

New Hires

written by CD | NOVEMBER 18, 2022

New hires present the best opportunity to put employees on their path to achieve their greatest potential. There are three very impactful people in determining the joy, success and fulfillment an employee finds in their job...

Typically, none of the three appreciates the honor and responsibility bestowed upon them to have this impact on another human.

These three are crucial people in determining whether new hires enjoy their job, are successful and find fulfillment. For, the joy, success and fulfillment an employee derives from their job greatly impacts their life. Employees spend more of their waking hours at work than they do with their life partner and family.

I believe these three people are in order:

1. The New Hire Employee Themselves

New hires often don't fully appreciate their ability and role in determining their own joy, success and fulfillment at work. As leaders, our most important task is to help those we lead appreciate their ability to impact their own destiny. By enabling a growth mindset, we let them feel the joy, success and fulfillment they derive from their job. We enable them discover their ability to succeed, we are allowing them to get in their own way. They can be their own worst enemy or own best champion.

2. The New Hire's Manager



Sadly, as managers we often overlook the honor and responsibility

bestowed upon us in hiring and managing a new hire. Each employee does spend more waking hours at work than anywhere else in their life. We, as their managers, bear a huge responsibility in making that experience enjoyable, fruitful and fulfilling. Successfully helping a team member find fulfillment in their job, we ourselves may derive a great deal from that experience. More on the manager's responsibility at [Where to Begin the Journey](#).

3. The Spin-Up Buddy or Mentor



The first three months can be the most influential in whether new hires find joy, success and fulfillment at work. Yes, they themselves and their manager bear a huge responsibility in this endeavor. However, success is greatly increased for a new hire when assigned a buddy / mentor. Ideally this is someone that works closely with them in a similar role. They show them the ropes, they introduce them to people they should know to succeed. They help ensure they find their feet in doing their job.

Often the person honored to be a new hire's spin-up buddy becomes that new hire's most trusted confidant at work. Often that relationship continues on well after either or both of those individuals have moved on.

The opportunity of consciously choosing and assigning someone into this third role is often overlooked. Sometimes we refer to these buddies as mentors; however, that implies it must be someone more senior than the new hire. It can also be a peer or someone at a lower level.

I've been asked how, at a fast-growing startup, one can afford to take time from the best engineers to spin up new engineers. First of all, it's a great investment, but perhaps more importantly, a well spun-up new hire, even if fresh out of college, makes for a great mentor for the next hire. They simply repeat what they went through with their own improvements.

The New Hire's Team

In addition, the team plays the fourth most influential role. It takes a village. Enabling an employee to find fulfillment the team finds itself in a symbiotic relationship – one that is truly mutually beneficial. Each employee themselves should not overlook their own responsibility here.

Spinning Up New Hires at IMVU

On joining IMVU, the expectation was to make a change and push it to production on my first day. There are a few objectives with doing that:



- The new hire push ensures everything is right in terms of system, accounts etc.
- It ensures your mentor has a change ready for you.
- It allows you to see that it's possible to make a change, add testing for it, and run a complete set of tests.

New hire change emails go to all employees, and responses are a lot of "Welcome to IMVU" emails from Execs and people across all functions. You become an employee not when you show up at the office, but when you've made your first impact. New hires are given a frame of mind of having impact (not to do paperwork).

I uncovered a few glitches in the spin-up process, and I decided to improve the documentation and process. I then made the improvement the first thing in the spin-up document. It's new hire's and mentor's responsibility to leave the spin-up process in a better state. I've carried the practice of new hires improving the new hire process to Twitch, Pure Storage and Prosper.

At Twitch, I set the target for a new hire make their first production change on Day 1. There was concern that this would end up as a disappointment for the new hire and the mentor. However, folks didn't realize that I'd been having new hires fine tune the process for some time. It proved to be a success. And so, my notion of framing this as Leave a Trace began.

Have New Hires Leave a Trace

Scouts of America Outdoor Ethics	Engineers of the World Code Ethics
Leave No Trace	Leave A Trace
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understanding and respecting nature• Cub Scout Guidelines<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Plan Ahead2. Stick to Trails3. Manage Your Pet4. Leave What You Find5. Respect Other Visitors6. Trash Your Trash	<p>Always leave code in a better state than you found it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understanding and Respecting Software• Engineering Guidelines<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Remove some Tech-Debt2. Make more readable3. Add more tests4. Extract duplication5. Refactor APIs6. Delete unused code
	

As new hires, please view it as your responsibility as a new hire to make improvements to this process. Add missing steps, make corrections,

or clarifying things so as to improve the spin up for the next person. To this affect, please feel free to enlist your mentor.

This also sets expectation that encountering anything that could use improvement, it's your responsibility to improve it.

