

# Talent Management Begins Before Hiring



By **Amelia Chan**, CPHR

**T**ALENT MANAGEMENT PROVIDES AN ENORMOUSLY POWERFUL business advantage: honing processes, revealing opportunities and driving results. Executed in conjunction with existing workplace culture and business strategy, it provides a powerful “magnetism” within organizations—which can also serve as an antidote to the present and future skills shortage.

While primarily viewed as a series of internal processes and interactions, talent management may be the difference between having the best and brightest knocking on your door or, well, less ideal candidates.

However, all departments and levels of the business have roles to play. It isn’t about one well networked, star employee or any one program managed by HR. The flow of talent into an organization is usually a reflection of its (real or perceived) public image. As such, it is highly connected to the employer brand and an important touchstone to the pursuit of top talent.

## Forward and Reverse Engineering Talent

When people aren’t just regarded as overhead costs, but as prime assets of potential, the business conversations around talent take on the HR mindset, and become more proactive. Savvy decision-makers no longer just look at payroll figures, but recognize that quality employees are difficult to find and are also harder to replace. This requires a greater emphasis towards a people-focused mindset because it is the ongoing connection between the individual and company that drives shared success.

Understanding the skills required and applying this knowledge to people processes propels employer brands to the next level in organization development—creating a living narrative. While employer branding presents the naked truth about the organization’s culture to attract and hire, talent management looks inward to understand current capabilities and stretches outward to where the organization wants to be. When applied wisely, this information extends organically to resource allocation, succession planning and leadership direction.

In a market in which talent has greater tools and choice than ever, companies with strong talent management systems have a power of attraction which both retains and serves as a beacon to top talent.

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## A New View on Talent Management

The mindset around recruitment has seen some fundamental shifts: from separate and administrative to the more integrative approach of talent management which emphasizes staffing effectiveness with a feedback loop. It is integrated because the outcomes of the search (recruitment) and feedback (performance) provide key information for the business. If job descriptions are not accurate, candidate sourcing and hiring will not yield the appropriate talent. If the performance evaluations aren’t applied, there is no communication about what is actually working or feedback for improvement. None of these activities happen in a vacuum, so organizations must be careful not to let these activities fall to the wayside and miss the opportunity to mine information which is available to them every day.

## Of Scouts and Ambassadors

From an employee perspective, talent management represents an organization’s commitment to attract, retain and develop the best talent available. It starts well before any hiring begins—if you have your talent management systems in place and the “scouting” hat on. Just as our workplace systems have become more dynamic, so too has the approach of companies seeking equally dynamic talent.

Top talent, by its very nature, pursues its own path, and generally has more “working” options available. Motivated and mobile, such talent values and seeks a development path when selecting their next career move. Having an established talent management program is a key competitive edge that makes one company culture stand above another.

Consider the amount of effort that goes into scouting talent for professional sports and entertainment—industries where professional scouts are tasked to keep a watchful eye for budding “talent.” They know it is not enough to “fill” the position. They look for brilliant stars-to-be, who they know will be hotly competed for, as well as the otherwise overlooked diamonds in the rough whose abilities and attitude could provide a unique fit.

These talent scouts are also ambassadors and visionaries, playing an integral part in cultivating the future and communicating the strength of their teams and talent management systems. In this light, the world at work has much to learn from the world at play.

## Commitment in Action

This is why the HR mindset—fuelled by people potential—is a powerful tool for any leader as it organically links talent management to business strategy while sharing the burden. In this scenario, leaders and managers are active participants, so buy-in and commitment is built in. Moreover, HR isn't the sole owner of an outcome, but the stewards of the ongoing development process with operational managers.

We see this in action on the shop floor in apprenticeship programs. The very nature of what is needed in trades must be identified and fostered by the journeyman who then trains and mentors accordingly. This is not only a highly important relationship for the individuals involved and the value they bring forth, but it also marks a strong company for its investment of time and money required. The promise of the high standards skills training and commitment to employment, such as the Red Seal program in the hospitality industry, often seals the deal on new hires in a competitive marketplace— attracting the most promising and dedicated candidates to the employer.

## Feedback Loops Play Forward

The greatest success for an organization happens when the employer brand attracts the workforce they seek. By genuinely looking at its brand through the lens of its customers and staff, businesses will find this knowledge to be useful in multiple ways. This, in turn, can provide feedback for further evolution

of talent management systems and the customer experience— external and internal alike.

Pride in working for a company is a key engagement driver, which has its own benefits in our digital and social media-driven marketplace. If the employer brand and company brand are consistent, a job seeker's curiosity (a.k.a. employee-to-be engagement) can start before employment. Moreover, an authentic depiction of brand which translates into employee experience can extend this engagement throughout the employee cycle, and even extend after termination.

If businesses can see how similar their communication efforts with customers and employees really are, they can get greater returns through synergy between departments and talent management systems. This continuous cycle of connected feedback helps to maintain a steady and sustainable organization.

Progressive organizations realize that top talent will always be in short supply, and make use of these feedback loops to rise above "crisis mode" and bring their brands to life in a competitive marketplace. Most importantly, they are not be afraid to do a little old-school, new-age talent scouting of their own. **P**

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