

# FOUNDER'S GUIDE TO HIRING THE BEST ENGINEERING LEADER

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## SOLVE FOR THE TASK AT HAND

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This is a framework for any CEO looking to hire an executive to take their company's engineering team to the next order of magnitude in scale and sophistication on their journey to IPO. It is domain and business model agnostic but based on the cumulative insights of over 250 CTO and VP Engineering appointments across consumer, marketplace and b2b SaaS scaleups.

## PIONEER, SETTLER, TOWN PLANNER, CITY DWELLER

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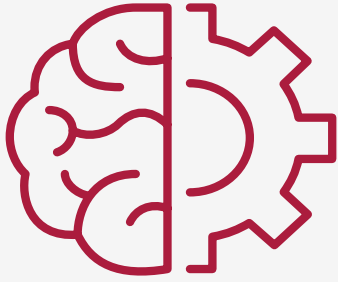
Everyone's company is unique, but 80% of the archetype profile for your next two years can be captured with this framework. Do you seek a Pioneer, Settler, Town Planner or City Dweller? Most engineering leaders will have a distinct preference for one of these stages to IPO. Some can straddle two but no single leader would be your best choice for all three. Ideally, you want to find someone who has most recently had success at the specific stage you are embarking on. The only exception is where you expect hypergrowth and wish to hire someone two stages ahead for speed. This guide is designed for you to explore the responsibilities and mindset of leaders at each stage. What are the best trade-offs and priorities at each step of scale? Do they have the muscle memory for what you need them to be doing from the outset?

## DON'T OVER-INDEX FOR BRAND

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Beware of The City Dweller. This is the person who has built a team that appears similar in size to the journey you are embarking on, but within a tech giant. Once a company's engineering organization is measured in the thousands, the roles of engineering leaders can become very niche. These people are well versed at articulating what great looks like, but have had great laid out **for them**, rather than designed and delivered **by them**. Some people make the transition from public to private well, but you need to be particularly attentive to how they demonstrate a growth mindset and first principles thinking for them to successfully make the transition.

The following pages describe how each stage of leader thinks about their leadership priorities in terms of People, Process, Product and Stakeholder Management.



# ENGINEERING LEADERSHIP PRIORITIES

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## PEOPLE

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They range from tactical and unstructured to strategic and frameworks driven

## PROCESS

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They range from prioritizing speed of feature delivery and dynamic context switching of priorities to being more systematic, methodical and paying down technical debt

## PRODUCT

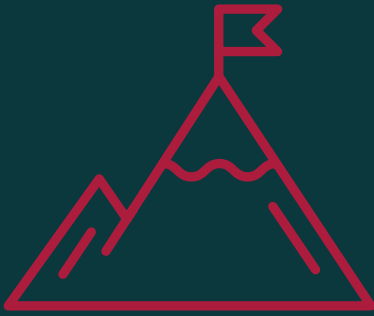
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They range from code committers and tools selection to making architectural choices for scale and resilience and delegating technical choices to avoid bottlenecks

## STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT

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They range from a narrow focus of engagement with engineering and product to a wider remit with customers, investors and non-technical executives.



# PIONEER SEED STAGE INVESTMENT

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## PEOPLE

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0 to <20 engineers, leads through technical example, seeks energy and pace in peers, short term horizons on people development.

## PROCESS

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Focus is on speed of feature release and customer impact to find PMF, trading off quality (bugs) and architectural scalability (hacks together a monolith).

## PRODUCT

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Technical contributor. Strong technical abilities in tools selection, languages, and committing production code. Hacking together a monolith to find PMF.

## STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT

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Whilst deep personal relationships with the founding non-technical team, normally less adept at explaining technical decisions to non-technical team members. A peer relationship based on trust to execute in their function without any detailed reporting of outputs.



# SETTLER SERIES A-C INVESTMENT

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## PEOPLE

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Player / coach style. Crafting team leads from ICs. Great recruiter of Principal Engineers and Eng Managers. Implements V1 of Conway's Law (Org to mirror product architecture). Typically takes a team from >20 to <100 in scale (Series A-C).

## PROCESS

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Keeps a focus on speed of feature development and more granular PMF to find repeatable motions, but starts to plan for quality (develops), scalability, reliability, re-usability. Sets up more detailed OKRs to bring visibility into planning. Builds first budgets.

## PRODUCT

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The first 'decomposition' of the monolith begins. A player coach to engineering team, must win the technical respect of principal engineers but not do their job and be a bottleneck. Has to evenly balance pace of new feature development with strategic decisions on 'good enough' for technical debt being incurred and a plan for resolving in the future.

## STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT

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The EQ to take over from a co-founding tech leader and agree division of labour but normally being the direct report to the CEO. Establishing the tone for exec team and board reporting of engineering deliverables / prioritization. Normally bringing more reliability and visibility for planning and budgeting.



# TOWN PLANNER

## SERIES D+

## INVESTMENT

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### PEOPLE

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The stature to recruit and mentor other VPs. Leads through leaders. Big focus on vision through which others execute and Organisational Health and Employer Brand. Typically takes a team from 100+ to multiple hundreds (Series D to IPO).

### PROCESS

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A systems thinker. Has a philosophy for maintaining speed of development but complexity in synchronising across offices, time zones and cultures. Sets and drives metrics of success to reinforce repeatability, deduplication, scalability and reliability.

### PRODUCT

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The Unicorn Town Planner can unblock deep technical issues but mostly they hire teams to do this. Player coaching is delegated to lieutenant VPs and Directors. Architecturally moving from product to platform, big focus on quality, scalability, reliability. Often commercially astute enough to run product and engineering.

### STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT

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Strong EQ and commercially oriented in order to build trust with investors, non-technical leaders internally and clients. Often the public voice for technology vision of the company. The translator of technical vision to non-technical stakeholders.



# CITY DWELLER

## 10K + EMPLOYEES

### PUBLIC COMPANY

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#### PEOPLE

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Can lead teams of hundreds and sometimes up to a 1,000+ engineers. Already in a public company setting. Recruiting systems are already scaled and automated for you with little need for personal networks. The brand sells itself.

#### PROCESS

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Focus is on adapting to the processes, systems and governance already in place with some room to tweak in your product / business area.

#### PRODUCT

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Technology Decisions are narrow in scope. They can make individual selections for features but the core platform tools are decided above them.

#### STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT

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Mostly peer engagement with the product and engineering plus reporting to a technical leader. Can become quite silo'd and far from the customer which impacts gravitas with boards and executive operators. No requirement for financial acumen - budgets are decided for you.

## CONTACT

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