



***What's your philosophy on maintaining a focus on innovation?***

At AppDirect, we believe that one of our company's greatest strengths is our innovative culture. From our developers to our leadership team, nurturing creativity is at the core of our company philosophy. As we rapidly expand our team, our focus on cultivating innovation is the key factor behind our recruiting and hiring process success.

There is little doubt that recruiting and retaining top performers in the technology industry is more challenging than ever. While there is a competitive hunt for talent, hiring candidates simply based on prestigious education or big name experience will ultimately fail. Employers must look beyond a candidate's talent and consider if a person would be a cultural fit within the company. But in many organizations, culture is neither meticulously developed nor defined in the recruiting process.

Culture instead must be intentionally shaped to define the working norms and processes of an organization. Setting the right cultural infrastructure is what separates scalable start-ups from small businesses. Founders must be deliberate in establishing the cultural DNA and training team members to recruit based on a defined set of cultural values.

To implant culture into the recruiting process, brainstorm key ideas and define how those values can be converted into hiring criteria. Define your interview process, clearly mapping out each component and how it relates to your business and culture objectives. Your interview process should allow you to "test" for the values rather than have candidates simply regurgitate résumé bullet points.

We have defined our cultural values and created criteria to score potential candidates. Our company hires based on six core values: positive mental attitude, humility, true north, ownership, communication and intensity. Candidates are evaluated for these values using a four point scale, where four exceeds expectations and one is below expectations. Any candidate that falls below a two in any of the values will not be hired. The interview process

then assesses these values. For example, to measure communication, candidates are given 5-10 minutes to present on any topic they're passionate about. This gives us an opportunity to gauge the candidate's passion and communication style. The responses have been incredibly engaging and entertaining with a wide range of subject matters that allow us to see the candidates' passions shine.

We also put would-be hires through a rigorous set of interviews to ensure they can maintain their intensity throughout the process. All candidates have a minimum of three rounds of meetings each of which last at least two hours and involve different staff members across business disciplines. This process ensures that candidates present consistently in different situations and that you're ultimately hiring someone who can maintain their level of excitement and focus when presented with challenging situations.

By focusing on cultural fit versus resume strength, we are attracting employees who want to work for a company that focuses on the bigger picture, allowing us to secure long term talent and foster innovation.

The technology industry can be intensely competitive, and start-ups in particular need people that will continue through all the obstacles. From day one you need people that will remain positive and inspire others on the team to become better. Defining shared values early on in the company is a critical step to ensuring your team can carry out the vision. Those values can be refined over time and will set up the company's evolutionary path. Deliberately shaping a cultural DNA enables you to attract talent that reflects your culture and understands the value of innovation.

*This interview was published in [SIIA's Vision from the Top](#) , a Software Division publication released at [All About the Cloud 2012](#)*