
THE QUEST FOR HIGH CALIBER TALENT



"THE EMPLOYER GENERALLY GETS THE EMPLOYEES HE DESERVES."
WALTER RALEIGH, SR.

The Quest for High Caliber Talent

THE STRUGGLE TO ATTRACT QUALITY TALENT



Human resource professionals and executive teams are finding it increasingly difficult to land the type of talent needed to truly impact their organization's success. This quandary traverses industries, impacting both high and low tech companies. Why is finding just the right talent so crucial? An organization that has a focused, unified and productive workforce has a decided advantage over its competition. In an environment where new and better technology is rapidly developed and easily available; it is an organization's human talent that can truly make it stand head and shoulders above its competitors. Why are companies struggling to find quality people?

The intersection of several factors has made the hunt for viable talent increasingly complex. An ad for an open position in your organization may net hundreds of resumes. Yet, how many of those applicants have the skills required for the position? Employers have discovered that even among applicants with the required credentials, several lack "on the job" skills needed to be successful in the workplace. As a result, there has been a growing outcry among educators, experts, political and business leaders for reforms to our educational system.

Modern technology requires that today's workforce increase their level of technological skills in order to keep up in today's job market. However, many employers lament the lack of critical thinking and communication skills that ultimately lead to their new talents' demise within their organizations. Businesses usually seek talent based on a hard skill set; yet, it is usually a deficiency in soft skills, or people skills that prevents the candidate from succeeding in an organization. This leads to costly turnover which has a negative effect on both your bottom line, and company morale. What other factors impact your ability to find quality talent?

The much discussed "graying of our workforce" means that baby boomers (those born between 1946 and 1964) who currently compose 46% of our workforce are inching ever closer to retirement. Generation X (those born between 1965 and 1983) comprise just 29% of the current workforce and do not have the capacity to fill the positions that baby boomers are leaving behind. Additionally, Generation X, in response to its disillusionment with decades of mergers, acquisitions, and downsizing is more inclined to opt for the route of entrepreneurship over the corporate fast track. The explosive growth of entrepreneurship over the past decade will most likely continue, further impacting your ability to find and keep good employees.

In light of the above factors, what can your organization do to become a talent magnet? Better yet, how can you attract top talent that will help your organization to successfully achieve its short-term and long-term goals? Visionary companies have discovered that their talent is their most valuable resource; many have made the attraction and retention of top performers one of their top priorities. How can your organization develop a strategy that will enable you to attract high caliber talent? First, start with a careful introspection. Does your organization have the courage to do this?

GUIDED BY A CLEARLY DEFINED VISION

Does your organization have a clearly defined vision? How does it relate to the goals that you have outlined for your company and each individual employee? Has this message been communicated organization wide with unquestionable clarity? Does your vision have a daily impact upon the decisions of your executive team and your workforce? Does each of your employees understand their role in this vision? Have you established core values and a core ideology? What impact do they have upon your organization's hiring, performance management, career progression and employee termination decisions? If you are reluctant to answer these questions; it is time for your organization to make a careful assessment of itself. This will enable you to either develop a meaningful vision or bring your current vision into focus. Why is this necessary?

An organization whose members are unclear about its vision and mission, its plans and goals and their role in the achievement of these goals will lack focus, and efficiency. The overall effectiveness of the organization will suffer. Vagueness and uncertainty breeds a lack of accountability that can easily shipwreck an organization's ability to compete and its future success. How can your organization demonstrate the clarity needed to attract top talent?

Jim Collins and Jerry Porras, authors of *Built to Last*, performed extensive studies involving long time, top performers like Disney, 3M and Nordstrom to discover why these organizations experienced such long-term success. A clearly defined vision, core ideology, core values and strong organizational cultures that supported this vision were common factors among these leading organizations. A guiding vision centers these organizations and all other decisions are made around achieving their goals and remaining true to their vision. What impact will a clearly defined, motivating vision have upon your ability to attract top talent?



An individual with an honest sense of themselves (their desires, hopes, dreams, likes and dislikes) has a much better idea of what type of person they are seeking as a life partner. They also have a lower tolerance for those who do not meet their standards. While this person may be weeding out many, many possible life mates, the prospects that are left will more likely be a good match. Likewise, an organization with a clear understanding of who it is and what it wants to achieve will be able to clearly define the characteristics sought in prospective talent.

