

The Screening Gap

A capable applicant can disappear before anyone sees what they can do.

Hiring teams are trying to protect quality while moving quickly. **The question is not whether standards matter.** It is whether every early requirement is evidence that someone can do the work.

The first screen - automated or manual - often favors what is easy to verify: a degree, an unbroken work history, or exact resume language. Those signals can matter. But when an easy-to-check signal becomes a substitute for evidence, a capable applicant can be screened out before their experience is assessed.

Skills-first hiring does not lower the bar.

It makes the bar job-relevant: based on what the role actually requires, not on a signal that is simply easier to check.

What the evidence says

88%

of surveyed employers believed qualified high-skills candidates can be screened out for failing to match exact job-description criteria. The figure rose to 94% for middle-skills candidates.

HBS/Accenture, 2021 [1]

48%

of employers using recruitment systems reported filtering middle-skills candidates for employment gaps longer than six months.

HBS/Accenture, 2021 [1]

61%

of survey respondents agreed their organizations reject some people with the skills and experience to succeed in a middle-skills job because they lack a four-year degree.

HBS/Accenture, 2017 [2]

This is not a judgment about any one employer. Requirements can outlive the reason they were added. When a screen rewards a conventional path instead of evidence of the work, a capable person can never reach a real assessment.

SOURCES

[1] HBS & Accenture, *Hidden Workers: Untapped Talent* (2021), pp. 4, 23, 27.

[2] HBS, Accenture & Grads of Life, *Dismissed by Degrees* (2017), p. 18.

FROM SCREENING OUT TO SCREENING IN

Better screening. Same standards.

Skills-first hiring makes the first screen more precise - not more permissive.

What changed in Delaware

Family Service Specialist roles | State of Delaware Department of Human Resources

After replacing a bachelor's-degree requirement with relevant experience, Delaware DHR reported [3]:

575%

more applicants

13%

fewer non-qualified applicants

6%

lower vacancy rate

Source: Delaware DHR, Job Requirement Project Report (Dec. 31, 2024).

These are real-world results, not a universal formula. Some credentials are genuinely essential. The work is to distinguish them from proxies: signals that are easier to check than to justify.

The audit turns on one question:

Could a capable person fail this screen even though they can do the work?

Ablevate's free Hiring Audit: one live role

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2. **Test the first screen.** We separate job-critical requirements from preferences and possible proxy signals.
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