

# THE RESOURCE

# HR INSIGHTS

VOL. X, ISSUE III

magazine

*from the eyes of industry leaders*

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO  
**RECRUITING  
CHATBOTS**



## IN THIS ISSUE

Incentivize Your  
Workforce to Increase  
Company Revenue

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The Guide to  
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Getting Practical  
With AI in HR

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**JULY:** Making the Most of LinkedIn (Randy Wooden)

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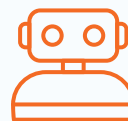
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# GETTING PRACTICAL WITH AI IN HR:

## Can it help you help your people?

BY KEEN HAHN

When the words artificial intelligence or data science come up in a conversation about HR strategy, there are times—especially if the context is a small or medium-sized business—when the eye rolls are almost audible. "Here comes the sales pitch," listeners think while wondering what kinds of AI insights will be valuable enough to offset all the extra hours spent putting them into practice.

Too often, when HR professionals hear about AI, the conversation focuses on the AI itself and not on how to work with it. Knowing the nuts and bolts of how this machine-learning algorithm works or how that statistical process is just so very efficient doesn't matter to them. What they need is a clear picture of how these processes will help them help their people—and how those processes fit in with the many responsibilities HR already has. Done right, AI can help HR professionals proactively get strategic without bogging them down.

### The best AI is the kind no one talks about.

The implementation of AI in HR shouldn't become another task on the checklist. Instead, it should be something that makes HR's other tasks easier to accomplish and gets HR to a place where it can continuously improve people processes in strategic ways. When adding value to everyday HR activities becomes the priority, HR's relationship with technology becomes different because the outcomes are focused on people rather than on the technology itself. With a successful implementation of AI:

- ▶ targeted answers come to HR professionals as they're working, so they don't have to devote time to digging through people data to figure out what to act on;
- ▶ there's no more worrying about automating away jobs or losing touch with what matters to the organization's employees;
- ▶ technology helps HR professionals and their people excel in their roles and adjusts to the organization's needs; and
- ▶ the facts and guidance needed to make informed decisions are delivered to HR right when they're needed, so there's no guessing about what to do to make improvements or strategic changes.

An implementation of AI that ticks all those boxes may seem like a pipedream, but it's possible. Here's how to achieve it:

### Treat using AI like hiring a strategic advisor.

Anyone hiring one of those top-shelf consulting firms that most businesses can't really afford wouldn't expect them to come in, dump a bunch of information on a desk, and then just leave. So why is it okay for HR technology to do that?

There's already enough confusion around all the different aspects of people analytics that HR is expected to track in order to be strategic. In an ideal world, any information obtained from an HR solution should be served up with something that makes it actionable: guidance. In addition to being built into the single solution HR already uses to manage data, AI should function as an advisor that takes the company's priorities into account and gives recommendations based on what it's seeing so HR can spend less time analyzing data and more time making an impact.

A big part of this comes down to timeliness and flexibility. Having to ask an AI solution for predictions or information means putting just another item on the to-do list without getting help when it's needed most. Instead, AI should do what any good advisor would and actively look for opportunities to help, such as:

- ▶ sending quick heads-up alerts when it looks like employees are likely to leave the company, explaining these flight risks, and offering up possible ways to address them;
- ▶ establishing benchmarks based on what normal activity looks like across the organization, proactively notifying HR when something falls outside that norm, and suggesting whether that change is positive or negative; and
- ▶ stepping in to assist in HR's regular reporting activities, giving tips on how to answer different people analytics questions, and providing quick help setting up charts or dashboards so HR can maximize its time and get answers fast.

Consultants anticipate their clients' needs and not only help them do what's best for their people and their organizations but also help them become better leaders. AI can do the same thing if it's built to focus on adapting to organizations and embedded in the flow of their employees' life cycles.

