

A HIGHMATCH GUIDE

4 Steps to Hire

TOP CUSTOMER SERVICE TALENT IN A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD



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Introduction

The customer service job has changed. Here's how your hiring should too.

Thanks to **social media**, serving your customers well has never been more important. On the one hand, **poor customer service** can quickly do tangible damage to your revenue and brand.

United Airlines experienced this personally. In 2008, musician Dave Carroll wrote and shared a song called “**United Breaks Guitars**”¹ to express his disappointment with how his guitars were handled during a connecting flight in Chicago. Some analysts attributed a 10 percent drop in United’s stock price to Dave’s catchy tune -- equal to a \$180 million loss of shareholder value.

On the other hand, **great customer service** can dramatically lift the prestige and value of your brand. **One customer’s viral tweet**² sharing their delight with Tesla’s customer service received 25,800 likes, 2,400 retweets, and 540 comments.



¹ "United Breaks Guitars | Dave Carroll | An award winning" Accessed August 14, 2020. <https://www.davecarrollmusic.com/songwriting/united-breaks-guitars/>.

² "Chris Kern on Twitter: 'Flat tire on Sunday. Called Tesla, git a'" Accessed August 14, 2020. <https://twitter.com/cjk7216/status/1057765681108725760>.

Tesla

Tesla has done many things right as a business, but the fact mobile technicians respond to **80% of customer service requests** must contribute to Tesla's stock rising more than **4000 percent**³ since its debut ten years ago.

While not every poor or pleasant customer interaction will go viral on social media, **quickly and cost-effectively hiring top customer service representatives (CSR) is key to your brand's success.** Unfortunately, Covid-19 and the ensuing global economic downturn have thrown the usual hiring rulebook out the window.

Here are just a few changes that have affected the CSR role and how CSRs are hired:

▶ **The CSR job is harder.**

A study of 1 million customer service calls made two weeks after Covid-19 was declared a pandemic found⁴ that "difficult" service calls more than doubled from 10 percent to over 20 percent. To quote the researchers, *"issues related to the pandemic [have] dramatically increased customer emotion and anxiety in service calls, making a job that is hard for reps on a normal day far more challenging."*

▶ **Many CSRs now work from home.**

CSRs have been cut off from the resources and support they're accustomed to—such as reliable technology or a manager in arms reach to help address challenging issues. This change may explain the **34 percent increase in average hold times and 68 percent increase**⁵ in call escalation numbers since the pandemic began.



³ 'Tesla stock up 4125% since IPO ten years ago - CNBC.com.' Accessed August 14, 2020. <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/06/29/tesla-stock-up-4125percent-since-ipo-ten-years-ago.html>.

⁴ 'Supporting Customer Service Through the Coronavirus Crisis.' Accessed August 14, 2020. <https://hbr.org/2020/04/supporting-customer-service-through-the-coronavirus-crisis>.

⁵ 'Supporting Customer Service Through the Coronavirus Crisis.' Accessed August 14, 2020. <https://hbr.org/2020/04/supporting-customer-service-through-the-coronavirus-crisis>.

▶ **Customers have higher expectations.**

As the frontline representatives of your brand, meeting your customer's expectations depends on how quickly CSRs resolve issues or display a high level of expertise. **Fifty-seven percent** of customers say they've switched to a competitor because they provided a better experience, and **62 percent** say they share bad experiences with others.

▶ **Legacy systems and processes aren't designed for scale.**

Compared with pre-pandemic levels, there are **at least 10 million more unemployed workers**⁶. Of open jobs, **more than 1.5 million are entry-level**, with CSR roles listed as one of the top entry-level jobs. Although more candidates in the job market mean more opportunities to hire top talent, cobbled together legacy technology systems weren't designed to scale. On top of that, having distributed or remote teams make consistent and efficient hiring decisions difficult, causing costly delays.


When added up, these issues negatively impact your recruiting, hiring, and onboarding process, and likely add to the undue candidate and employee stress.

When organizations meet business customers' expectations', 72% will share their experience with others, and 67% say they're willing to pay more for a good experience.



⁶ 'The unemployment rate is falling. Here's why the outlook ...' Accessed August 14, 2020. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/02/the-unemployment-rate-is-falling-heres-why...>

⁷ 'What Are Customer Expectations (and How Have ... - Salesforce.' Accessed August 14, 2020. <https://www.salesforce.com/research/customer-expectations/>.



