Stanford eCorner

New Views on Recruitment

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With 34 full-time employees and 25 interns, Cooliris has brought innovation into attracting the best talent. Here, Product Manager Josh Schwarzapel and CEO Soujanya Bhumkar discuss their company's unique recruiting process for both engineers and interns. For the former, Schwarzapel sells the company to potential engineers during the interview as he would a VC - striving to get them excited, and giving away a small piece of proprietary information in the process. To find the best interns, the team identified and recruited well-respected and hypersocial "connector" students from top universities to evangelize the company and hand-pick the best available members of the "party team". In short, Cooliris gives weight to finding the top talent across the board, whether they are board members, full-time staff, or unpaid innovators.

Transcript

Great. So how many people are at the company now? Soujanya Bhumkar: We are right now around 34 full timers who we actually call as more than full time, and Austin and Kevin are all the time. Then we have another big gang of about 25 interns who we call as Party Teammates. I can see actually, second row here, RJ, Richard and all these guys are all from the Party Team. So we've leveraged the student horsepower and we've blended the two in terms of experience plus innovation and raw energy and condition energy to really drive innovation and collaboration. Tina Seelig: OK. So I know I got a chance to talk to you about this recruiting process that I think is brilliant. How many students in the room have been touched by Cooliris' recruiting efforts? Just a handful of you. Soujanya Bhumkar: Not many. You suck! Tina Seelig: Listen there's a few opportunity here.

I have to tell you, I would like Josh to tell a little bit the story here because when I met you, you had just started Cooliris. And one of the biggest challenges, of course it was during a big, I guess maybe we'll call it another bubble, the Bubble Echo. And it was really hard for you to recruit people. You were pulling your hair out trying to figure out, "How do I get really, really talented students to come to Cooliris?" And you ended up turning the assumptions upside down and doing some very creative things. Maybe you could tell us a little bit about that. Josh Schwarzapel: Sure. So there's really two paths for recruiting. One is recruiting full time engineers and the other was recruiting interns. On the full time side, what we really learned is you hear it everywhere people say, "A players, hire A players." And you've probably heard it at every ETL and no one ever says, "OK, so how do you hire A players?" And for us, we learned and we'd bring people in, we'd walk them in, we'd have them interview and every interview we would say, "We're doing this great stuff but we can't tell you and it's going to be really awesome and take

our word for it." And everyone they go, "OK." They'd go back and say, "OK. I have free food at Google and all these uninvested stock options and my life's pretty good.

I'm working in a big corporate job so the extra 20 hours a week at the start up, probably not a great thing." And we found that the really, really great amazing A plus people out there in the world are people that already have great opportunities. They're very sought after. So we completely reversed the process. And what we started doing, so we were in the Kleiner Perkins office, we'd walk them in through the front door of Kleiner Perkins. Walk them in, walk them past John Doerr, Bill Joy's office and Al Gore's office casually. Bring them across the bridge, make sure they stop and got the fancy drinks in the refrigerator. And then we'd sit them down and Soujanya was saying, we'd say, "We're going to sell this person like they're John Doerr. And bring them in and say it and really paint the picture for them." And it comes at a risk. You're giving away some information at the time but it really is a way to if you're going to get the best people, you have to get them excited. On the internship side, credit goes to Soujanya for this program.

Soujanya Bhumkar: It's really Matt Wall and Jonah who've turned the corner for us in that. Josh Schwarzapel: Yes. So I think what really helped us turn the corner was bringing in a couple of people, how many of you guys have read Malcolm Gladwell? "The Tipping Point" and they talk a lot about connectors. And we brought in a couple of people, specifically Matt Wall and Jonah Greenberger, a couple of students from here. That were both highly respected in the technical and engineering community but also very, very social and that's a combination you don't find all that much. And really sort of allowing them to evangelize the company for you and to move out and identify who the great people are and get them excited to come in. Tina Seelig: I also love the fact that once you started getting the parade of people coming in you took them all. Soujanya Bhumkar: Pretty much, yeah. Tina Seelig: You kind of decided, right? So how did you do that? What happened? Soujanya Bhumkar: The timing worked out great I think. So the product was done around January 15th timeframe and this basically a year ago.

Matt and Jonah would bring in people that they had met the night before or I don't know where they were picking them up from. Tina Seelig: Maybe we don't want to know all the details. Soujanya Bhumkar: I don't want to know that. But everybody was amazing. I mean they would really come in very passionate, very excited. We actually had one person who we didn't actually accept and then he wrote a very passionate letter saying, "Here's why I think..." So we brought him in again and we actually accepted him. It wasn't the case that we accepted everybody blindly. We did talk to every person. But the need of the company I think matched nicely with the student energy and passion that was available at that point in time. And then we said, "You know what, why not?" And Randy was very supportive of that idea.

Him being a guru again, he said, "Yes, let's try it out."