At IMVU, a mentor's primary task during spin-up to make the new hire completely self-sufficient and fully-functional as an engineer. That supersedes the priority of any other work. There is good, long-term ROI to sooner have two fully functioning engineers instead of one. We have even had success with a mentor spinning up three engineers at the same time.

Spin-up work Buddies for New Hires in Munich

When I started my job at Softlab at Arabellastraße in Munich in 1983, I realized how influential the colleague I shared an office with was in determining how much joy, success and fulfillment I found in my job. When I learned that the next engineer we hired was to sit alone in a two person office until we bought on another new hire, I decided to take it upon myself to move into that office with them to help get them started. Note: Softlab was all about enabling developer productivity as it's core product [Maestro I](#) was the first [integrated development environment](#) in the [history of computing](#). One of my first changes at Softlab was to get the company to dog-food it's own product.

Note: At Softlab, we were very conscious of facilitating engineering productivity. Our flagship product Maestro I, was [the world's first integrated software development environment](#). By the time I left in 1989, Maestro I had been installed by 22,000 programmers worldwide. Until 1989 there were 6,000 facilities in the Federal Republic of Germany. Maestro was probably the world leader in this field in the 1970s and 1980s.

Higher Productivity Work Environments



When Softlab achieved enough success that we could hire an architect to

design a new building for us at 120 Zamodorferstraße, we had several discussions around the configuration of that office space. One of the considerations was whether we should have one, two or three person offices. Initially most people feeling inclined toward having individual offices. This would solve for quiet and focused space that improve engineering productivity. Three people offices would increase collaboration. We ultimately decided the best experience for all would be had by having pairs of mentors and new hires working together. For collaboration, the German laws about needing to regular breaks during the day (e.g. for coffee, tea or lunch) allowed for impromptu collaboration time.

Even in open space offices, I hate to interrupt engineers. When I see an engineer I want to catch up with grab their coffee mug, I grab mine and tag along.

Note, there were also other factors that went into designing that building to aid in creating the most productive work space possible – such as the width of the hallways, the location of the restrooms, the location of the raised floor computer room (we worked very close to the hardware of the the systems we were designing), ...Softlab became the second most successful independent software company at its time (behind SAP) to then get acquired by BMW. My uncle, Carl Martin Dolezalek, made quite a nice living up until the 1970s by advising businesses and factories how to lay out work space so as to gain efficiency as he described in his book [*“Planung von Fabrikanlagen”*](#) first published in 1973. His income was derived from a minor percentage of any increases in output due to higher productivity that resulted from changes he suggested.

How Hiring Impacts Spin-Up

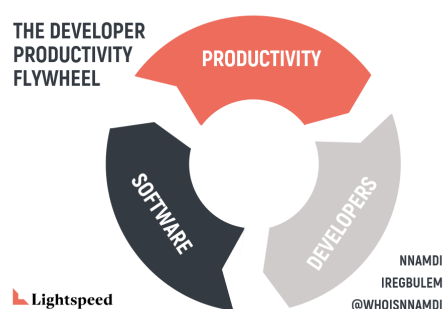


The ability for a new hire to spin up is also greatly influenced by their mindset and approach to learning new things. As mentioned in [10x Engineer – The Root Cause](#), there are ways to find and hire engineers with a Growth Mindset. This mindset that comes with curiosity and a desire to learn new things contributes significantly to how quickly someone spins up. Also, the well-defined spin-up process itself will reveal if the hiring process truly found the person you want to have on your team.

Furthermore, the “burden” or interviewing can also greatly impact an existing team. As such, it helps to spin up new hires to become certified as qualified to ask certain interview questions. This is not to be taken lightly, as the interview questions we use have been developed for over 12 years. The continuous improvement of questions and the manager close process is key in finding and hiring the best engineers.

Ensuring New Hires don't Slow Down Accelerated Growth

Rapidly on-boarding new engineers generating new designs and code can create a burden on the existing team. I have found myself in a few situations where rapid growth is required, but existing/senior staff are also critical to move the company forward in its rapid growth phase. At Twitch, I came up with the ideal that the nth hire could be best suited and least impactful in spinning up hire n+1. This proved to work, with a good spin-up process even when the next hire started only two weeks later. Their mentor was also still being spun up but had very recently learned what they needed to learn and made improvements to the spin-up process they would now be teaching.



[The Developer Productivity Manifesto](#)

Another challenge in rapid growth companies comes with finding the time to review designs and pull-requests. There is much new code being produced and an ever-shrinking percentage of engineers with tenure. Therefore, it's crucial to include how to review designs and pull-requests as part of the new hire process. Good hires should already come with the ability

to comment on general design and coding principles. The mentor should also provide context relevant to the design and architecture of the system in place and being extended. It's also important that the mentor impart that design and code reviews are essentially continuous spin-up processes. Comments and suggestions should be given as coming from a place of helping (not criticizing). Exchanging comments and feedback through design and code review feed the continuous and incremental growth of the entire team. It also leads to an ever-improving code-base and system.

