

Opinion

Your First Employee is a Watershed Moment: Anannke Foundation's Malini Saba

Malini Saba , Founder & Chairman, Annanke Foundation

#Anannke Foundation #First Employee #Hiring #startup

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It took almost one year for the Anannke Foundation to reach the position where we could accept a new member. Non-profit organisations confront money and time constraints, and our employees are mission-driven. Instead of reading books about hiring employees, we relied on our own observations and the advice of our mentors. Three months, over 100 applicants, and a steep learning curve later, we hired our first employee.

Based on what we've learned, here is what we would advise anyone hiring their first employee:

1. Check your finances

Startups require funding. You must use an excel spreadsheet under a financial expert's instruction to anticipate your costs, income, and savings for the next five years. The advisory board and board of directors oversee and control the operations of a business. First-year funds are needed to hire staff and launch your entrepreneurial career.

Because we are a non-profit with limited resources, we needed a candidate who is committed to helping those in need and creating positive change in communities around the world. We accounted for the extra costs that would come with hiring our first employee, such as hiring, payroll taxes, travel, equipment, and training.

Double-check your books to verify that hiring your first employee won't kill your startup. You will need to decide how much money you can afford and whether or not you will offer perks. Keep in mind, however, that the new employee should be contributing to the expansion of your organisation and, preferably, generating additional money (but maybe not right away).

2. If possible, start early

The intelligence, inventiveness, and presence of an additional worker are invaluable. Things that require weeks to complete can be completed in days, and entire work streams can be eliminated. Owners who delay hiring despite being overworked frequently come to regret their decision when they realise how little they accomplished while waiting. Most startups are risk-tolerant because they value the product and journey over profit. Because timing is so important, you must start right away after getting information and making a plan.

At the Anannke Foundation, we are aware of the obstacles and difficulties that lie ahead, but we have persevered because we are committed to our vision and goal. Initially, employees sacrificed compensation for equity. This makes them a part of the tale and promotes the company, which is to the shareholder's advantage. We all agree that professional success is more about how you feel than how much money you make.

3. Hire potential, not performance, and request skill demos:

Typically, early-stage startups cannot afford a recruiter and rely on word of mouth and other hiring methods. We looked for people who understood that the return was far away. Together, we agreed to steer this ship while being aware of our roles and the fact that everyone wears more than one hat.

Our experience shows that the best way to evaluate a candidate is to have him or her complete a task. For example, if we are recruiting for our education support department, we ask the applicant to address future planning difficulties for adolescents who haven't had steady schooling or similar experiences to extend their perspectives. We instruct the applicants to develop a strategy for reaching our target audiences with minimal direction to determine how they would approach the task. Those who didn't put in the work are eliminated.

We rejected candidates with Master's degrees and ten years of experience because we believed the candidate we ultimately chose had tremendous potential in our organisation's activities, including development, emergency aid, rural development, women's empowerment, etc., which required cultural competence to reach marginalised communities. Her proficiency in multiple languages enabled us to better serve clients, government officials, and the media. Moreover, it was evident that she desired to punch above her weight.

4. Team interviews for your first employee:

The CEO is responsible for the company's specific culture, which consists of ambitious employees that wish to see this ship reach port. As there is no HR department in a startup, the CEO employs the initial few employees and looks for those who share the company's values, are willing to put in the hours, and prioritise the business. Finding the ideal cultural fit for a team can be challenging. E.g. Person A and Person B get along, but it does not imply that Person A and Person C will (let alone work well together). It was crucial for the Anannke Foundation management to get along with the initial hires. To keep the company's culture intact in its early stages, you should only hire people who have experience with other startups.

We conducted many interviews. This seemed extravagant, yet it ensured a proper fit. When everyone on the team thinks they can work with the new person, we know we've found the best candidate.

5. Create an onboarding procedure and invite First Employee to join

Businesses should have their attorneys generate the relevant documentation based on their country's regulations and conduct identification, character, and reference checks. Never get complacent with this method. You may have financial problems, and if you don't check a candidate's credentials and criminal background, you may fall victim to con artists.

Options exist after employing someone. This person is an employee because you train, evaluate, and pay them. Or, picture it as a team member who volunteered to assist in making your vision a reality, growing alongside you, and experiencing your business's ups and downs. This is one of the key reasons why individuals initially join new companies.

We marketed our goals and initiatives in order to recruit motivated young people. We discussed why we exist and how we might address global issues. This established a pipeline of ambitious learners, and our goal from day one was to demonstrate that our employees are an integral part of our team. On day one, we held a two-hour 'formal' onboarding meeting and smaller chats to explain our culture and expectations. We also held workshops on our culture, mission, organisations, worldwide concerns and needs, and outreach strategy. We guarantee that everyone who joins the organisation will have the exact same experience by explaining every detail.

6. Your legal affair

Employment, contract, and termination concerns necessitate careful planning and adherence to state law. If you wish to conduct business, you should always retain the services of a lawyer. In business, legal problems can always come up, so you need a skilled lawyer who looks out for your best interests.

Teams and new hires should have contracts (or terms agreed on with advisors and lawyers). When your objective is to increase profits and market share, legal considerations are necessary. Being protected helps you concentrate on what is necessary.

Your company's first hire is a watershed moment in its history. Taking the time to do things correctly will ensure that your first employee stays with the company, which will be advantageous in the beginning.

Author: Dr Malini Saba has a business background in international, multicultural organisations and has experience with highly engineered systems.



Snapshot

Registered Name: Anannke Foundation, registered in USA

Year of Incorporation: 2002

Number of Employees: 50 +

Founder: Dr. Malini Saba

Business Line: Its mission is to ensure access to nutrition, basic healthcare, education, art, and culture, as well as to provide people with opportunities to break the cycle of poverty and eliminate illiteracy about human rights issues.

Key HR Factor: Flexible schedules, telecommuting, encouraging empowerment, diversity, teamwork, and innovation. Performance reviews and evaluation is done by measuring group work in terms of objectives not defragmenting the individual effort.

Key Investors: Self-funded

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