How do you respond to the dual threat of quickly and efficiently hiring CSRs while under new assumptions and constraints?

As your company is most likely spending \$750 to \$3,500+ to replace one CSR⁸, it's important to make an efficient yet accurate decision.

We walk you through **4 practical steps for hiring high-performing CSRs at scale.**

⁸ "The US Contact Center Decision-Makers' Guide 2017 - Cirrus ...". Accessed August 14, 2020.

<https://www.cirrusresponse.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/US-Contact-Centre-Decision-Makers-Guide-2017-.pdf>

4 Practical Steps to Consistently Hire Top CSR's at Scale

There are four essential steps to consider as you look at how to hire CSRs at scale.

STEP ONE

► Connect CSR hiring improvements to achieve strategic goals

As a talent acquisition or HR leader, it's easy to assume other leaders in your organization understand the value of improving the hiring process as clearly as you do. Or, that other leaders understand how achieving HR goals contribute to overall business goals.

But remember, this often isn't the case.

For instance, the average U.S. enterprise may be wasting \$4.5 million⁹ in productivity annually due to inefficiencies related to employee turnover. Sharing stats like these make it easier to see the benefits of TA process improvements, but if you want new tools or processes to be successfully implemented, achieving complete buy-in from your peer stakeholders is necessary.



“Buy-in is critical to making any large organizational change happen,” according to Harvard Business School professor, John Kotter¹⁰.

He goes on to say: ***“Our research has shown that 70% of all organizational change efforts fail, and one reason for this is executives simply don't get enough buy-in from enough people, for their initiatives and ideas.”***

⁹ 'Knowledge Loss: Turnover Means Losing More Than ...' Accessed August 14, 2020. <https://hrdailyadvisor.blr.com/2018/07/18/knowledge-loss-turnover-means-losing-employees/>.

¹⁰ 'INTERVIEW: Dr. John Kotter on Creating Organizational Change.' Accessed August 14, 2020. <https://www.hrbarter.com/2011/business-and-customers/interview-dr-john-kotter-on-creating-organizational-change/>.

To get more buy-in for your initiatives and changes, you need to translate TA goals to business goals.

Action steps to connect CSR hiring improvements to strategic goals:

1

Use stats from your top CSRs

(e.g., customer satisfaction scores, longer tenure, or sales numbers) to build out scenarios for the potential savings or increased revenue that better hiring can drive.

2

Gather data

(e.g., customer retention, satisfaction, speed of service) that illustrate how the CSR function contributes to your business results.

3

Create a business case

for better hiring by sharing relevant customer\ feedback and CSR exit interviews that demonstrate the impact of a bad hire.



STEP TWO

► Understand the CSR role(s) in your organization

Deloitte's 2019 Global Human Capital Trends survey¹¹ discovered that only 49 percent of global incumbents across small, medium and large organizations believed that employees were satisfied with how their jobs are designed. This statistic shows a disconnect between how leaders expect a job to be performed versus how employees actually perform it.

In other words, we've all had customer service experiences as consumers, so it's easy to believe "we all understand" what the job requires or what types of people excel in it. But CSR roles change over time and are nuanced depending on the business, customer base, or industry.

For instance, here are a few examples of nuances in the CSR role:



► Remote call center agents

often assist with onboarding new customers, purchases, returns, as well as answering user questions and troubleshooting technical issues.



► Wait staff

provide customer service by responding to customers' needs in-person, answering questions about menu items, and conducting customer recovery when items ordered do not meet customer expectations.



► Retail/commerce staff

have similar roles as remote call center agents in that they troubleshoot issues and provide user education. However, these retail CSRs face a difficult challenge, with 57 percent of consumers worldwide saying they believe they're more digitally forward-thinking than some retailers and commerce services.

¹¹ "Workforce engagement: Focus on the work | Deloitte Insights." Accessed August 14, 2020. <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/focus/human-capital-trends/2019/workforce-engagement-employee-experience.html>.



As these three CSR roles illustrate, many of the required CSR skills are the same, but there are important differences that require different personality or ability profiles. For example, someone who brings CSR restaurant experience may be able to recall a customer's order, but can they talk a new user through the login steps to a technology offering?