This continuous investment in employees feeds a virtuous cycle spinning a developer-productivity and code quality flywheel. It also helps reinforce the mindset of always keep learning and always keep teaching.

A Culture of Learning and Growth



The spin-up process fosters the notion of always learning and improving things. This is furthered beyond hiring and spin-up in a supportive culture of Human Transformation. An overall culture of learning with the organization fosters the mindset of continuous growth and learning. This includes training existing staff and new hires to do design and code reviews from a place of helping rather than criticizing. It includes doing one-on-ones starting with trust. The trust is that leaders have the best interests of everyone at heart. See [Start with Trust](#).

This is further supported by clear and communicated rubrics of various levels within an org and what is expected at each level. This creates a structure for leaders to find opportunities along various vectors of growth. Also, [Radical Candor](#) in support of growth also enables upward mobility.

Grooming new [New Managers](#) also provides another avenue of growth for certain individuals.

These considerations are crucial along with growing an org through hiring and spinning up. Retention and motivation is critical among existing staff as new staff members are added. Also, when this culture is present among existing employees, it comes across both in the interview process and tends to infect new hires with an excitement based in collaboration and growth.

Engineering Productivity Enables New Hires to Have Greater Impact

Having comprehensive testing in place, reduces the odds of new hires inadvertently breaking code and systems they aren't familiar with. This too frees up existing engineers to take on other challenges.

Furthermore, good architecture, such as cookie-cutting templates for new services and frameworks for front-end design increase engineering efficiency. These help avoid a hodgepodge of coding styles as you continuously add new hires to your engineering team. They also enable moving engineers to new areas quickly if there is a need to shift or pivot focus in various stages of growth. Spinning up people quickly as they move to new areas within a company not only increases efficiency but benefits morale as well.

Reliably removing obstacles and burdens to getting to ever-increasing productivity is what it's all about.

Background



softlab
DAS SYSTEMHAUS



I have a long-standing passion around spinning up new engineers and increasing engineering efficiency dating back to joining Softlab, GmbH in 1983 with its flagship product [Maestro](#) the first [integrated development environment](#) in the [history of computing](#). I got engineering at Softlab to dog food Maestro and trained customers' engineering teams to be more efficient through Maestro. A passion for helping new-hires spin-up also developed as Softlab became the second fastest growing software company in Germany (behind SAP) to be acquired by BMW.

**Broad
Vision**

That passion continued as I moved to Silicon Valley and again became critical as I joined BroadVision Pre-IPO and helped it grow to the fastest growing software company on Nasdaq during dot com and branching it out into 7 product lines and achieving a \$26B valuation.



TEACHING

After the rapid growth and success of BroadVision, I became more interested in how people learn and decided to get educated as a schoolteacher. I struck up a good relationship with one of my professors, [Patricia Swanson](#) who had worked at Stanford with Carol Dweck. Patty got me inspired to learn more about Dweck's notion of the Growth Mindset. Dweck later published the first edition of The Growth Mindset in 2006. The notion of the Growth Mindset has made its way into business with particular relevance in rapidly evolving fields.

Return to Tech



After my sabbatical of diving into teaching, I came back into tech at Intuit where I grew an internal startup. A few years later, I came to IMVU aka The Lean Startup where I developed the notion of more rigor around the ever-improving spin-up process. Here too came the introduction to interview questions targeting at finding candidates with a hunger and ability to learn – those questions have continued to evolve over the last 12 years. My experience at The Lean Startup helped develop my notion around [Lean Staffing](#).



I brought these concepts of growth to Twitch which had been struggling to hire in its early days and I was able to triple the engineering team within one year. I employed and enhanced many of the spin-up principles during this rapid growth and came up with the 8practice of the nth hire spins up hire n+1. The successful growth led to a unicorn acquisition by Amazon.



My next stop at Pure Storage, came with further development of the spin-up processes where I developed an approach to a Manager Close which I was then asked to teach in classes for all hiring managers across both business units.

Also, while at Pure, I developed an interest in coaching. This came to mind after learning about [Google's Project Oxygen](#) where they concluded after much research that the most important behavior exhibited by their best managers was being a good coach. I began and completed the training as a coach. Again, another angle on how to enable people to grow beyond what they believe was possible.



Another arena where spinning up new players and building world-class teams came into play was as a competitive athlete where I ended up coaching two teams to winning national championships.

See Also

- [*10x Engineer – The Root Cause*](#)
- [*Talent Code Applied*](#)
- [*Where to Begin the Journey*](#)
- [*The Developer Productivity Manifesto by Nnamdi Iregbulem, Partner at Lightspeed Venture Partners*](#)
- [*Maximizing Developer Effectiveness by Tim Cochran , Technical Director, Thoughtworks*](#)