

**WHAT IS
TALENT?**

MANAGE TALENT? HOW ABOUT DEFINING IT FIRST?

Buzzwords and catchy phrases have peppered the world of Human Resources since time immemorial. One that has stuck around over the past ten or so years is 'talent' and we've become obsessed with managing it – nurturing it and making sure it doesn't elude or, once we've got our hands on it, escape us. 'How did companies ever manage anything before they knew how to manage talent?' we ask ourselves. It seems so essential, so ingrained within our culture, that it feels dangerous to ignore. Trouble is, if you ask a roomful of HR generalists how they'd define talent, the worst case scenario is that they'll stare back at you as blankly as if you'd just asked them to explain Einstein's idea of a Unified Field Theory.

Fortunately, it doesn't take a deceased, scruffy, white-haired genius to unravel the mysteries of talent – what it is, how we spot it and nurture it, what to do when we feel we're losing our grip on it. It's just a case of working out the difference between a more general idea of 'employees' and this all-singing, all-dancing parade of wondrous Human Resources we rely on to transform our businesses from merely functioning into profitable, thriving success stories that we call talent.

*"92% of top performers [say]
they search for jobs at least
a few times a year"*

Indeed

ISN'T TALENT JUST ANOTHER WORD FOR EMPLOYEES?

Historically, businesses hired employees – people they felt were best suited to the job at hand and who had the capacity to develop their skills in ways that would benefit both themselves and the organisation. Sounds great – the employer's dream acquisition. In reality, though, recruiting people in the hope that they'll get on with the job of being brilliant and then do it until they retire is far more problematic than that. There's motivation to worry about – how will the employee fare as part of your culture and with all the stresses and strains of day-to-day life both inside and outside the workplace to deal with? There are your competitor organisations to consider – outside the public sector, there's no such thing as a job-for-life anymore and organisations are becoming evermore focused on developing contentment strategies for their people, meaning you have to do the same if you want to stand a chance of retaining your best people. And this leads right back around to the beginning of the process – when businesses offer so much to their people, how on earth do you attract them to your company in the first place? How do you make yourself stand out from the crowd?

This is where the idea of talent springs from. It's about seeing your existing and future people as more than just candidates and employees. Elevating their status from Human Resources – a very functional term for what are, essentially, real, live people with their own personal and professional goals and skills. Instead, thinking of them as a talent bank made from different sets of people whose ambitions and abilities should be put on a pedestal, nurtured, taken seriously at every stage and treated as if the future of your business depends on them. Because – you know what? – it does!

In short:

- i. **Employees** are interchangeable people who get the job done because you're paying them to do it – the employer is in the driving seat.
- ii. **Talent** is defined by wilfully flipping that balance of power around – authorising those people to take control of their future within your organisation so that they can bring about positive change both for themselves and for your company.

TALENT POOL? WHICH ONE?

When we think about talent, we put it in a pool. It's an interesting image, but a somewhat inaccurate and out-dated metaphor. Because talent doesn't just sit within one location from which it can be easily spotted or plucked.

To labour the metaphor, you could say that talent swims along a series of interconnected tributaries (represented by the attraction process – the flow of talent), each of which leads to a set of different pools (represented by each individual employer). And often at high speed, going from one to the other. It'd be more accurate to call it 'the talent rapids' than the talent pool.

This means that engaging with talent is a much more complicated process than simply sending out a positive attraction message. And not just because the attraction process is always in flux (people at different points on their journeys as potential candidates – some looking to move, others not even realising there might be a reason to move). But also because multiple pools of talent already lie within our own organisations – our existing people – most likely within our own department, but perhaps elsewhere within the business, unaware of their transferable skills and potential for sideways development.

Talent is everywhere. And, if an agency like Jupiter is going to help its clients tap into, engage with and continually inspire those people, then we have to make sure that their Employer Brand message is in all the same places. Never giving that talent the opportunity to forget or ignore it.

TALENT ENGAGEMENT – SO MUCH MORE THAN RECRUITMENT ADVERTISING

The industry we work in used to be called recruitment advertising. But, because managing talent happens at every stage of the employee journey, no longer is it an appropriate term. The work carried out by Jupiter starts out with attraction, sure – but that's certainly not where it stops. To call us a recruitment advertising agency would sell us incredibly short. That's why we now refer to the industry we work in as employer communications and talent engagement.

