

Case Study | Freelance HR Consulting | 2025

Rebuilding Recruitment From Scratch

How a tech startup cut time to hire by 38% and improved candidate experience in four months

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Client name withheld for confidentiality

01. Context and Brief

A note on confidentiality: The company name, exact location, and identifying details have been removed from this version. The data, findings, and outcomes are presented exactly as they happened.

This project took place at a 40-person tech startup that had grown quickly but whose hiring process had never been properly built. They were posting roles, receiving applications, and running interviews, but without any consistent structure, pipeline visibility, or ownership of the candidate experience.

By the time I came in, the symptoms were hard to ignore. Good candidates were dropping out mid-process. Hiring managers were frustrated. Roles were sitting open for months. The company had started losing people to competitors who moved faster and communicated better.

The brief was straightforward: come in for four months, figure out what was broken, fix what could be fixed quickly, and leave behind a process that would hold up as the team kept growing.

40

Employees at start of project

67 days

Average time to hire (baseline)

4 months

Engagement duration

8 roles

Filled during the engagement

02. What the Audit Found

Before changing anything, I spent the first two weeks doing a proper audit: reviewing every open and recently closed role, speaking with hiring managers one by one, and looking at whatever data existed on timelines, drop-off, and candidate feedback.

Six problems came up consistently.

High priority**Time to hire was 67 days on average**

The benchmark for similar roles is around 30 to 35 days. At 67 days the company was reliably losing candidates to competitors who moved faster. In a market where good candidates have options, speed matters a lot.

High priority**No structure in interviews**

Every hiring manager ran interviews in their own way, with no shared questions, no scoring criteria, and no agreed definition of what a good candidate looked like. Decisions were made largely on instinct, which creates inconsistency and real bias risk.

High priority**Candidates going silent between stages**

People were routinely waiting 10 to 18 days between stages with no communication at all. Where post-process feedback existed, this was the most commonly cited reason for a poor experience.

Medium priority**Job descriptions written without a brief or template**

Hiring managers were writing their own job descriptions in isolation. The output was long, jargon-heavy, and requirements-focused. Several contained language that would put off strong candidates before they even applied.

Medium priority**No candidate feedback process**

There was no post-process survey, no NPS tracking, and no monitoring of what candidates were saying about the company online. The team had no idea what the experience actually felt like from the outside.

Medium priority**The ATS was being used inconsistently**

The company had an ATS set up but several hiring managers were still tracking candidates in their own spreadsheets. Pipeline visibility was basically impossible and the data could not be trusted.

03. What We Did

The work split into four areas. The priority was to get the process and communication changes live as quickly as possible, because those had the most direct impact on candidates already in the pipeline.

Building the process

Weeks 1 to 4

Mapped the end-to-end hiring process with each hiring manager and agreed a standardised four-stage structure: application, recruiter screen, hiring manager interview, and final panel. Set clear timelines for each stage, defined ownership, and wrote a short Hiring Manager Handbook covering role briefing, interview structure, and decision-making.

Structured interviewing

Weeks 2 to 5

Built competency-based interview frameworks for the six most common role types, each with a shared scorecard so every interviewer evaluated candidates against the same criteria. Ran a 90-minute training session with all hiring managers and introduced a short structured debrief call after every final-round interview before any decision was made.

Candidate communication

Weeks 1 to 6

Rewrote all 11 candidate email templates in the ATS. Set up automated stage-progression emails so no candidate waited more than 48 hours without an update. Introduced a five-question post-process survey sent within 24 hours of every final decision. Created a candidate FAQ covering what to expect at each stage and how long things take.

Data and visibility

Weeks 3 to 8

Migrated all active roles from spreadsheets into the ATS and trained hiring managers on using it properly. Built a simple weekly dashboard tracking open roles, time per stage, drop-off, and offer acceptance. Shared this with leadership every week for the first six weeks to build visibility and keep the project prioritised.

04. Results

The figures below compare the eight weeks before any changes were made against the final eight weeks of the engagement.

