Founder’s Guide to Hiring an Operations Team in the Philippines

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I wrote this guide to help founders work with global talent (generally in the Philippines). At my last company (Rent the Backyard YC S19), we built an operations team of nearly 20 based in the Philippines. The team helped us with everything from payroll to sales proposals to procurement. The team helped extend my capabilities as a founder while extending the company’s runway and our chance of success.

The below methods are a combination of what’s worked for me and what I’ve seen others use.

Why the Philippines?

Great English

English is widely spoken and used in business, school, and media.

Well educated workforce

Filipino culture values education and the country has a strong set of colleges.

Cost-effective

Average incomes in the Philippines are around $300 per month (<$2 / hour). You can hire excellent talent for around the US minimum wage.

Traffic in the Philippines is notorious and post-Covid, many of the best workers in the country are now considering remote work.

Cultural Alignment

The US administered the Philippines from 1898 until 1941. >90% of Filipinos have a positive impression of the US. Many of the Filipinos I've worked with have watched shows like Friends.

Experience with Western companies

It's common for Filipinos to work with Western employers. Amazon, Microsoft, and others maintain large offices there. Many workers are accustomed to U.S. hours (with some restaurants even serving 2 a.m. "lunch" breaks).

That said, you'll often get better talent by offering flexible or asynchronous schedules so your team doesn't have to stay up all night.

What kind of work can operations team members do?

I've had the most success delegating tasks that:

- Have a clearly defined goal
- Require pattern recognition, personalization, or discretion
- PDF of 220 possible tasks [a]

Working styles

Hire directly: cheap, most control, takes more time

Source via OnlineJobs.ph [b].

Very much like a traditional hiring process. Focus on matching skills and past experience to what you need done.

Always pay for a representative sample task (can be done before an interview).

OnlineJobs.ph [b] offers generic contracts

Pay via Wise

Use a headhunter: faster to high quality, more expensive

If you don't have much experience hiring, it's a pretty good idea to work with a headhunter to see what good looks like.

Catena [c]

Headhunter agency my Filipino ex-McKinsey friend Monty started.

Email monty@withcatena.com [d] and tell them Spencer sent you for extra good service :)

Somewhere [e]

Headhunter agency buzzy on Twitter. No first-hand reports.

On demand work: pay per result, less relationship

If you have a large quantity of the same work (especially if it isn't ongoing), use one of these services.

Pareto [f]

Great for high-volume work on the same tasks (data collection, sourcing, labelling, etc). Started by my Stanford friend Phoebe.

Mechanical Turk [g] / similar

Good for cheap, super high volume work but quality can be very poor

How to work with operations team members

Favor asynchronous updates. For managers, add regular 1:1s as you would with local hires.

Instructions / tasks

- Record yourself doing the tasks with Loom and narrate what you're doing
- Ask hires to create SOPs from your videos and store them in Notion / similar to make onboarding / delegation easy as the

Accountability

- Track tasks in Linear / Asana / Notion / similar
- Track hours with Clockify (or via a daily “what did you get done” email)
- Use Slack or WhatsApp for communication

Cultural norms

- You will probably be called sir or ma’am quite a bit.
- Whenever anything is slightly wrong you will probably receive a very quick, (sometimes over the top by American standards) apology. People will occasionally resign if they think they have done particularly poorly (don’t worry - you can usually get the back and they will appreciate you more).
- People in the Philippines are generally very deferential to their bosses. If you would like your team member’s input / honest opinion you should ask them a lot of questions and try to avoid letting them know what your opinion is.
- It is generally expected (and is the law for employers in the Philippines) to give “13-month pay” (one month’s pay as a bonus) in early December. If you’re going to do this include it in the job description.

Retention

- Turnover may be high in the first couple of months, but once someone settles in, they tend to stay long-term.

More resources

- OnlineJobs.ph [b] has a helpful YouTube channel [h]

My job posting and hiring flow

You’ll receive a lot of applicants. Requiring a specific response format helps you quickly see who actually read the description and saves everyone time.

I lean toward relatively complex trial tasks to confirm the candidate is detail-oriented and can follow written instructions and Loom videos.

Pay will vary by role. Look for comps online and include a (fairly wide) range in the description.

Example job description

I'm looking for full-time help with basic research, staying organized, and creating customized marketing proposals for customers.