Seeking talent that is already closely aligned with your vision and goals will have a positive effect upon your organization. The experience of visionary companies has proven that it is much more effective to bring in candidates that already buy into your organization's vision and goals. How can your organization refocus its current recruiting efforts to a more successful approach? How can a candidate's ability to integrate into your organization be gauged? Is there a way to determine the likelihood that a candidate will fit in with your company culture and their prospective team?

EQUIP YOUR HUMAN RESOURCE TEAM FOR SUCCESS

A company that has a clear, concise picture of who it is, what it wants to accomplish and who will get it there is in a good position. However, it must next assess its current workforce to identify skill gaps. This will help the organization to determine what hard skills are needed from its future workforce. However, the soft skills of new talent may play an even larger role in their ability to adapt to the organization's culture and support its mission. While today's marketplace demands ever increasing technological savvy, many employers have discovered that an applicant who is "a good fit" can easily be taught these skills. Conversely, an organization that hires talent with the right tech skills, but a complete inability to mesh with the organization or its core ideology is often vastly disappointed.



A growing wave of human resource experts believe that organizations deprive themselves of a host of viable applicants by demanding a laundry list of technological skills or educational credentials that may have much less of a bearing on the position than the person's inclination toward the values and core ideology of the organization. An executive team should carefully decide which hard skill sets are essential to the position they are attempting to fill. However, just as much weight should be given to finding a candidate with an enthusiastic propensity for the ideals that are key to your organization's vision and your company's culture.

Many organizations have gone a step further by opting to enlist the services of a qualified human resource consultant. An experienced, knowledgeable consultant can help your organization to develop interview questions, templates and questionnaires that will aid in determining a potential candidate's personality traits and characteristics and how these compare with the needs of your organization. Organizations that have taken such proactive measures have experienced a high return on investment as the reduction of costly turnover has far outweighed the price of such services.

Before your organization begins its recruiting efforts consider equipping your human resource team with the following:

- A clearly defined organizational vision
- Specific organizational goals in line with your vision
- An honest assessment of the current workforce including current and future skill gaps
- A list of characteristics and skills that are non-negotiable as they seek new talent
- A list of desired skills and traits that could possibly be taught to otherwise qualified applicants
- Assessments, questionnaires or other valuable tools provided by a skilled, experienced human resource consultant

Your organization will experience marked success in attracting and retaining qualified candidates when you make a well-prepared search for potential talent that will have a meaningful impact upon your organization and complement your current company culture. How, though, can your organization find such high caliber talent in the current competitive talent market?

BUILD A REPUTATION THAT WILL ATTRACT TALENT

Most organizations realize the importance of developing a good reputation with their external customers, in their community and perhaps even among their competitors. However, two other groups are largely overlooked; their current employees (internal customers) and their potential talent. Why must you develop a good reputation with your current employees? What impact will this have upon your ability to compete in the marketplace and attract high quality talent?

An organization's reputation among its employee base has a ripple effect that can either facilitate or hinder its ability to attract new talent. Whether your organization utilizes **employer branding** or not, it does indeed have a brand among both your current and potential workforce. Employer branding refers to the personality of a company as regards its employment of staff. Your brand gives potential employees a glimpse of what it is like to work for your organization, and why your employees want to stay on board. The concept of employer branding is utilized in both the recruiting and retention efforts of a growing number of organizations. Have you considered the importance of your brand?

The use of employer branding is spreading across the board and the majority of companies surveyed have plans to utilize this HR marketing concept in the near future. How can your organization use employer branding in its quest to become an "employer of choice"?

While the concept of employer branding is a complex one involving the use of marketing, public relations, customer service, advertising, psychology, and human resource management it can be quite effective when it is built around an intimate knowledge of your target market; your current and potential talent. Time must be invested in learning what current employees and potential talent expect and whether or not your organization is delivering. A growing number of consultancy firms specialize in helping employers develop a powerful employer brand that speaks to their current and future employee base and is consistent with their organizational climate.

Developing a strong employer brand will make your organization stand out among its competitors and top talent will seek out opportunities within your organization. How can you do this?

- Provide a meaningful work experience for your employees
- Give them the ability to continue to learn and grow within your organization
- Develop a strong community connection and support causes that are in line with your organization's vision and your employees' interests
- Offer competitive pay and benefits and flexibility that acknowledges your employees right to a life outside of work

Remember, your efforts will backfire if your organization is content with simply creating the illusion of being an "employer of choice." Your employees will grow resentful and cynical if your organization is not consistent with your brand. This will result in damaging word of mouth that will no doubt reach potential talent. New employees will also notice any deviation from promises made during the recruiting process and their new reality. Therefore, it is imperative that your organization deliver on its promises.

