COVID-19 ELEVATED YOUR ROLE

Now, here's what CHROs should expect from their talent acquisition and management leaders to drive success in an incredibly complex environment.

Diane Smith
CEO & Co-Founder

From managing a remote workforce to inspiring employee confidence and loyalty through strategic communications and outreach, the areas of expertise your CEO needs from you continue to expand. You're supporting executives as they make tough decisions regarding cost-cutting measures and guiding them through efforts to improve the employee experience, including diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). And, most importantly, you're charged with the safety and wellbeing of employees both at home and as they return to the office.

An elevated role offers tremendous growth opportunity. But it also comes with an incredible amount of pressure, which can be managed by tapping into the knowledge and capabilities of your team, especially those in talent acquisition and management. Here's how to get what you need from them to solve an increasingly complex set of workforce challenges.

– Diane

No matter the industry or the size of the company, success in our knowledge-based economy depends on the quality of an organization's human capital. The ability to attract and retain talented workers who can solve problems with creative solutions and innovative thinking became essential to an organization's survival. Today, faced with a global pandemic and associated economic downturn, companies aren't simply seeking to survive—they're working to reinvent the organization in a new normal that is still taking shape.

At the heart of reinvention lies changing how companies attract, engage and retain talent. Therefore, among the most critical things you must do as CHRO is to look to your talent acquisition and management leaders for fresh ideas and meaningful solutions concentrated across three areas: developing and maintaining an agile talent strategy, delivering accurate data and meaningful insights, and creating transparent talent communications.

Developing and Maintaining an Agile Talent Strategy

Perhaps the biggest lesson COVID-19 has taught us is the value of agility. It's already clear that being able to pivot in the blink of an eye to meet rapidly-shifting business demands head-on is vital to coming out on the other side of the coronavirus crisis not simply intact but with an ability to pursue opportunities and growth strategies that weren't on the company's radar at the start of 2020. An agile talent strategy is paramount in this regard given the role talent is playing, and will continue to play, in the economic recovery. In order to arrive at an agile talent strategy, your talent acquisition and management team

should be working to ensure the following components and competencies are in place:

1. Efficient Tools and Technology

What COVID-19 uncovered is that antiquated hiring systems are far more of a detriment to business success than most organizations had previously imagined. In a prior CHRO briefing, I shared insights regarding how the right software was being leveraged to meet critical talent needs—including the ability to redeploy internal talent fast in response to a crisis—and position organizations for a stronger rebound.

Since then, the case for enabling talent acquisition and management teams with the most efficient tools and technology has only grown stronger because those with the right systems in place have already been far more effective in transitioning to virtual tools and talent practices. At the same time, it's not solely about the ability to move operations entirely online. It's just as essential that the software allows you to adapt when the next big shift arrives. For example, enterprise organizations that moved their internship and early-career recruiting programs online in response to the pandemic will eventually be back on campus for in-person recruiting activities, even if those activities look different than they did before COVID-19. The recruiting functions with the tools in place to support a smooth transition will find themselves in the enviable position of being able to seamlessly connect with and engage the student and early-career talent that their organizations depend on for continued growth.

2. An Agile Mindset

An agile talent strategy involves going beyond tools and technology. It requires resilient people who can navigate terrain for which there is no roadmap—a hallmark of agility and often a by-product of the way team members think about and approach their work. As Curie Gooden, GR8 People's director of agile delivery, continually reminds our employees, "Agile is a mindset." More specifically, it's a mindset where teams are hyper-focused on solving customer problems as quickly as possible so that the business can achieve more. In the case of HR, employees and candidates represent customers, which is one reason why we saw an increasing emphasis on delivering exceptional employee and candidate experiences well before the pandemic began.

Of course, exceptional experiences begin with a solid understanding of one's customer. In the case of employees and candidates, this means cultivating an awareness of just how much life has changed for these "customers" and the unique difficulties they now face, both personally and professionally. Those with an agile mindset will immediately educate themselves regarding a range of shifting variables that span workforce dynamics, employee and job seeker perspectives, and the impact of remote work on engagement, productivity and wellbeing. How your talent acquisition and management team chooses to monitor and assess these developments is central to ensuring that your organization continues to attract A-players and cultivate a more diverse workforce. Your team should also be able to articulate how they plan to leverage talent markets that are opening up to them because geographic location is now less important, as well as how they are revamping their talent strategies overall to better serve their customers.