## Find ways to deepen relationships with people managers.

In addition to increasing HR professionals' efficiency and strategic ability, presenting and sharing the right data at the right time to make an impact can help HR build strong, positive relationships with the people managers they work alongside. Think about it: automatically receiving insights into the people activities going on at the organization and getting time back from not having to dig through data give HR some breathing room to align strategies with managers. HR technology can help there, too.

The benchmarks mentioned above help HR professionals tap into what matters to managers, help them to get out of the weeds, and do what's best for their teams. It's important to remember that it's not just a matter of mitigating risk or penalizing people. When HR has, at its fingertips, a constant feed of benchmark information that's proactively pointing out where there are outliers, those outliers can also be examined as positive changes to be capitalized on. HR technology should guide HR professionals to those opportunities, in addition to showing them where they can reduce risk.

Consider this example: one shift manager is particularly skilled at setting up fair schedules, and their team is starting to recognize them for it. The team is becoming more engaged and productive as a result of these schedules. With the right solution, HR would see the team's change in real time and get a helpful notification about where its performance sits relative to other benchmarks (and alongside the team's scheduling patterns). This opens the opportunity to talk with that manager, understand what it is they're doing that's working, and roll that process out more broadly by finding time for them to train their peers (or collaborating with them) to draft new scheduling policies. HR forms a new alliance with a strong manager, they feel heard and recognized for their efforts, and the wider organization gets the benefit of some process optimization that will help employees succeed. It's a win-win situation.

## Remember that emotional intelligence matters as much as business intelligence.

How can these hard numbers really translate into insights on how people are feeling or what they're thinking? Good AI should go beyond just advising HR on operational metrics and should also offer sentiment analysis. By looking at people's written responses in different activities (such as recruitment evaluations, performance reviews, and engagement or pulse surveys), AI solutions can help HR understand the feelings behind those responses.

This data gives HR a fact-based way to look at and talk about something that would otherwise be just a gut feeling in many cases. This approach has several possible valuable applications. For example, it can help HR:

- ▶ zero in on the HR processes or initiatives that people feel particularly positive or negative about (and then either reinforce them or change course);

- ▶ process feedback from hiring teams faster by understanding their general emotions toward different applicants moving through the company's recruitment channels; and
- ▶ get advice on performance review trends (such as when a particular manager consistently provides overly positive or overly negative feedback to their team).

Sentiment analysis enables HR to bridge the gap between common business goals and KPIs and the employees' well-being. Having this kind of data mix in hand on a regular basis enables HR to communicate with leadership about how overall organizational strategy should align with the needs of everyone working there and become an even more critical part of those conversations.

## "Practical AI" isn't an oxymoron after all.

Conversations about AI in HR can quickly become overwhelming, and the solutions often seem like more trouble than they're worth. But when the search for HR technology starts from the right perspective and involves asking the right questions, HR professionals will find that there are many ways AI can benefit them, their people managers, their organization, and, ultimately, all of their people. When evaluating the organization's strategic HR options, focusing on the advantages can help HR have better, more productive conversations about newer technologies, such as AI solutions. ■

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## 5

# Ways to Incentivize Your Workforce to Increase Company Revenue

BY ANDREW NELSON

Creating pride in and loyalty to the company is key to generating revenue-increasing employee performance. To cultivate those sentiments in their workforces, many businesses turn to incentive programs that recognize strong performance. Not all incentive programs are created equal, however, with many outdated employee-of-the-month efforts doing more harm than good to organizational morale. In order to effectively incentivize today's workforces to help grow company revenue, leaders should consider other strategies as well.



## Provide Plans for Reaching Goals

The math is simple: more sales equals more revenue. Even in the most altruistic-minded organizations, though, employees are less likely to get a warm, fuzzy feeling about increasing the company's worth than about receiving a quarterly bonus check or an upgraded company car. In most companies, the problem isn't the incentives themselves but the communication about how employees can go about attaining them. Too many companies simply take a "sell more, get this" approach that's akin to coaches telling their athletes, "If you want to win the race, run faster."