Some CSR roles are dedicated entirely to selling or generating leads. Other CSRs must be skilled in answering customer questions or troubleshooting a problem over the phone, by text, or virtual chat. The common purpose of a CSR is to help customers and provide a positive experience, but to hire CSRs at scale requires carefully defining what's required in the CSR role in your company.

In summary, making assumptions about the CSR role fails to capture nuances and makes it difficult for decision-makers to agree on what defines a top candidate.

Without a true understanding of the position, you risk losing buy-in for your initiatives or changes from front line managers who may not trust your judgment.

To fully calibrate how the CSR role is unique to your organization, perform a **basic job analysis** as it exists today. Gather input from tenured and high-performing CSRs, frontline managers, and customers to answer these questions:

- ▶ **What tasks are performed?**
- ▶ **What tools, technology, systems, or processes are used?**
- ▶ **What training is provided versus required upon entry?**
- ▶ **What performance metrics are gathered? Which metrics are the most important?**
- ▶ **What environments or contexts is the work performed?**
(At home, on personal equipment, in a call center)
- ▶ **What social or interpersonal work is performed?**
- ▶ **What competencies are required to perform the role successfully?**

Bonus Tip:

Review CSR job information on [O*Net](#). For the CSR role, O*Net provides a helpful summary of the skills, abilities, and work activities required, such as:

★ **Active Listening Skills:**

Giving full attention to what other people are saying, taking time to understand the points being made, asking questions as appropriate, and not interrupting at inappropriate times.

★ **Communicating Outside the Organization Skills**

Representing the organization (in person, in writing, by telephone, or e-mail) to customers, the public, government, and other external sources.

★ **Oral Communication Ability:**

Communicate information and ideas in speaking so others will understand.

★ **Conventional Interest Occupation:**

Follows set procedures and routines, including working with data and details more than with ideas. Usually, there is a clear line of authority to follow.

★ **Work Styles**

Requires attention to detail, cooperation, integrity, dependability, and concern for others.

Action steps to understand and examine the CSR role:

1

Look for reading, training, or materials on job analysis.

HR organizations such as the [Society for Human Resource Management](#) have detailed steps about how to conduct an analysis and implement your findings.

2

Consider getting help.

Find a consultant trained in Industrial-Organizational Psychology and job analysis. An expert consultant can help you do the work and provide a documented write-up of the findings. Check the [Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology](#) locator for consultant referrals.



STEP THREE

▶ **Audit your process and automate manual steps with technology**

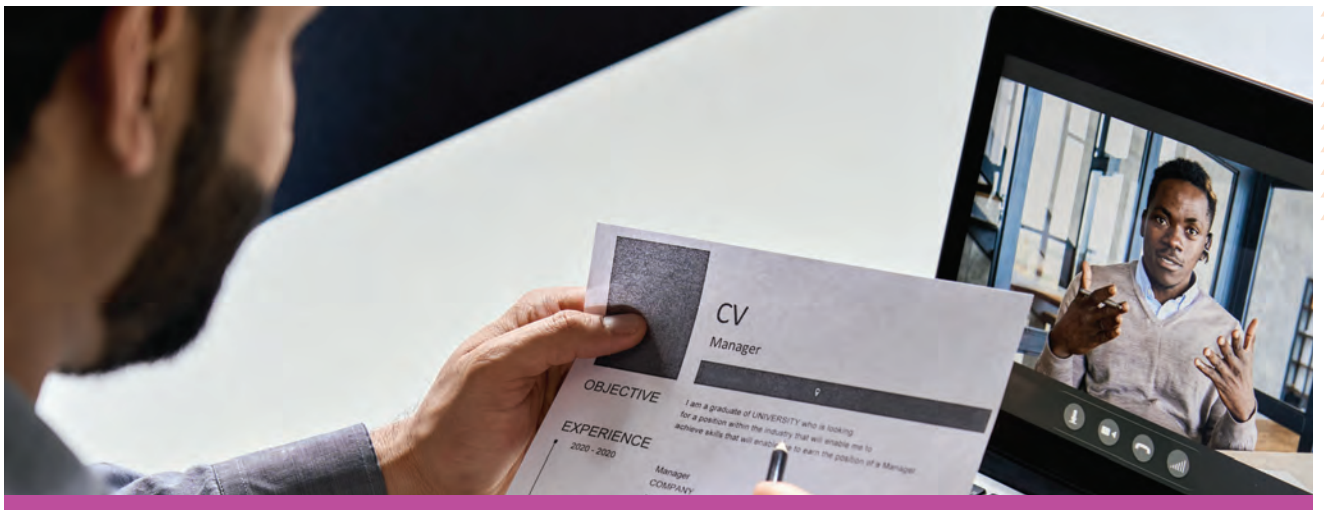
If you want to hire CSRs at scale, you need to consider the hiring steps from each stakeholder's perspective: recruiters, hiring managers, and candidates.

