



How Ethos Life grew their engineering team by 6x

A customer story with Ethos Life



Challenge

In March 2019, Ethos Life was preparing to raise its next funding round. The company needed to simultaneously grow its software engineering team and accelerate an ambitious product development roadmap. The goal was to rapidly deploy new technologies to transform the customer experience in a very old industry—life insurance.

VP of Engineering, Vipul Sharma, leads the team responsible for that innovation. “Ethos is a modern solution for life insurance and we’re leveraging advanced technologies such as machine learning and predictive analytics on top of a complex platform built by our team. This requires a strong engineering team at the heart of the operation, so being able to properly identify and bring in engineering talent is definitely important in positioning Ethos to succeed.”

To successfully identify and hire the right engineering talent, Ethos developed interviewer training, but the volume of interviews hampered the engineering team’s ability to do their jobs simultaneously. The talent acquisition team surveyed Ethos’ engineers about their interview load and found that the majority of the team felt overburdened by interviews.

VP of Engineering, Vipul Sharma observed, “engineers were spending two to five hours each week on interviews and about one to three hours preparing and sharing feedback with the team.

Interviewing is a productive use of time as it allows us to build our team. However, we had to consider that when engineers are interviewing, this is time they’re not able to spend on high priority projects.”

“A live interview helps us see seniority in communication style.”

Prior to partnering with Karat, Ethos evaluated code testing tools and a homegrown test to identify the right candidates with the goal of maximizing hiring yield. However, VP of Talent Acquisition, Tina Tian, quickly realized that those tools failed to evaluate the seniority of a candidate.

“For example, the test might be ‘Write an app.’ Ok, we could verify that it worked,” said Tian.

Case study in brief

▲ CHALLENGE

6x software engineering headcount across Austin, Singapore, and San Francisco in less than 12 months while meeting aggressive product goals.

👁 SOLUTION

Transition from automated code tests to live technical interviews aligned to the Ethos Life hiring bar, conducted by Karat Interview Engineers.

▮ RESULTS

Improved morale

35 senior software engineer hires

400 hours developer time reclaimed

93% of candidates report a positive experience

“But it made it hard to say that the seniority is there, which we really look for in communication style. A live interview helps us see seniority in communication style. Like how a candidate takes feedback and how they work with other teams to approach a methodology. Everyone has opinions on how to approach an issue, but the most important thing is how they work together. Take home tests can’t identify that.”

At the same time, Sharma saw that the test would not scale. “Creating and reviewing the take home tests took engineering time. Additionally, we missed the opportunity to have candidates walk us through their thought process or show us their communication and working style.

Our technical calls solved this, but again, it was taking engineering hours to build the test, administer or attend the interview, and review afterward. Our team understands how important it is to build the best team and was willing to put in the time and effort. However, this was not the ideal setup. We were, at the time, and are still, building rapidly and constantly require all hands on deck.”

Then, a member of the engineering team suggested Karat. “We had to quantify the value engineering time, once we did, it was significant. We realized that using an external partner would have a high ROI. Internal bandwidth was important, that’s why we went with Karat,” said Tian.

Solution

Today, Karat conducts first-round technical interviews on behalf of Ethos for Back End, Front End, Full Stack, Data Science, and SWE 1 roles in Austin, Singapore, and San Francisco. To get started, Karat’s Alignment Engineers worked with the Ethos team to identify competencies that accurately represented the Ethos hiring bar. After two calibrations, the competencies for each role properly represented the seniority and coding style needed to be successful on the Ethos Life engineering team.

“Defining our bar was a step forward for us. It allowed our team and the Karat team to be on the same page with the candidates we wanted to attract and hire,” noted Sharma. “Long-term, this saved time and created more trust in the process. As a result, we were able to gradually have more candidates go through the Karat process, and more candidates aligned with what we were looking for on the engineering team.” Tian added, “we ended up with a framework that quantifiably tells us what each approach to solving the question really means. If they’re an 8 out of 10 in algorithms, then the candidate is a ‘yes’, but if they’re an 8 out of 10 in systems design, then it’s a ‘no.’” She advises future Karat partners, “it’s really valuable for talent acquisition and engineering to spend time to build that framework with Karat.”

Results

Today, Sharma says, “the end result is our stellar team and growth trajectory. The other thing is that [Karat] allowed us to reflect on what kind of team we wanted to build, and the caliber of engineers needed to get us there.”

Ethos has not only reclaimed engineering time previously dedicated to interviewing and evaluating code tests, but realized efficiencies on the recruiting team as well.

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“The cost is a no-brainer, we can turn any recruiter into a tech recruiter overnight,” said Tian. She added, “engineering trusts the [Karat] recommendations and lets talent acquisition run with the process, they say ‘I trust your judgement.’”

The engineering team is also more open when talent acquisition asks them to do a final round interview, because they’re more confident the candidate will be someone they want to hire.

“We’ve definitely seen an improvement in morale. Our engineers are some of the most talented individuals you’ll encounter, and it’s a clear value add for them and the broader team when they can dedicate more time to product launches, code reviews, and generally building the Ethos products,” said Sharma.

“The advantage we saw in Karat was our ability to look at the candidate’s code and evaluate technical skills, but also see the interview recordings, which give us a preview into the candidate’s communication skills and working style. This gives a very balanced view of the candidate, and it allows us to be as involved or hands-off as we’d like. This also helps with the quality checks as we can always see how candidates are being evaluated.”

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Quantitative results



93% of candidates rate the experience and Interview Engineer 4 or 5 stars



47% interview on nights and weekends



77% interview completion rate, up from 70%



Over 400 hours of producting coding time saved

ABOUT ETHOS LIFE

Ethos is a new kind of life insurance provider making getting coverage easy and accessible for millions of families. Ethos uses predictive analytics and sophisticated data technology to eliminate traditional barriers to life insurance and bring the industry into the modern age. The company built its technology from the ground up with a focus on creating a seamless customer experience; a mobile-first, online application process that takes minutes instead of weeks, and offering coverage without a medical exam for most applicants. The result is a life insurance company that puts people first.

getethos.com

ABOUT KARAT

Karat conducts live, highly predictive technical interviews and powers world-class hiring processes for leading organizations like Indeed, Intuit, and Pinterest.

The company’s network of experienced Interview Engineers have conducted tens of thousands of technical interviews with software engineering job candidates. Clients increase capacity to interview with structure and consistency all while providing exceptional candidate experiences. Karat has amassed the largest, most robust dataset of structured-interview intelligence to produce never-before-seen hiring analytics.

karat.com