THE LAWS OF ATTRACTION

Armed with clear parameters for building your workforce and effective employer branding; your human resource team or recruiters must now begin putting these “laws” or guidelines into action. The next items that require careful attention are your job descriptions and employment advertisements. Have you overlooked the significance of these tools in the past? Do not minimize the role your ads play in attracting the talent that you truly want.

Peter Geisheker, an internet recruiting specialist, encouraged employers to utilize AIDA (attention, interest, desire, and action) when developing employment ads. Grab the **attention** of the job seeker by creating exciting job titles that will attract candidates and stand out from all the others. Build **interest** in the position by describing the details of the job in simple terms. Utilize the previously developed list of required skills and experience for each position. Many organizations go astray here by including a laundry list of job requirements that seriously limit the number of qualified applicants.

This is also your opportunity to create a **desire** to work for your company. Describe the benefits of working for your organization. Keep in mind the Employee Value Proposition (the balance between what an employee gets from its employer in return for their performance on the job) but place heavy emphasis on the “get” for the purpose of your advertisement. However, be careful not to overstate benefits, rewards or the conditions of your workplace. Employee branding can have a considerable impact upon your ability to build a desire to work for your organization. Finally, make a call to **action**. Don’t assume that candidates will call, fax or email; instead, expressly state the type of action you would like for them to take and the desired timeframe. Recruiters have reported higher success rates when these simple guidelines are followed.



Developing a clear perception of the type of candidate you are looking for will enable you to spend your advertisement dollars wisely. What magazines and newspapers does your target audience read? Place advertisements in those periodicals. What types of schools offer programs that closely match your company’s needs? Create a presence on those campuses. Show a genuine interest in the school and provide internships to students that are likely candidates for your organization.

Leverage your technology by using various methods of advertisement. While most organizations now see the need to set their web sites up to accept resumes, some organizations have taken this process to the next level. Borders Group, Inc., operator of the Borders and Waldenbooks bookstore chains, has converted their entire recruiting process to an online system that goes from application to hiring. This move has considerably reduced the amount of “white space” (unproductive delays in your hiring process that can cause you to lose viable candidates) enabling them to hire people in as little as a few days. Candidates can apply for positions in Borders’ corporate offices online; their resumes are sifted, organized and quickly made accessible to recruiters and managers. Notes made by pre-screeners and interviewers are recorded online and accessible to everyone involved in the process. This results in a satisfying experience for newly hired employees who are brought in quickly. What else can be done to improve your chances of bringing in highly qualified talent?

ARE YOU FISHING WITHOUT A LURE?

The competition for high caliber talent is growing increasingly intense as employers vie for an ever dwindling talent pool. How can you make sure that your organization will stand out among your competitors? What does today's workforce want?

Competitive salaries and comprehensive benefits – Your organization may quickly negate its ability to offer competitive salaries. However, with streamlined screening processes you will be able to hire quality employees. Organizations like The Container Store, voted #1 in *Fortune Magazine's* "100 Best Companies to Work For," feel that their unusually high salaries are commensurate with the type of high caliber employees that they attract. It is their belief that one "great" employee is worth three "good" employees. Many organizations have been able to tweak their business strategies in order to offer a higher base salary to top talent. This has greatly improved their ability to attract and retain high caliber talent.



Flexibility – Today's workforce understands the importance of creating a healthy balance between work and family. Employers who understand that today's employees demand a personal life, and respond by offering flexible hours, generous vacation time and personal days, are more likely to attract and retain quality people.

Bonuses and performance based compensation – Top performers want to know that they will be rewarded for their hard work and dedication. Offering raises or bonuses commensurate with the level of commitment of each employee is a strong incentive for both your current and potential workforce.

Stock options and profit sharing – Many organizations offer stock to their employees. This gives employees a vested interest in the success of the organization. If you are not comfortable offering stock; consider developing an innovative employee stock purchase program that will allow employees to purchase stock at a discounted rate. Profit sharing can entice talent to join your organization. It's also a great way to encourage employees to focus on reaching the organization's goals, reduce waste and increase profitability.

