow these steps the easier it gets and the faster you will move through your short list.

Remember the essential mindset: **PEOPLE HIRE PEOPLE TO SOLVE PROBLEMS**. You're hunting for some hiring managers with problems you can solve so you can present yourself as a solution.



Good luck!!

Jimmy Parker | Connect with me at [linkedin.com/in/jimmyparker4](https://www.linkedin.com/in/jimmyparker4)

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- **The live 1 hour workshop** is also free to groups of 50 or more, until it's not :-). Get it by having a nice, friendly chat with Jimmy at 404.969.5323 or [jparker@rubbermeetstheroad.com](mailto:jparker@rubbermeetstheroad.com).
- This job search strategy is a component of **Your NYCH in Life™**, a system to help you find and fulfill your purpose much sooner in life. Read more at [RubberMeetsTheRoad.com](https://RubberMeetsTheRoad.com) > Your NYCH in Life.