Employees, like athletes, respond well to coaching. Everyone wants to get the prize, but the journey in pursuit of it often carries the most significant impact. Companies that update their incentive programs to include detailed road maps for how employees can reach specific incentives usually achieve the best results.

Company leadership can modernize ineffective incentive programs and help employees earn rewards in several ways. One is to clearly communicate which products to focus on. Another effective strategy is to provide incremental sales goals (as opposed to one big, pie-in-the-sky incentive). Leaders can also give regular shoutouts to employees for even the smallest milestones, such as completing their first sale or selling to a new client.

## Flexible Work Schedules

Although all of the classic performance perks (e.g., cash bonuses, company vehicles, more paid time off) still carry plenty of weight, in the era of remote work, businesses need to get a little more creative in order to keep their employees motivated. When employees see other professionals doing similar jobs from home (and getting an extra 30 minutes of sleep by skipping the morning commute), they can quickly sour on an environment in which they feel imprisoned by the 9-to-5 timeclock. When possible, most people prefer to work remotely at least occasionally. Therefore, if a company's infrastructure allows flexible schedules for employees, leaders should make them part of an incentive package. They can give employees who reach certain milestones one flex day a

Everyone wants to get the prize, but the journey in pursuit of it often carries the most significant impact.

week, for example, or reward continued performance excellence with diminishing time-in-the-office requirements (and the freedom to log the remaining work hours from other locations).

In addition to increasing employee motivation, greater leniency with remote work can actually reduce the cost of employee benefits. This has an added impact on company revenue by lowering utilities consumption and reducing the need for office space.

## Offer Subscriptions

With most Americans now paying monthly fees for entertainment streaming and online fitness services, it's clear that subscriptions to digital services are now a way of life. At a relatively small cost to the company, an employee gift subscription to Netflix, Amazon Prime, Peloton, or other services could go a long way toward providing the type of lifestyle benefits that resonate with a contemporary workforce and fuel strong performance.

## Tuition & Training Reimbursements

In an economy rocked by the COVID-19 pandemic, many displaced and current employees are concerned about their viability in a job market increasingly shaped by remote work, automation, and other factors.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, many of them are interested in pursuing upskilling or reskilling opportunities. By reimbursing employees for tuition and training costs, companies not only signal their interest in workers' skill development but also improve their in-house talent pools (and thus decrease future recruitment costs by

being able to promote current employees into some senior positions).

## Elite Employee Benefits

Despite the emergence of other enticing incentives, the staple fringe benefits—health, dental, and vision insurance; retirement contributions—still resonate quite strongly with employees. (For example, over half of respondents to one survey said they would give "heavy consideration" to a job with low pay but better health, dental, and vision benefits over a job with high pay but worse benefits.<sup>2</sup>) As a result, when it comes to rewards for strong performance, an increase in employer-covered insurance and retirement contributions may motivate employees more than a one-time cash bonus. Keeping in mind the rule of thumb that an employee's total cost to a company is their base salary plus their benefits, leaders should look into ways that funds appropriated for performance bonuses can be spread out to offer a more appealing benefits package.

## Conclusion

Incentivizing the workforce is a great way to drive employee performance that will have a positive effect on company revenue. However, not all incentives achieve the same (or even intended) results. By adding more options to their toolbox of incentive strategies, leaders can find the solutions that work best at increasing their employees' productivity and yield higher revenues for the organization. ■

*Andrew Nelson is a freelance writer who specializes in human resources topics such as workplace management, employee lifestyle and fringe benefits, employee retention, and employee development. This article originally appeared on Workology.com and is reprinted with permission.*

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## 5 ELEMENTS OF



# Perfect Offboarding

BY JESSE FINN

A good offboarding (or employee-exit management) strategy often ranks low on the priority list for busy HR leaders. They already have so much on their plates—bringing new employees into the fold, shaping their experiences with the organization, ensuring they grow into fully rounded hires—that they don't have time for offboarding. As the final opportunity to leave a positive impression on soon-to-be-former employees, though, exit management is important, and companies should treat it as such. The most effective offboarding programs touch on five key areas, each of which has distinct action steps.