Some tasks you will do to help my company, Rent the Backyard:

- Track purchases being made
- Prepare presentations for customers by filling out templates
- Document what questions are being asked in Facebook groups. Help prepare responses and build a "answer bank."
- Search LinkedIn for prospective job candidates based on clear background and experience criteria

The most important skill for this job is **strong organizational skills and attention to detail**

I'm also looking for someone with

- A "can do" attitude and willingness to take on tasks of any size
- At least two hours of overlap with US Pacific business hours (07:30 - 19:30 in UTC-07:00) Monday - Friday
- Pay: . This will depend on your level of skill and other people that apply for the job

Perks

- Flexible hours—as long as you have at least **six** hours of overlap with U.S. Pacific business hours (07:30–19:30, UTC-07:00) Monday–Friday.
- Salary plus overtime (paid for hours >40/week).
- Flexible vacation (just coordinate in advance).
- Opportunities to advance and earn bonuses for strong performance.
- 13 month pay.

About me

- I run a company that builds houses in a factory (Rent the Backyard). I have been working with folks in the Philippines / VAs for about four years now and all my team members have been very happy to work with me. You will be given the opportunity to speak with a current team member before you are hired.

To apply

- Email me with the subject line: **"I want to work for you and [insert my co-founder (business partner's) name]"**
- At the top of the email, write **two sentences** on why you want this role and why you're a good fit. (More or less than two sentences will disqualify your application.)
- Below that, include the following (use the letters **A/B** to label your answers):
  - **A.** Years of experience with research and purchasing
  - **B.** Software you've used for these tasks

Make sure to follow all of the steps above. This is a great opportunity with the ability to get bonuses and raises, so I will only look at applicants that really want the job. If I decide to interview you, there will be a short call between us where video will be required. I will also give you a quick (paid) trial task before an interview.

Thank you and I look forward to reading your application,

Spencer

Reply to a correctly formatted application

Hi **[Name]**,

You look like a strong fit, and I'd like to interview you.

Please pick a time here: **[Calendly link]**

Then email me at **[email]** with the subject line **"I have scheduled an interview with you"** and include the time you selected in the body.

If none of the listed times work, let me know. I try not to ask candidates to stay up late or wake up early, given the time-zone difference.

Before we meet, please complete this short sample assignment: **[link to assignment]**

- You will be paid **$10** via PayPal or Wise for completing it.
- Please track how long this takes you to complete it.
- **Deadline:** Midnight U.S. Pacific (UTC-07:00) the night before our interview. If we're interviewing today, it's due by **11:00 a.m.**
- If I don't receive the assignment, I'll assume you're not moving forward and will cancel the interview.

Thank you,

Spencer

Example project from a friend's CPG nutritional company

Project for VA - English Writer

I'm very excited to see your results on this small project. Hopefully, it will not take too long. If you need help along the way, please let me know.

The instructions below will help guide you through the assignment. Most of the information will be gathered from the internet. Please send everything in one email to « email » with the subject line "I am Ready To Start Working"

1. Go to http://www.speedtest.net/ and take a screenshot of your test results and attach it.
2. Take a screenshot of how much free space you have on your hard drive as well. We will be sharing a Dropbox so the more free room the better, but if you don't have very much that is okay as there are workarounds.
3. This is a link to our website: performancenutbutter.com. Please send back the following:

- The link to our five closest competitors
- Why do you think these products are competitors?

1. Please create a Google spreadsheet with the following information: -Title - Performance Nut Butter Social Media

- Please make the following columns. Instagram Handle of Account, Instagram Post Link (link to instagram image), Potential Comment, Notes (How you found them)
- One of your possible tasks would be finding people who would potentially be interested in buying Performance Nut Butter and commenting on their Instagram. I would like you to find 5 users of Instagram who fit this criteria and come up with a sample comment you would leave on one of their posts as if you were posting from the PNB account. Please also fill out the notes section on why you choose them.
- Include a sharing link in the email response to me. I must be able to edit the sheet. Not simply view it.

1. Put the link to your OnlineJobs.ph profile.

Please email this back to me by 11:59 PM (PST) the night before your interview. If I do not receive this from you, I will not interview you. If there's anything that needs to be clarified, please let me know. It's my job to offer help when I can.

If they did well on the project

Subject: Next step — Interview confirmation

Thank you—excited to interview you.

Please note the time is **U.S. Pacific (UTC-07:00)**. If that's not what you expected, use the calendar invite link to reschedule or tell me what works and we'll find a time.

This is a **video** call and video is required.