“Skill shortages are escalating – over four-fifths feel that competition for talent has increased over the past two years...”

Resource & Talent Planning, CIPD

EMPLOYER VALUE PROPOSITIONS

It all starts with the development of an Employer Value Proposition (EVP), which acts as a business's platform for all communication with its existing and future talent. Everything an organisation subsequently communicates to its people is built upon the principles of the EVP, which, in turn, validates those messages further down the line of communication.

The EVP is built upon two key factors:

- i. The organisation's perception of its idealised self – how it wants to be seen by its talent
- ii. Workplace realities as perceived by the company's existing talent

The former represents the corporate goal for the company's talent. Prior to the development of the EVP, this idealised view of how talent sees the company may be true to a degree, in its infancy or – in some cases – complete fantasy. The latter represents what the company invariably didn't previously know about itself – positive stories will be unveiled that reinforce the idealised self-perception of the company, but negative stories that undermine it will also come to light.

One thing that 25 years' experience in the industry tells us is that the perception the organisation has of itself almost never tallies with the perception held by the various pools of talent who make up the target market.

What an agency like Jupiter then does is marry the two. It categorises the various workplace realities under a number of overarching banners (usually three or four) that describe them in a way that suits the idealised company perception. Those four banners are then honed down (with a little sprinkling of creative genius) into a single sentiment that summarises all of them – an 'umbrella' message under which each of these workplace reality categories retains all of its meaning – yet which also makes a promise to your existing and future talent, again in the language of the idealised company perception. This is your Employer Value Proposition.

The reason it works is because it succeeds in turning a company's perceived weaknesses into its strengths through the use of creative language. After all, what one person sees as a weakness, another sees as a strength. Your EVP speaks only to talent who will thrive within your organisation. No culture shocks, no skillset inconsistencies. And it encourages the talent already working within the company to get on-board with the message. This is talent management from the bottom-up – exactly the way it should be done.

INTERNAL TALENT POOLS

Before any organisation looks externally for talent, it should first look at its own people. Not merely within the departments to which it is recruiting but also elsewhere within the business among the many pools of talent there.

It's very likely that the core strengths for development along the lines defined by the corporate goal already exist within the business. It's probably just that they haven't been recognised, nurtured or realised.

Nurturing talent, therefore, should begin from the inside and work its way outward. This has a twofold effect. Not only do you develop your existing people into the idealised version you want them to be. You also sell the image of this existing, internal talent bank to the external target audience. By turning potential into success, you demonstrate a commitment to developing the talents of your people. This is attractive to the most ambitious future candidates – the kind you most want to employ.

But it's not just about developing talent – it's about managing it too. Making sure people know the boundaries of working for your organisation. What's expected of them and what happens when they do or don't meet those expectations. When people know where they stand with their employer, they are given the focus with which to move forwards and develop their skills in a way that matters to the business.

Internal talent engagement, management and development tools:

- Induction materials (e.g. welcome pack)
- Staff handbook
- Employer mission statement and values
- E-newsletter
- L&D materials
- Knowledge sharing systems (e.g. mentoring programmes)
- Rewards and benefits handbook
- Exit interview materials

EXTERNAL TALENT POOLS

From an existing talent bank grow external ones. Because, by the time you come to talk to your external audience, you've already proven your Employer Brand promise by developing the skills of your internal people. They, by proxy, become ambassadors for your Employer Brand. And any promise you make can legitimately be proven by their successes.

Reaching future talent, however, is a case of identifying where they engage with media outside of the workplace. You've already identified what their habits, likes, dislikes, goals and aspirations are by observing the very best of your existing talent. So attracting them is simply a case of bearing the best of your existing people in mind and presenting truth-based messages about your employer offering that would appeal to them and to your external audience.

This is what the best of all employer communications does. It says, 'This is who we are. This is what we do. Placed here, in this medium in this (real or virtual) location, it has reached you. And being here, in this (real or virtual) location, you connect to it. The message speaks to your personality, skills and goals – and in your language. It promises exactly what you are looking for and proves that it can deliver it based on its past record of doing so.'

