

HOW TO LEVERAGE YOUR EXISTING EMPLOYEES TO BRIDGE THE TALENT GAP

By Roxanne Calder



It's a war for talent, and the continual tightening of the candidate pool significantly impacts current and future success. In bridging the talent gap, upskilling and reskilling the workforce are strategies smart businesses are implementing. Or, in other words, leveraging their existing employees.

A Learning Culture and Environment

If reskilling, upskilling, learning, and adapting are new to your business, you need the right culture and environment to support them. For successful strategy implementation and ongoing long-term sustainable success far into the future, the right culture is a must. A culture of learning and upskilling is seen as a critical worker benefit on par with bonuses, additional leave, etc., and essential for employee engagement and retention.

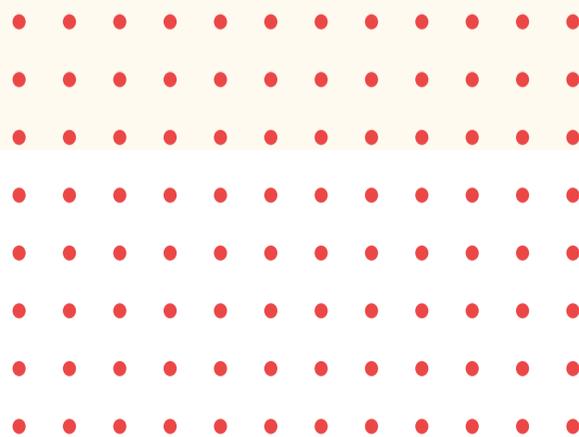
An environment where it is safe to learn, with ongoing development, opportunities for deployment, openness to new experiences, and allowances for failure on the path to mastery requires time, patience, encouragement and inspiration. Providing a continuous learning culture, one in which the acquisition of new skills is the expectation and the norm, is the first step in successfully leveraging your existing employees.

Future Needs and the Job Description

What are your business goals and projections? Identify the core skills and prioritize the critical and urgent. Decide which to outsource short- and long-term, which to bring in, and which can be cultivated, nurtured, and trained in your existing employees.

Review your organizational structure and job descriptions. Too often, job descriptions are a wish list, with extras added, meshed with the real needs of the role and business. In a market of constricted talent, the option of fries with your order is no longer applicable. Worse still is if job descriptions are a perfunctory adjunct attached to a contract only to be put in the filing cabinet by both parties.

Instead, use job descriptions as a tool, encompassing only core skills and duties matched with business goals. In dovetailing to your adaptable and learning culture, job descriptions are a working document, reviewed quarterly to half-yearly. The job may expand and evolve and the skills increase—even better!



Teams

Know Your Employees

How well do you know your employees? It's like discovering your neighbor is a plumber after the pipes have burst. Conduct an audit on the skills and experience of your teams. Consider conducting a cultural questionnaire designed to draw out unseen and unknown skills, attributes, and potential. Learn more about their values and experiences. You might be surprised! Mostly, the time you invest in getting to know your employees should be a new healthy habit. This is where deep connections and understandings exist.

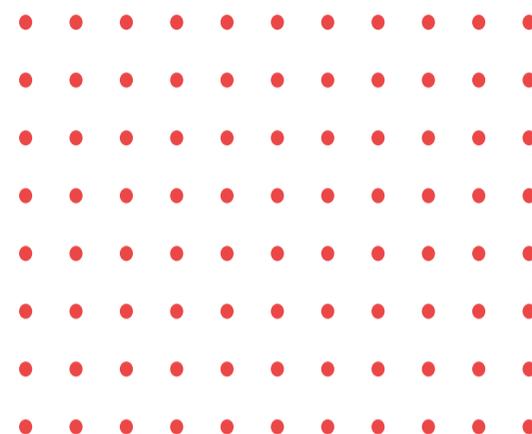
Perhaps your office manager has a marketing degree. Or maybe your team assistant is a member of Mensa. Don't just look for the obvious—look for the hidden and uncover the potential. Consider second languages, creative skills, and hobbies. All provide insight into untapped potential, skills, and future roles. Language skills require great memory, concentration, listening, comprehension, and even people-reading ability. Sports experiences offer the gifts of teamwork and winning spirit.

Expose your employees to projects and different parts of the business as deployments or secondments. Perhaps there is someone with a propensity for figures and spreadsheets? Gallup research has shown workers who use their strengths daily are six times more likely to be engaged at work. Even more importantly, when managers focus on employees' strengths, only 1 percent are actively disengaged. Above all, your employees need to feel they are contributing, which is the case when discovering their skills, strengths, gifts, and attributes.

See Their Potential, Mentor, and Review

It's not just about knowing the skills but also seeing and uncovering potential. As a recruiter, paying attention to the hidden attributes, behaviors, and skills and viewing potential through a different lens is the best part of my job. Consider implementing buddy and mentoring programs as well as setting regular skills and job progress reviews—not classic performance reviews. Make it OK to talk about areas to develop, what has or hasn't worked, what they enjoy, and what is a struggle. Working on the struggle parts will increase confidence, remove insecurities, and build trust.

The difficulty and challenge in sourcing talent won't disappear any time soon. Instead, a business must find a long-lasting approach and adopt it early to avoid being left behind. Implementing and executing a strategy to leverage existing employees not only bridges the talent gap for now but also strengthens and increases your business's human capital for the future.



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