Employee perks –Retail chains, restaurants, airlines and other organizations offer their employees generous discounts that result in a win-win situation for the organization and its workforce. One popular restaurant chain offers employees a 50% discount on food items, but does not discount the beverages. Employees feel good about their employer, spend lots of money in the restaurant and recommend the restaurant as a great place to work and eat. A paint manufacturer has secured discounts for its employees from businesses ranging from apartment complexes to shoe stores. The company also brings in a masseuse after its most hectic period of the month. On-site cafeterias, day cares or other services can help your employees balance life and work and engender loyalty toward your organization.

Learning opportunities – Continued opportunities for learning is a priority for many top performers. Offering your employees the ability to keep their skills up to date with technical training will improve the abilities of your current workforce and draw high quality talent. Forward thinking employers have realized a high return on investment by providing their workforce with quality opportunities to participate in teambuilding, leadership and other training. Additionally, employees who receive continued training tend to be happier, excel within your organization and remain with your company.

What else can your organization do to secure high quality talent?

EXPAND THE POOL OF AVAILABLE TALENT

Is your organization overlooking valuable sources of talent? You may very well be doing this if your organization does not consider the benefits of:

Creating an inclusive workplace – Minority groups will comprise an increasing portion of our population in the coming decades. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that African Americans, Latinos and Asians will collectively represent the national majority by the year 2050. Does your organization currently reflect your community? Do you strive to be a diversity rich “employer of choice”? Successful organizations like PricewaterhouseCoopers have created a pipeline for multiethnic talent by building diversity into their mission. It is not just a tagline, or motto, but the organization has created a presence and actively recruits on the campuses of both mainstream schools and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

Include mature workers into your workforce strategy – While many employers fear the impact that the “graying of our workforce” will have upon their organization; others have embraced this phenomenon by including knowledgeable, experienced workers into their organizational development plans. Consider making alliances with organizations like AARP that serve the needs of older workers. Many organizations are re-recruiting their older workers by giving them part-time, flex-time and work share opportunities that encourage them to put off retirement.

Allowing boomerang employees to return to the fold – Some organizations have policies in place which preclude an employee from returning to their organization. However, research has indicated that return employees are among an organization’s most loyal. Re-hiring a previous top performer gives your organization the opportunity to reclaim your valuable investment of training and experience from your competitor.

Recruiting on college campuses – While many organizations have made this a standard part of their recruitment process for many years; some organizations fail to see the benefits of doing so. Neglecting local college campuses may send a negative message about your organization.

Does your organization possess the commitment needed to succeed in the quest for top talent? A sustained effort is required to attract and retain quality workers. Determine exactly what your organization needs before you begin your search. Seek talent that clearly identifies with your organization’s mission. Offer attractive compensation and benefits packages that will appeal to your desired talent. Offer your workforce opportunities for continued learning and growth. Honestly communicate your organization’s expectations and benefits to potential talent. The results of developing a well thought out talent strategy and maintaining the commitment to bring it to fruition will benefit your organization now and in the future.

About the Author



Tim Wilson

Tim Wilson

Tim Wilson is a business management and organizational development consultant with more than 30 years of progressive business and managerial experience in senior-level positions. He has extensive knowledge of the technology industry derived from 25 years with Digital Equipment Corporation, once one of the largest high technology employers in New England.

Tim's most valuable strengths are in team building, training, change management, developing organizations, and understanding businesses' need to persistently focus on their bottom line. He is an expert in the areas of accountability, revenue generation and diversity management and inclusion, helping businesses to improve communication, enhance employee performance, increase productivity, and quantify their investment in diversity.

Professional Development and Education

Tim started his career in information systems, but quickly moved to human resources to apply his experience resolving system and people issues, and to acquire expertise in organizational development and employee/human relations. He held positions in the retail, insurance, financial services and management consulting industries before settling into the tech arena in 1974.

Tim possesses a Master of Science degree in applied management from Lesley College in Cambridge, MA and a Bachelor of Science in business administration and information systems from Clark University in Worcester, MA. He also received an Associates degree in business management from Fisher College in Boston.

T.A. Wilson and Associates creates customized, focused programs and conducts specialized training designed for your entire organization or individual one-on-one sessions. We provide proven solutions based on decades of knowledge and experience in organizational management and development solutions focused on your company's goals.

Contact Information

Call Tim Wilson:
508.393.9921

You can fax:
508.351.9083

To send email:
timwilson@tawilsonassociates.com

Write:
Tim Wilson
T.A. Wilson & Associates
15 Chesterfield Road
Northborough MA 01532