END-OF-YEAR HIRING

The Waiting Tax

What delaying hiring until next quarter actually costs you.

6-8 MONTHS

of full contribution lost by moving one requisition from October to January.

Same role, same 44-day search. Only the start date changed.

01 — A January start date is three delays, not one.

Three separate lags compound on top of one another, and only the first is usually budgeted for.

44
DAYS TO FILL
Cross-industry average, climbing four years running. Specialized and senior roles run well past it.

Feb–Mar
BONUS TIMING
Payout dates keep passive talent in seat, turning a January hire into an April start. Earlier in the cycle, a full incentive year strengthens your offer without touching base pay.

6-8
MONTHS TO RAMP
Gallup puts median time to full productivity at 8.2 months for mid-level professionals.

> A paused search does not restart where it stopped. Visibility drops and engaged talent moves on, which puts you 60 to 90 days behind rather than back at the starting line.

02 — The market does not go

Employer postings dip between October and December while candidate activity holds steady, which leaves a smaller field competing for the same talent. Year-end is when people take stock of their careers, and it is also when most of their potential employers stop answering.

quiet in Q4. Employers do.

+23.8%	Applications per job, Q3 to Q4. Applications historically increase during the timeframe.
42%	Of professionals are actively searching
85%	Of professionals are at least somewhat open to a move

03 — Waiting one quarter costs you two.

A requisition opened in early January does not reach full contribution until the first of September, so the role frozen to protect this year's budget quietly consumes half of next year's.

A · OPEN IN OCTOBER	
Requisition opens	**October 1**
Offer accepted, 44 days	**November 14**
Start, after notice	**December 1**
Full contribution	**June 1**

B · WAIT FOR JANUARY	
Requisition opens	**January 2**
Offer accepted, 44 days	**February 15**
Start, after notice	**March 1**
Full contribution	**September 1**



04 —

Put a number on it.

Two steps model it from figures a client already has on hand.

STEP 1 · COUNT THE LOST DAYS

(Days from requisition to start date) + (Ramp days × 0.5)

Ramp days count at half productivity, which keeps the figure conservative. A January requisition on the timeline above produces 58 days before the start date and 182 days of ramp, or 149 lost days.

STEP 2 · APPLY THE VALUE OF THE ROLE

(Annual salary × Value multiplier) × (Lost days ÷ 365)

Choosing the value multiplier. Standard planning ranges run from entry-level and administrative roles up to senior leadership, where strategic impact compounds.

VALUE MULTIPLIERS

- 1X entry-level and administrative
- 2X individual contributor
- 2.5X manager
- 3X senior leadership

Any finance team that already models revenue per employee should substitute its own figure.

WORKED EXAMPLE · CONTROLLER SEARCH	
Annual salary	**$145,000**
Value multiplier, manager	**2.5X**
Annual value of the role	**$362,500**
Days from requisition to start	**58**
Ramp days at half productivity	**91**
Lost days	**149**
The Waiting Tax	**≈ $148,000**

Adjust the multiplier to your own model and the number moves. The 149 days do not.

05 —

For finance and technology teams, timing makes a greater impact.

Accounting & Finance

Close, audit prep, and tax season all land in Q1, so a controller who starts in March arrives after the work they were hired to manage has already happened. Public accounting firms recruit hard in November and December for the same reason, which means clients who wait compete against firms that moved first.

Information Technology

Technical work is sequenced, so a delayed hire does not delay a single task, it delays a roadmap. Every initiative downstream of that role moves with it, and the compounding is rarely visible in the original hiring decision.

06 —

A freeze on headcount is not a freeze on capability.

A year-end freeze usually freezes headcount, not budget. Interim Staffing and Project Solutions engagements typically sit in a project or operating line rather than an approved FTE line, so you can bring in senior talent now, cover the year-end crunch, and keep the work moving while the permanent requisition waits for January. That engagement doubles as a working audition, which reduces the hiring risk that prompted the caution in the first place.

For roles that need to be permanent from day one, Direct Hire and Executive & Retained Search put you in market during the quarter your competitors go quiet, so the offer is signed before the January field gets crowded.

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SOURCES

Applications per job and job seeker sentiment: Employ Inc. Quarterly Insights and 2025 Job Seeker Nation Report.

Time to fill, 44 days cross-industry average: Employ Inc. recruiting benchmark data.

Time to full productivity: Gallup (median 8.2 months, mid-level professionals) and Harvard Business Review (six to twelve months cross-industry).

Cost-of-vacancy method: annual value of role model, value multipliers applied by role level.