- Assessment (Has the departing employee given feedback on their time with the organization?)
- Brand (Has the departing employee been empowered to be a positive future brand ambassador?)
- Compliance (Is the departing employee legally prepared to leave the organization?)
- Dignity (Is the organization helping the departing employee to leave with dignity and respect?)
- Expertise (Has the departing employee's specialized knowledge been shared and documented?)





## 1 Assessment

Departing employees have valuable knowledge and insights that HR needs, and organizations should not let that information go to waste. Too often, HR schedules exit interviews because it's "supposed to do them," then lets the data sit without analyzing it. Feedback is effective only if HR uses it to learn and improve.

- Create an incentivized feedback quiz. When multiple parties offer similar negative feedback, then it's probably a good idea to make some changes. The reverse also holds true: When HR hears positive feedback, it should look for ways to recreate that success in other areas.
- Schedule the exit interview with an unbiased third party. If a departing employee has been having problems with their manager, then booking that manager to run the exit interview isn't going to yield useful results.

## 2 Brand

Departing employees are the best brand ambassadors—except when they're the worst. By investing in a positive offboarding experience, companies create brand ambassadors (who can also help with future recruitment!) and prevent people from bad-mouthing the organization after they've left.

- Provide (quality) company swag. It may seem counterproductive to give company swag to a departing employee, but these items can serve as fun reminders of their time with the organization and set them up as visible brand ambassadors.
- Enroll leavers in the organization's alumni group. A well-run alumni group gives HR a space in which to share company news and events, ask about referrals for job openings, and include leavers in the organization's future.

## 3 Compliance

This is the one part of offboarding that most organizations get right, mostly because they know the dangers of messing up the legal side of exit management. It's important

not to mistake good compliance for employee-exit management, though: Compliance is only one part of a well-rounded offboarding strategy.

- Request a signed letter of resignation. This legal formality also gives the resignation a certain amount of finality and can be used as the official beginning of the offboarding process.
- Review confidentiality or noncompete agreements. Many employees will have forgotten the details of these policies during the course of their employment. A quick in-person review of them at this point can prevent headaches down the road.

## 4 Dignity

This should be the most important part of the employee-exit management strategy in any organization that purports to "put people first." Allowing employees to leave with their heads held high is the biggest gift a company can give them and will foster goodwill with both leavers and the organization's entire employee network.

- Communicate the departure internally. The sooner the leaver's departure is announced, the sooner they can have open and honest conversations with their colleagues about their exit. Be sure to let the departing employee set the tone of this communication.
- Post a "thank you" message on LinkedIn. A public post by a direct manager to thank a departing colleague is a great (and public) way to show appreciation for their tenure.

## 5 Expertise

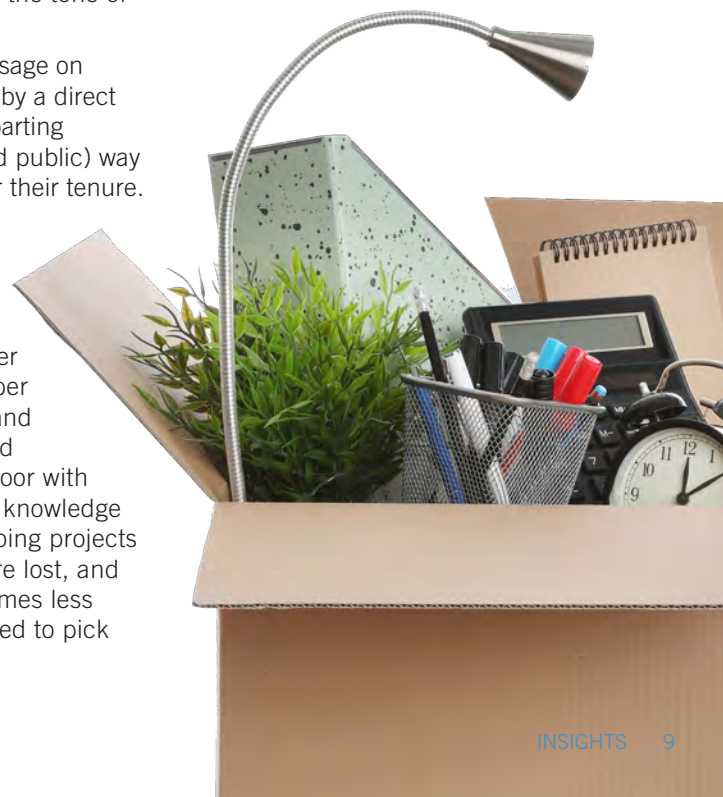
Too often, the following scenario plays out: a senior team member who is a poor record keeper leaves an organization—and their years of accumulated knowledge walk out the door with them! Safeguarding such knowledge is crucial. Without it, ongoing projects suffer, time and money are lost, and the rest of the team becomes less productive as they're forced to pick up the slack.

