

How to write a hiring brief that actually holds.

A short guide to locking the one document that decides whether a search closes in weeks, or drifts for months.

Most searches don't fail because good candidates aren't out there. They fail because the brief was never locked, so the target keeps moving. A hiring manager reviews the first ten résumés and quietly revises what "strong" means. Compensation gets renegotiated after an offer is already close. An interviewer asks questions nobody agreed to score against.

None of this looks like failure in the moment. It looks like diligence: "let's keep an open mind," "let's see what the market has." But every one of those small adjustments resets the clock, and a search that resets enough times never closes.

A hiring brief is the antidote: the single document, agreed on before a single résumé is reviewed, that defines what the role needs and what "good" looks like. This guide walks through the five things a solid brief locks, gives you a working template, and covers the ways briefs quietly drift even when everyone has good intentions.

Five things every brief must lock

Agree on these before the first conversation with a candidate. Anything left loose here gets renegotiated later, mid-search, when it's far more expensive to fix.

1 The role, and why it's open now

Not just a title. Why does this role exist, and why now? A backfill, a new function, a promotion that opened a gap below it: each implies a different kind of candidate. Write one sentence a hiring manager and a coordinator would both sign off on.

2 Compensation, as a real range

Not an aspirational number nobody can actually offer. The range you would sign an offer letter at today, agreed on before the first conversation with a candidate. Renegotiating comp mid-search is one of the most common ways a brief drifts, and it's the one candidates notice fastest.

3 Required vs. preferred qualifications

Two short lists, not one long one. Required: the role cannot function without it. Preferred: valuable, but you'd still hire someone missing it if everything else is strong. Skip this split and you end up screening for a mythical candidate who checks every box, then wondering why nobody's a "strong yes."

4 The approval chain

Who signs off on the eventual offer, and in what order? Decide this before the search starts, not when an offer is finally ready to go out. A search that stalls at approval after weeks of work is a process failure, not a market problem.

5 What interviewers will actually be asked

Give every interviewer the same two or three questions, tied to what the role needs, agreed on in advance. Without this, five interviewers form five different opinions of "strong," and the debrief becomes a negotiation instead of a comparison.

The brief, as a template

Fill this in before the first résumé gets reviewed. If you can't fill in a line yet, that's the conversation to have first.

ROLE

Title _____

Why open now _____

Reports to _____

COMPENSATION

Range (low to high) _____

Bonus / equity, if any _____

QUALIFICATIONS

Required — the role cannot function without this

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Preferred — valuable, not disqualifying

1. _____

2. _____

APPROVAL CHAIN

Order of sign-off _____

Who can override a hold _____

INTERVIEWER QUESTIONS

1. (tied to requirement above) _____

2. (tied to requirement above) _____

3. (tied to requirement above) _____

TIMELINE

Target first interview by _____

Target offer by _____

How briefs drift, even with good intentions

Brief drift rarely looks like a mistake. It looks like reasonable adjustments, made one at a time.

Scope creep

The role quietly picks up a second job's worth of requirements after the first few résumés look "almost right, but."

Comp renegotiation

An approver decides mid-search that the range was too generous, after candidates have already been told what's on offer.

A shifting "ideal candidate"

The hiring manager's mental picture of a strong hire evolves résumé by résumé, so candidate five is measured against a different bar than candidate one.

Silent vetoes

An interviewer who wasn't part of writing the brief applies their own bar in the room, and nobody catches the mismatch until the debrief.

Each of these is an argument for locking the brief in writing before the search starts, and treating any change to it as a real decision, not a quiet adjustment.

This is exactly the discipline Hireware's intake step enforces: compensation, qualifications, the approval chain, and interviewer questions, locked before a single résumé is reviewed.