Use feedback from stakeholders to identify bottlenecks or frustrations that occur due to manual tools or processes.

In addition, you need to audit each step of the hiring process by asking questions such as:

- ▶ **Where are we still using paper forms?**
- ▶ **Does the decision-by-committee prevent timely hiring selections?**
- ▶ **Are siloed or fragmented databases making it difficult to track candidate information?**
- ▶ **Which face-to-face interactions could be moved to a virtual interaction?**

This audit can help you determine where sourcing, screening, selection, and onboarding processes could be automated. You may also uncover opportunities to repair, improve, or replace the technology you're using.



Pre-hire assessments are an example of technology that scales and standardizes the hiring process while also reducing the administrative burden on recruiters and hiring managers. For example, a casual dining chain client decreased CSR turnover in their call center by nearly **22%** by using the HighMatch assessment.



Challenge

A casual dining chain's call center operation wanted to **decrease the turnover of its takeout order specialists**. They sought a way to efficiently and effectively identify and hire order specialists who would stay with the organization longer.



Solution

We created a **custom Job Profile using performance data** and assessed all incoming order specialist candidates' cognitive abilities and behavioral traits predictive of performance.



Result

A 12-month comparison of turnover rates for candidates rated "Recommended" based on the custom Job Profile (100 people) versus "Not Recommended" candidates (84 people) revealed that "Recommended" hires produced a **21.8% reduction in turnover** compared to "Not Recommended."

As our client discovered, you may also find that tools such as pre-hire assessments help recruiters automate a manual process and more efficiently and objectively decide which candidates merit moving on to the next steps in the hiring process. At the same time, the data also provides hiring managers with quantitative insights about a candidate's skills and abilities.

Action steps to audit your process and tech stack:

1

Identify opportunities
to automate manual processes.

2

Interview stakeholders
on their feedback regarding the
hiring process using the questions above.

3

Consider getting help
auditing your HR/TA technology. **Sagemark HR** specializes in
helping organizations identify gaps, inefficiencies, and opportunities
in their technology as it applies to scalable, efficient, and effective CSR hiring.



STEP FOUR

► Challenge status quo decision-making

It's essential to examine the technology, platform, and systems that support the hiring process. Additionally, you should reflect on how decisions are made to move candidates through the hiring process.

When was the last time the written and unwritten rules to make hiring decisions were evaluated, if ever?

For example, if you've been relying on past experience to predict future success, it may be time to revisit that model. A recent summary study¹² of 12,000 candidates found little evidence that past experience predicts, much less correlates with, future performance or turnover in a similar job.

How much of your current decision-making is dependent on arbitrary experience requirements? Experience requirements provide some relevant information, and we're not advocating that you remove them entirely. As part of your audit, what's important is to carefully examine how those requirements are set, if they're still relevant, and who they're set by.

Even large firms like Goldman Sachs are challenging the status quo and replacing old hiring practices with new models based on data and organizational science.



“Not long ago [we] relied on a narrower set of factors for identifying ‘the best students, such as school, GPA, major, leadership roles, and relevant experience—the classic résumé topics. No longer,”

writes the global head of human capital management for Goldman Sachs¹³.

¹² 'A meta-analysis of the criterion-related validity of pre-hire work ...' Accessed August 17, 2020. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/peps.12335>.

¹³ 'Your Approach to Hiring Is All Wrong - Harvard Business Review' Accessed August 14, 2020. <https://hbr.org/2019/05/recruiting>.



*"We decided to replace **our hiring playbook** with emerging best practices for assessment and recruitment, so we put together a task force of senior business leaders, PhDs in industrial and organizational psychology, data scientists, and experts in recruiting.*

Some people asked, 'Why overhaul a recruiting process that has proved so successful?' and 'Don't you already have many more qualified applicants than available jobs?' These were reasonable questions.