- Facilitate access to resources. Ensure that the departing employee briefs their manager on the systems they use and provides all required logins and passwords. Store this information safely and securely.
- Record a handover video. If an employee is departing before their replacement starts, have the exiting employee record a short handover video to give the new hire a soft landing when they eventually join the company.

Parting ways with employees doesn't always have to be a negative experience. By taking action to support each of the five offboarding areas described above, companies ensure business continuity, grow their future processes, and ultimately create powerful brand ambassadors who leave the organization with their heads held high. ■

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Chatbots (or digital assistants) have been around for a while, but their use has soared in recent years, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, and is expected to climb even higher. Not only are these AI-powered automated software robots rapidly growing smarter, but they're also becoming increasingly capable of handling recruitment tasks such as answering job seekers' questions, prescreening candidates, and scheduling interviews. (One of their most valuable contributions toward recruitment is their ability to recruit 24-7: at any time of day or night, a chatbot can connect a job seeker with positions that best match their skills, experience, and interests.) In order to best leverage chatbots for their own recruitment, though, hiring managers and HR staff first need a basic understanding of what they do and how they work.

### The Rise of the Chatbot

The first chatbot, ELIZA, was created in 1966, but it took a few more decades for the technology to be developed well enough for widespread use. Only in 2016, for example, did Facebook begin allowing software developers to put chatbots on Messenger. Other big brands then started creating their own digital assistants, and software vendors soon entered the ring with the specialized voice-based technology known as conversational AI.

The growing use of AI shows no sign of slowing: research published by Deloitte in March 2020 stated that "63 percent of the leaders surveyed already view AI as 'very' or 'critically' important to their business success, and that number is expected to grow to 81 percent within two years."<sup>1</sup> Why the sudden boom in popularity? Thanks to rapid advances in machine learning technology, AI now "learns" from its own experiences, becoming more "humanlike" and valuable to businesses.

Along the way, chatbots took on the ability to use natural language processing and became increasingly sophisticated in their abilities to mimic human conversation. Not surprisingly, compared to survey participants in 2018, "twice as many consumers surveyed in 2019 would knowingly engage with chatbots because they are 'very helpful.'"<sup>2</sup> CIOs surveyed in 2019 identified chatbots as the main AI-based application used in their enterprises, and at that time, experts predicted that "by 2022, 70 percent of white-collar workers will interact with conversational platforms on a daily basis."<sup>3</sup> And in a 2019 survey of "customer service decision makers in the US, CA [Canada], and the UK," 89 percent of respondents ranked chatbots and virtual agents among "the most useful AI/automation technologies for personalizing customer interactions."<sup>4</sup>

Chatbots are making great strides in many sectors, but have been especially powerful performers in human resources. As far back as 2017, 58 percent of surveyed job seekers reported feeling "fairly to

extremely comfortable interacting with chatbots to answer questions in the application and interview process."<sup>5</sup> And just two years later, "88 percent of companies globally [were] already [using] AI in some way for HR."<sup>6</sup>

### Where to Position Chatbots

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic kicked chatbot adoption into high gear, with the use of this technology increasing tremendously over the past year and all signs pointing to continued high growth even after the pandemic ends. Companies that aren't already using chatbots for recruitment should consider doing so soon if they want to stay competitive with other brands in their industries. Integrating digital assistants into its talent-acquisition strategy can save an organization time and money, bring in quality candidates, deliver insights into candidate behavior, and enhance the hiring experience for both the job hunter and the recruiter.