3. Operational Expertise

Even with the right technology in place and an agile mindset embedded in the team, talent acquisition and management leaders will encounter process bottlenecks that, if not quickly uncovered and solved for, can impede both progress and results. Whether operational expertise exists in the form of a dedicated recruiting

specialist or is spread across the capabilities of individual team members, it's key to achieving agility during difficult times.

Operational expertise also matters to the application of automation and AI as a means for streamlining processes further, as well as task elimination and role augmentation. Identifying the skills and abilities required of all employees, including

the talent acquisition and management team, to work alongside machines was already a prominent C-suite concern heading into 2020. In the wake of the pandemic, it has become more urgent as digitization accelerates and machines become sophisticated enough to manage tasks dependent on human judgement. Operational expertise will be required to adapt to workplace realities that are the result of AI and automation.

Delivering Accurate Data and Meaningful Insights

The struggle that many HR departments have faced in effectively transitioning to data-driven practices is no secret. According to the LinkedIn Global Talent Trends 2020 report, the profession has witnessed a "242% increase in HR professionals with data analysis skills over the last five years." And yet, a 2019 Deloitte survey finds that 63% of executives lack confidence in the ability for their organizations to make decisions based on data.

Given an accelerated digital transformation and dramatic shifts in both where and how people are getting their work done, accurate data and meaningful insights are no longer optional. Those that fail to make data part of the picture risk falling behind competitors. In terms of talent acquisition and management, arriving at the best possible answers to a broad range of questions relies on accurate data and meaningful insights:

- *Where can we find people with the emerging skills we need to move forward from the pandemic?*
- *How do we make sure our employees are in the right roles?*
- *What are the biggest impacts of remote working on both employee and candidate experiences, and how must they be adapted for better talent outcomes?*
- *Where are the best talent markets since expanding the geographies from which we recruit?*
- *Which A-players do we risk losing and what can be done to retain them?*

One of the main challenges HR has pointed to in the past is data quality, especially since people and performance data is rarely centralized, which leads to inconsistent data collection and storage practices. So, for many organizations, this must be the starting point. Your talent acquisition and management team can overcome data quality challenges by clearly defining the talent outcomes they are trying to realize and match available data to those outcomes, identifying any gaps and determining how to close the gaps. The latter may require overhauling existing processes in order to gather the necessary data points. However, doing so is the only path to making more informed talent and business decisions, benchmarking success against competitors, and delivering an objective view of talent acquisition and management to senior executives.

Creating Transparent Talent Communications

Communicating with candidates, new hires and current employees regarding an organization's job opportunities and employment experience has long been a core competency of the talent acquisition and management function. With unease and uncertainty on everyone's mind, talent communications should best be viewed through the lens of public relations given the need to inspire trust and loyalty during times of crisis.

As such, talent communications must be overhauled to ensure transparency and relevancy when communicating to all target audience segments. Particular attention should be paid to conveying what the organization is doing to assist employees during the pandemic and how corporate strategy has shifted to support job stability and continued business growth. Candidates are listening to what you say and watching what you do—how you treat people during the pandemic will be remembered long after it subsides.

How is your organization maintaining communications with new hires whose start dates have been delayed? With furloughed employees? **Honest and consistent communications** *will help new hires and furloughed employees deal with uncertainty and demonstrate your organization's commitment to people during difficult times.*

Given the magnitude of this initiative, make sure that your talent acquisition and management leaders are working closely with your corporate communications team to get the messaging right. Even enterprise organizations that have a recruitment marketing specialist or employer brand strategist on the team will find that a close partnership with corporate communications leads to the best outcomes.

Rising to the challenges and opportunities that COVID-19 poses for CHROs requires novel ideas, approaches and solutions from your talent acquisition and management leaders. Prioritizing initiatives such as an agile talent strategy, accurate data and meaningful insights, and transparent talent communications offers the focus they need to help you guide the organization through the pandemic and toward a strong business rebound.

Entrepreneur, coach, leader and former recruiter, Diane Smith has significant experience launching and running SaaS companies. Currently co-founder and CEO of enterprise recruiting software company GR8 People, Diane co-founded and grew VirtualEdge Corporation (VE) into a worldwide HR technology leader, seeing it through its successful acquisition by Automated Data Processing, Inc.

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We're GR8ful to be able to support talent acquisition as it continues to navigate the impacts of the coronavirus outbreak.
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19 W College Ave, Suite 200
Yardley PA 19067
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