

Problems with Chasing the Perfect CTO Unicorn

1. Wastes Capital

Hiring someone just to impress the board isn't a viable strategy. If you create a position prematurely, promote an unprepared developer, or hire someone who clashes with your culture, you'll spend time and money undoing the damage. Instead, set job criteria based on real company needs. Savvy investors care less about titles and more about capability and scalability. Work with your current leadership team, technology department, or an expert CTO search firm to make your decisions.



2. Delays Hiring and Progress

When you're laser-focused on a perfect candidate, you delay the hiring process for months on end. Meanwhile, your engineering team lacks direction, your product backlog grows stale, and your leadership team struggles to make tech-informed decisions. Instead of waiting for a fantasy, take small, productive action. Set the expectations for a leader who can tackle a specific problem, like refining your minimum viable product (MVP) or building a development team.



3. Ignores Real Strengths

When you look for someone who does it all, you could ignore what a candidate does well and dismiss people for reasons that don't really matter in the long run. Instead of looking for all-around perfection, find a prospective CTO who will match your needs and company culture. Use specific and focused job requirements and interview questions to understand a candidate deeply.



4. Creates an Unstable Future Based on One Person

Even if you can find someone with a magical resume, expecting one individual to master and execute across many domains is unrealistic and unfair. They'll burn out. You could have to hire another CTO or restructure your entire technology department. Start by defining what success looks like for your current tech challenges. Sometimes, that means splitting the role.



5. Ignores Your Changing Needs

Trying to hire a single person to evolve through all the stages of your company can lead to significant misalignment later. Misalignment between company needs, potential growth, leadership expectations, and CTO capabilities is a recipe for frustration. Adjust your hiring process to find the right candidate for now and the near future, knowing that you can augment your leadership team later as growth demands change.