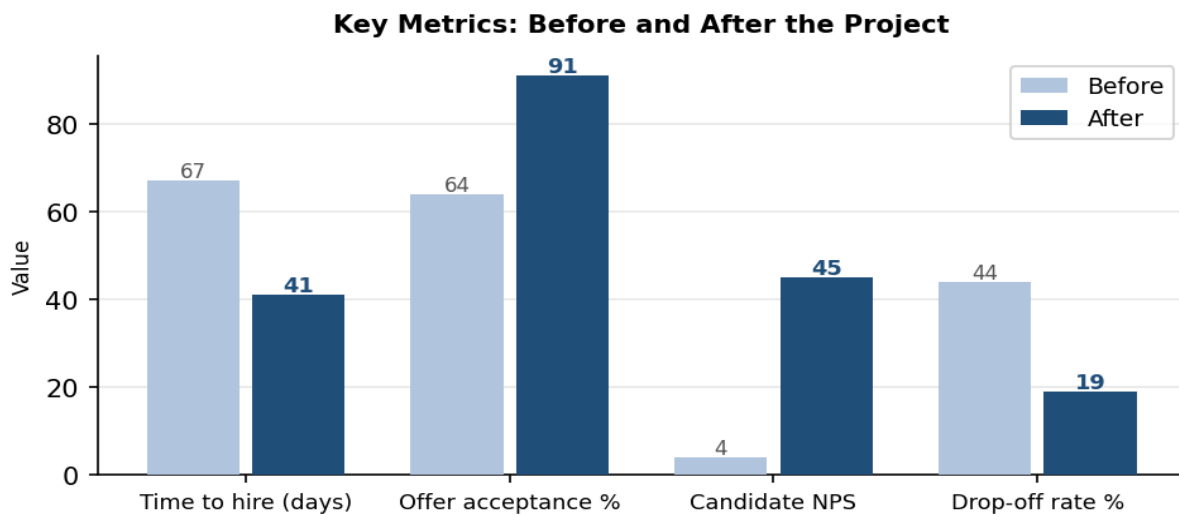


Figure 1: Key metrics before and after the engagement.

Metric	Before	After	Change	What drove it
Average time to hire	67 days	41 days	38% faster	Stage timelines and faster decision-making
Offer acceptance rate	64%	91%	27pp higher	Better communication and faster decisions
Candidate NPS	+4	+45	+41 points	Survey response grew from 22% to 68%
Candidate drop-off	44%	19%	25pp lower	Communication and process clarity
Roles filled in the period	3	8	167% more	Same headcount, same budget

Table 1: Pre and post comparison of key recruitment metrics

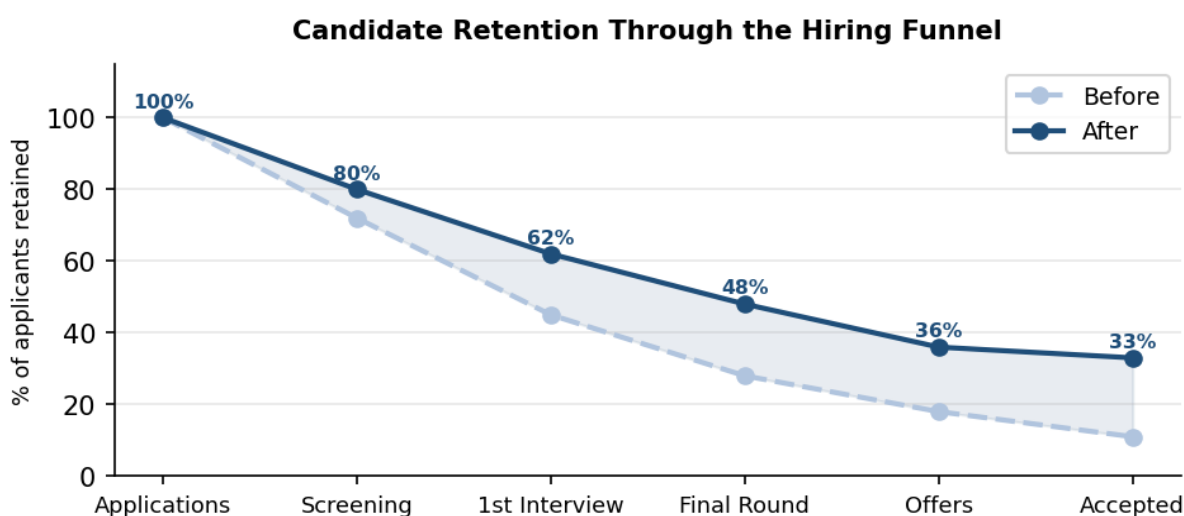


Figure 2: Candidate retention through the funnel. The biggest gains were at the offer and acceptance stages.