External talent engagement tools:

- Creative advertising campaign development
- Geo-targeted digital advertising
- Behaviourally targeted digital advertising
- Traditional media advertising (press, print, radio, TV, DM, etc.)
- CV hotspots
- Ambient media campaigns – everything from light projections on buildings and removable graffiti to coffee trikes and guerrilla flash mobs

DIGITAL

We couldn't write a paper on talent without talking about digital. It deserves its own section, as no other revolution has transformed the lives of everyone in the wider world, never mind employment and talent, as much as digital.

Undoubtedly if our goal is engagement – digital must also be the centrepiece of any talent strategy. It's a constantly changing roadmap, governed by almost daily innovations that influence how we communicate and disseminate information. Harnessing the hearts and minds of any audience means competing with hundreds of distractions that fill the mind of every digital user.

User is a great word to use here, because the secret to success with any solution is all about usability. Create something that is easy to use, simple to understand, beautiful in its design, experience and satisfaction. The goal is to develop something that talent will want to use – a journey – something to engage with.

From careers website, to apps, ATS, onboarding – the process of engagement: creating talent needs to be done in a way that inspires the user, resonates with the user and is ultimately, use-able!

No two solutions can be the same. Ultimately, whatever we create should absolutely be fit for your talent and fit for purpose. For it to be the new Facebook, LinkedIn or Snapchat, means developing a solution that establishes a relationship with talent, provides inspiration and information and can help the Talent Manager – in a way that feels individual, but uses the power of computing to achieve it en-masse.

What makes us a great partner in any digital journey is not just our deep understanding of the candidate journey from an online standpoint. But our desire to make that journey an individual, innovative and managed one. Talent needs inspiration to flourish and a digital strategy is the one that is most likely to achieve lasting success and results – unlocking engagement and creating respect and desire in your audience.

THE RESULTS

Understanding talent is not just about 'putting bums on seats' as the old saying goes. It's about ensuring that the relationship between your business and its people is at its finest – a two-way communication that responds dynamically to behavioural and market trends to achieve a shared goal.

Talent that is engaged is fully absorbed by the employer offering and enthusiastic about taking positive action to help the business achieve its goals. By the same token, the employer finds itself in a better position to deliver to its talent better rewards than its competitors due to the increased achievement of goals.

By keeping in mind the idea of your people as 'talent' rather than as 'employees', you will more effectively engage with their developmental needs and find ways to motivate them to meet those of your organisation. 100% of your team 100% of the time.

Make no mistake, when we talk about talent, we're not talking about a competition to be 'the best'. Because not everybody can be the best. Our organisations are divided along various lines of interest, skillsets and levels of ambition. What we as employers have to understand is that our ultimate goal is about getting everyone within a company to be the very best that they can be! That's how we define talent – as an endgame. A workforce giving everything they can – for themselves, for their clients or stakeholders, for their colleagues and for their employers. And the process we take to get there is engagement.

Businesses must find ways of engaging employees. That means helping them to see, at a glance, the benefits of giving their all. Encouraging them to take their raw talent and make the most of it. Research is the platform from which to build your tower of talent. Your EVP will provide the framework that will hold it all together. Your Vision and Values will be the fascia, making it attractive to the most applicable people. But only engagement can get your talent to move in, move up and take it to newfound heights. That's why you need a partner like Jupiter. Our strategic approaches and creative solutions draw-in talent, engage them in the idea of self-development as a part of your organisation and keep them motivated right through until the time that they come to leave your business (if, indeed, that day comes). If we have anything to do with it, we'd rather you remained the most attractive employer within your sector for the duration of your time working with us and sent your attrition rates plummeting.

35%

OF TALENT WANT TO WORK
FOR A COMPANY COMMITTED
TO CSR

45%

OF TALENT LOOK FOR A JOB
THAT MAKES SOCIAL OR
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

58%

OF TALENT WANT TO WORK
FOR AN ORGANISATION WITH
VALUES LIKE THEIR OWN

Forbes

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Let's start the dialogue today

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