But often, staying successful is about learning and changing rather than sticking to the tried-and-true."

DANE E. HOLMES,
GLOBAL HEAD OF HUMAN CAPITAL MANAGEMENT,
GOLDMAN SACHS

In the case of CSR hiring decisions, more applicants are now applying for these remote jobs. This makes it difficult to collaborate and discuss in-person among decision-makers, leaving more room for error and increasing the chances that decisions will be delayed due to bottlenecks and hiring criteria that may no longer be relevant.

⁸ "The US Contact Center Decision-Makers' Guide 2017 - Cirrus..." Accessed August 14, 2020.

<https://www.cirrusresponse.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/US-Contact-Centre-Decision-Makers-Guide-2017-.pdf>.

Action steps to challenge status quo decision-making:

1

Ask and answer the following questions:

- ▶ **Are the types of candidate data you're collecting still relevant today?** For example, does the job still warrant the same educational requirements, certifications, or years of experience? Or maybe there are new data points you need to collect, such as familiarity with specific software or technical expertise?
- ▶ **Are there better ways to evaluate performance, which leads to better decisions?** Having a pre-hire assessment for skills or personality, or offering an on-the-job trial may provide more reliable performance indicators to help you reach long-term goals.
- ▶ **What do you measure in each interview, and are those measurements job-relevant?** To scale hiring, you must have consistent, relevant questions and a clear candidate rating system. Without clear instruction regarding measurement, you risk miscommunication and leave room for errors in hiring.
- ▶ **If you conduct multiple interviews with each candidate, how do you compile, weigh, and act upon interviewer feedback?** Ideally, an established system is in place to allow all interviewers to submit a scale-based rating and provide specific feedback, which is then available via a dashboard for all decision-makers to review.

2

Consider how gut decisions can be validated or checked with objective data gathering tools such as [validated, pre-hire assessments](#).





After you've taken the four steps above, choose one stage of your hiring process (sourcing, screening, selection, onboarding) that would benefit the most from automation. You'll later be able to use this one stage as a proof of concept to demonstrate how automation can assist your organization in hiring CSRs at scale.

Based on the stage, review vendor options. Evaluate the pros and cons of various automated solutions. Before you implement new processes, identify the metrics you want to measure. Set clear goals for the ROI these tools will bring to the organization.

As you gather and review the ways, automation is driving your TA goals forward, report the results to other stakeholders, and illustrate the direct impact they're having on the business. This strategic and informed approach to automation is a powerful way to get the most out of the systems and processes you put in place to support the talent acquisition you need.

 Use this checklist to help you start scaling your CSR hiring efforts.

 **Take inventory of the CSR role**

Action: Gather any documentation about CSR roles such as job descriptions, interview guides, training materials, job analysis, job profile.

Results: Understand the job. Reveal the status quo. Identify current job profile.

 **Examine the CSR hiring process**

Action: Request feedback from recruiters and managers about the current process. Ask new hires about their experience. Review candidate feedback, if available.

Results: Identify bottlenecks or problems. Learn about how the job has changed. Assess current candidate pool. Establish relationships that foster buy-in for any upcoming changes.

 **Request help to audit HR tech stack**

Action: Conduct discovery sessions with vendors. Ask professional network about the HR tech they're using. Schedule a consultation to learn more from top vendors.

Results: Identify gaps, redundancies, or outdated processes within current HR systems.

 **Choose one hiring process to automate** (*sourcing, screening, assessment, selection, or onboarding*)

Action: Discover the options, solutions, pros, and cons using one process. Evaluate the business lift and ROI when implementing HR tech to automate.

Results: Use this as a proof of concept and use it to inform the next steps in automating other parts of the hiring process.

 **Identify metrics to measure impact automation has on HR and business goals**

Action: Work with SMEs and organization leaders to identify relevant business and TA metrics. Review previous process to identify additional relevant metrics to illustrate the impact of results achieved through automation.

Results: Capture the metrics and put measurement in place before implementation. Establish regular cycle to review, analyze metrics and adapt process based on results.

Final Thoughts on Scaling Your CSR Hiring

Right now, we're experiencing a global transition to working and doing business **remotely**. As this change occurs, organizations must maintain and manage customer satisfaction. To do so, brands must hire CSRs suited to the new work environment and handle the role's increasing demands and changes.