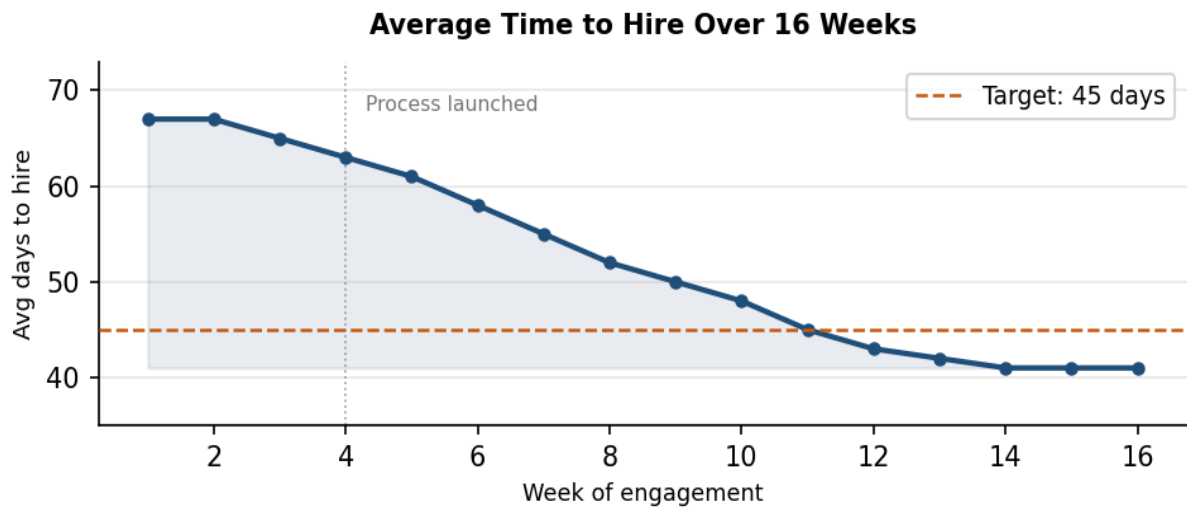


Figure 3: Average time to hire week by week. The new process went live at week 4. The target of 45 days was reached at week 11.

05. What Candidates Said

The post-process survey launched at week six. By the end of the engagement the response rate had grown from 22% to 68%. These are two responses that stood out.

"The communication throughout was genuinely impressive. I always knew where I stood and what was coming next. It made me feel like a real candidate, not just a name in a list."

Candidate for a Product role (joined the company)

"I did not get the job, which was disappointing. But the feedback was specific and actually useful. I would apply again and I have already recommended a friend to do the same."

Candidate for an Engineering role (not hired)

06. Reflections

A few honest observations from the engagement.

What worked well

Starting with a proper audit before touching anything. Two weeks felt slow at the time but every decision that followed was grounded in something real, not assumption.

Getting hiring managers involved in building the scorecards and the process itself. When people help create something they are far more likely to actually use it.

Rewriting the email templates had the highest return on time invested. Three days of work and the candidate NPS impact was immediate and visible.

Sharing pipeline data with leadership weekly. It kept the project visible and made it easier to get quick decisions when needed.

What was harder than expected

Changing how interviewers actually behave takes more time than changing systems. Even with scorecards in place, some people defaulted to old habits and needed ongoing coaching rather than a one-off training session.

Cleaning up historical data in the ATS took much longer than anticipated. Worth budgeting dedicated time for this at the very start of any similar project.

What I would do differently

Introduce structured feedback for unsuccessful candidates from day one rather than adding it as a later step. It is simple to set up and the employer brand impact is real.

Build in a 30, 60, 90 day new hire check-in from the start to close the loop between what was promised in recruitment and what people actually experience in onboarding. This was on the plan but fell outside the contract scope.

07. What Was Left Behind

At the end of the engagement, all of the following were documented and handed over to the incoming permanent People hire.

Done	Hiring Manager Handbook covering the full process, stage timelines, and interview guidance
Done	Six role-specific competency frameworks with interview scorecards
Done	Full library of 11 candidate email templates, live in the ATS
Done	Post-process candidate survey and NPS tracking process
Done	Weekly recruitment dashboard template
Done	ATS fully populated with all active and historical roles
Done	Process map from application to offer, with stage owners and timescales

Recruitment performance at an early-stage startup has less to do with budget and more to do with process clarity and how you treat candidates. The tools were already there. The structure was not.

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