Planning for the Unexpected: The Shifting Priorities of Tech Recruiting
Introduction

In technology recruiting, there are always peaks and valleys to contend with; that’s just the nature of the beast. An unfortunate side effect, however, is that recruiters are forced into reactive hiring mode, addressing needs when peaks rise but lacking a game plan for the valleys and the steady state. Reactive hiring can be a burden for the sanity of the recruiting function and can be quite counterproductive long term.

In almost every facet of the technology business, things move at a lightning pace, making it hard to fully plan for unexpected developments and recruiting needs. Product development requirements are constantly in flux to fit the needs of evolving markets and consumer preferences. At the same time, the technology industry naturally experiences dramatically high employee churn.

A recent LinkedIn report cited software industry turnover at 13.2 percent last year, the highest of any industry tracked. And when it comes to in-demand tech positions, the turnover is even more dramatic: UX designers churn at 23.3 percent, data analysts at 21.7 percent, and embedded software engineers also at 21.7 percent. Meanwhile, average employee tenure at technology companies is shrinking too. Median tenure at Amazon is just one year, for example, and Google performs only marginally better with a median tenure of 1.1 years, according to Payscale’s recent employee turnover report.

For recruiters, it’s no longer possible to just hire for growth; you must build a hiring machine that is “always on” and ready for your needs when the unpredictable arises.
Why Employee Churn Happens

There’s no question that the tech industry is a great place to be these days. There’s a wealth of innovative companies out there with growing demand for workers who can build great products and put them to use in global organizations. The green fields are so vast, however, that top talent is always in intense demand and constantly being targeted by recruiters for new opportunities that can power their careers forward. Companies are getting skilled at showing off their employer brand, differentiating themselves with unique perks and flexible working environments, and opportunities for interesting projects that might lead a tech worker to their dream job.

Tech workers these days also have unprecedented access to job listings, deep insight into the things that differentiate prospective employers in the market, and clear visibility into current salary data to evaluate each opportunity and find the best fit when job hunting. Meanwhile, hiring managers and recruiters similarly have the tools to find and reach out to even more top candidates and evaluate them by looking at not only skills and experience but also insights into their career aspirations and objectives.

To make matters even more complicated for recruiters, company initiatives are always shifting with the winds. Change is constant and unyielding in technology as revolutionary products produce a sea change in their market segments and produce a snowball effect in others. Macroeconomic shifts such as growing or shrinking economic conditions, evolving consumer demands, or new compliance mandates that force more stringent QA or support processes can all contribute to hiring unpredictability.
How to Plan for the Unexpected

It's a perfect storm that makes employee attrition inevitable. To succeed in a dynamic environment where employee attrition inevitable, companies must build in a strategy and process to prepare for the unexpected. Here are some recommendations to help keep you on your toes.

01  Get Immediate, Unlimited Access to the Talent Pool

It's easy for recruiters to fall into the trap of being reactive to the unpredictability of hiring planning. But taking this type of ad hoc approach every month, quarter or year can actually slow you down. It’s important to be proactive.

The first step is to start with a process that meets your needs no matter what your monthly or quarterly quotas are, and no matter how quickly they change. Throw out the notion that you can keep pace with needed reqs on an ad hoc basis and go with a steadier program that offers access to a consistent pipeline of highly qualified talent. Identify and engage only those top candidates that are actively searching for a new opportunity.

You can build flexibility into your model from the beginning by easily scaling up or down your number of reqs as your priorities shift, whether they are from employee churn or shifting development priorities. But if you always have access to the right talent, who are actively looking to find a new job, you’ll be ready.
Stay Prepared with a Consistent Pipelining Approach

Of course, the story doesn’t end with steady access to talent. It also takes a focused, proactive approach to recruiting that adequately prepares you for the unexpected — and the key is consistency. Successful recruiters keep themselves continually immersed in the recruiting game, building a steady drumbeat of sourcing activity to keep past, present and future candidates within arm’s reach. Sourcing pipelines should be constantly humming along, not something your turn on and off when the timing suits.

By building consistency into your sourcing model, you generate several important benefits to overcome unpredictability:

**Efficiency** Eliminate the need to slow down, speed up or start over based on changing hiring needs or corporate-driven circumstances

**Pipeline** Develop a sourcing pipeline that is forward-looking, always on, and continually pursuing talent that may only be on the market for a short while

**Warm Candidates** Enable a “staging area” by which you can engage candidates as they are identified, regardless of immediate need, and keep them warm and interested until the hiring need surfaces. And candidates will more often than not appreciate your being fully transparent about this approach.
Focus on Staffing Your Complete Tech Team

Gaining access to an unlimited stream of talent also empowers a more holistic approach to filling your tech teams. Instead of just focusing on one-off roles at any given time, or focusing on those hard-to-fill roles that can take more time, imagine what can be done when you’re able to broaden your focus to filling your entire dream team of tech talent concurrently. Even when hiring managers have thought through their immediate hiring needs, there is always room to re-evaluate based on the broader availability of talent. You enhance your strategic role when you can help create a cohesive team of inter-connected workers, not just individuals cherry-picked one by one.
Your efforts to build a more consistent sourcing program provide an extra side benefit: you gain momentum to actively enhance your employer brand and your ability to engage candidates. Employer brand will give you the leg up to attract the tech talent you need to stay proactive in building pipeline.

A strong employer brand connects you more intimately with talent. You can utilize social media and personal communications that reflect your brand to give candidates something to stay engaged with and excited about. Your ability to engage effectively will empower you to activate and re-activate candidate relationships whenever you need. Building a strong long-term relationship and better candidate experience provides a strong counterbalance to unpredictable external circumstances.

**Use Brand and Engagement as a Counterbalance to Unpredictability**

When you fill your open reqs quickly, your technology teams can be more productive, and you lower the financial impact of a missing tech worker. Accordingly, a faster sourcing process also helps minimize the impact of unexpected departures, unpredictable developments or changing hiring needs. Consistent pipelining helps you be better prepared to take action immediately in such cases. As soon as you learn from a hiring manager of a departure (or imminent departure), you can rely on your faster time-to-hire metrics to ensure the hiring manager of shorter down time and faster re-supply of talent. And from a financial standpoint, you’ll reduce the cost of an empty seat by shielding the organization from lost productivity.

**Minimize the Impact of the Unknown with a Faster Recruiting Process**
Conclusion

It’s always hard to predict what will happen in today’s dynamic technology hiring environment, but these steps should provide you with a bit of an insurance policy. By leveraging anytime, any-volume access to a huge tech talent pool — and by improving your ability to identify and move candidates quickly through the pipeline when they’re needed most — you will establish the groundwork to building a rich talent-driven corporate culture. A consistent approach to sourcing and hiring is also a more strategic approach, one that will be appreciated and encouraged by your management team. You’ll improve your ability to think talent from day one, no matter where the technology talent need originates, and make decisions in advance, not just when you’re under the gun.