Today, talented CSRs matter more than ever—customers don't just like exceptional service; they demand it. But what sort of people are best equipped to handle today's customers? How can you ensure that you attract, select, and retain talented reps?

"You can't deliver good service from unhappy employees."

TONY HSIEH, CEO, ZAPPOS

Filling your talent pipeline with the right people—at scale—for the CSR role requires a proven strategy and process that maximizes the power of automation. As you look at how to hire CSRs at scale, link your talent acquisition strategy to business outcomes and results; evaluate and understand what's required as the CSR role continues to evolve; take stock of your HR tech stack to identify where automation may help; and, challenge the status quo of hiring decisions.

Now is not the time to rely on hiring methods that have worked in the past. Today's customers—and candidates—are savvy consumers who are looking for the best service and employment experience. Without innovation and automation, it's unlikely you can deliver either. If you rely on legacy systems and processes, your organization will not be equipped to hire and fill CSR positions at the scale required to enable future growth and meet customer demands.

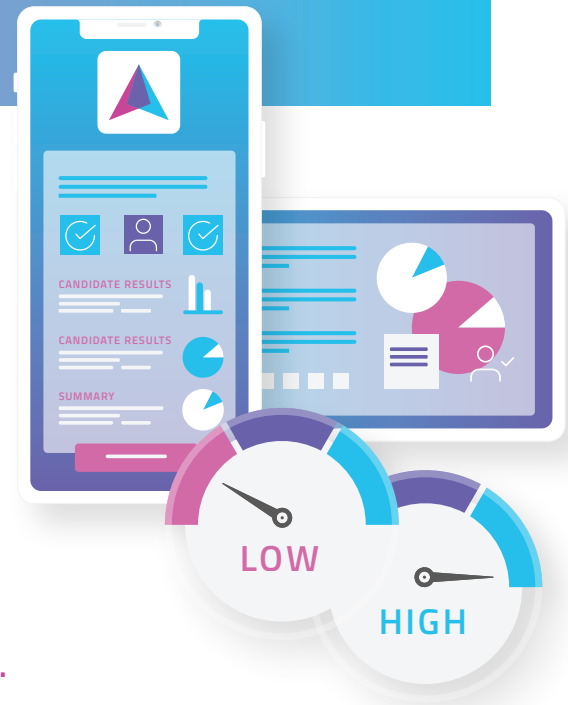
[Connect with us today](#) to learn how assessments can help you take the guesswork out of your CSR hiring decisions and help you choose the right candidates that will continue to drive your business as you scale.

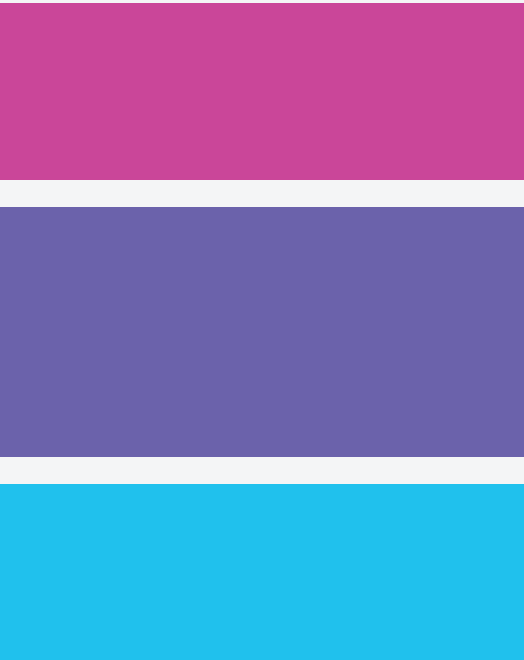
The HighMatch Assessment

HighMatch, formerly Berke, began in 2004 with the mission to create a better assessment that would accurately predict job performance.

HighMatch engagements begin with job benchmarking and the creation of **hiring profiles**, which outline the traits that are required to succeed in every job. After candidates take the assessment, you receive a **report** that provides clear, actionable guidelines to help you make great hiring decisions.

We believe that hiring the right people transforms companies.





ABOUT HIGHMATCH:

Our Talent Insights Platform combines modular cognitive and behavioral assessments with a massive library of skills testing, and our managed services arm provides a range of outsourced services to resource-strapped HR teams.

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