Thanks,

Spencer

If they did poorly on the project

Subject: Application update

Hello,

Thank you for completing the project. Unfortunately, I don't think this role is the right fit at this time, so I'll cancel the interview to save us both time.

I'll keep your information on file and may reach out for future roles.

Thank you,

Spencer

Interview questions & scoring

Schedule 20 minutes; aim to finish in 15. Skip as needed, but always ask about preferred name/nickname, prior VA (virtual assistant) experience, and English-language work.

| Profile Rating | Project Rating | Interview Rating | Other Rating | Desired Salary | Note s | | — | — | — | — | — | — |

Questions

1. Hi [Name] — do you prefer to be called [Name] or another name/nickname?
    - This is the most important question in the whole interview. Some people go by nicknames that are very different and will often not correct you…
2. Are you currently working? What do you do now?
3. Tell me about your last job.
4. What did you like most about it?
5. How would your manager describe you?
6. How would your best friend describe you?
7. What do you like to do outside of work?
8. Beyond a paycheck, what are you hoping to learn or get from this job?
9. What does a good manager look like to you?
10. How many hours a week do you want to work?
11. Do you have your own computer and reliable internet?
12. What do you do if the internet goes out?
13. Have you worked for foreign (English-speaking) employers before?
14. Where will you work from?
    1. Is it a quiet environment?
15. Where are you located in the Philippines?
16. If you could talk with anyone (living or dead), who and why? *(Optional—can get emotional.)*
17. What monthly pay are you looking for? I'm hiring full-time.
18. Who do you live with (if anyone)?
19. What are your plans over the next five years?
20. When could you start?
21. I liked this conversation. As a side note, how many other companies are you interviewing with right now?
22. Here are the next steps in the process: [outline them].
23. Any questions for me?

Hiring email

Subject: Offer: **[Role Title]** at **[Company]**

Hi [Name]—thanks for speaking with me.

Congratulations! We'd like to offer you the position of **[Role]**, starting as soon as today if you're available.

Compensation: USD **$[amount]/month**, plus the following perks:

- Work whenever you want with at least **six hours** of overlap with U.S. Pacific (09:30–19:30, UTC-07:00), Monday–Friday
- Fully flexible schedule (around 40 hrs/week; more if you choose)
- Overtime paid for hours >40/week
- **13th-month bonus** (first year prorated)
- Team bonus tied to company goals
- **VA Retreat:** All-expenses-paid 5-day retreat around Feb/Mar next year (somewhere in the Philippines but possibly internationally like Bali or Vietnam)
- Flexible vacation (coordinate in advance)
- Clear growth path with raises/bonuses for strong performance

I've sent your employment offer via **[platform]**. Please let me know if you have questions. I'm very excited to work together!

Spencer

My first-day email

Subject: Welcome to **[Company]:** Start Here

Hi [Name],

Welcome to **[Company]**—we're excited to have you!

Please start by reviewing our onboarding doc: **[link]**

This covers tools, expectations, and includes a short intro prompt.

You're one of the first to use this version. Please let me know what parts are unclear so we can improve them.

You'll work closely with **[Teammate]** (cc'd) this week. After onboarding, they'll assign your first tasks.

Thanks and welcome aboard!

Spencer

Another person's first-day email

Hi **[name]**,

Here is the first day orientation doc

https://docs.google.com/document/d/189Pb3SlNZk8z5SQnfPQywlqnKsmV1PZsEZ464j3jiIg/edit?usp=sharing

Throughout this whole process your job is to tell me anything that doesn't make sense.

I want to hire a second person soon to help me with social media, and I want them to be able to learn everything without me teaching them. Meaning that everything they need to know including the step by step should be organized.

A lot of it already should be organized but anything that isn't it's your job to make it more clear so the next person we hire will be able to read the documentation and know what to do without you having to teach them.

Hopefully get some of this done before your first day so we can hit the ground running but if you don't that is okay.

Please keep track of your time while you are setting everything up. I will be paying you for this time. But in the future we will be using hubstaff to track your time.

Thank you, **[your name]**

Links

a. drive.google.com/file/d/1Nkl9iYfyuTTRfe0pfSdklgdLNciVCaoi/view
b. OnlineJobs.ph
c. withcatena.com
d. mailto:Monty@withcatena.com
e. somewhere.com
f. hellopareto.com
g. mturk.com
h. youtube.com/channel/UCXKa0JRgZg0kiZbU_w5bW0A