To make the most productive use of chatbots for recruitment purposes, companies need to figure out where their chatbots should live by determining where their targeted candidates spend their time online and what their preferences are. Many people assume that chatbots are found only on websites. But chatbots can text with candidates, too, and communicate via not only Messenger but other applications (such as WhatsApp and Slack) as well. Companies that already have chatbots in hand can do some test runs on the Web as well as on texting and other platforms and, by comparing response rates for each, determine which options work best for them.

Third-party tools such as Google Analytics can help companies determine how candidates find their career sites and what they do once they get there. (For example, do they come in through job boards or through Messenger? Do they hit the "apply" button right after reading the job description, or do they go to the "contact us" section to send an email asking for more information before they submit an application?) Keep in mind that different demographic groups have different communication preferences. For example, the vast majority of millennials would rather text than talk and job searches are increasingly taking place via mobile devices, not just via desktops and laptops.

The most straightforward approach for a company to figure out where its recruitment bots should live is to ask the candidates. Use a bot to tell job seekers, "We'd like to stay in touch" and ask whether communication by text, e-mail, Messenger, WhatsApp, or some other application

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BY ICIMS STAFF

is most convenient for them. (Organizations that don't yet have chatbot technology but are planning to implement it can include this question on their application forms.)

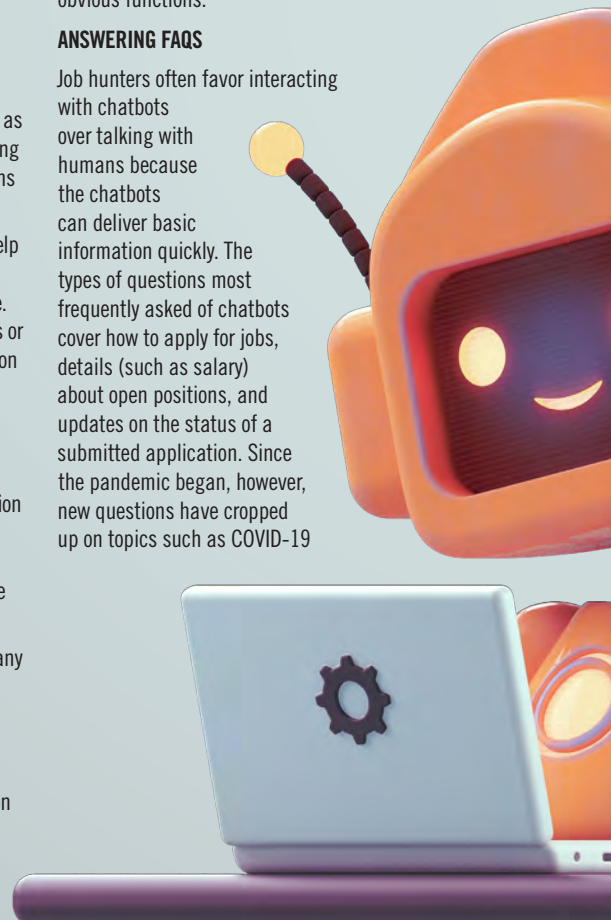
### How to Get the Most Out of Chatbots

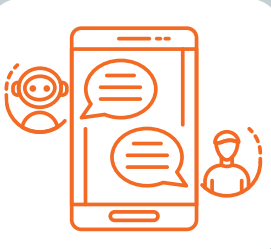
Three of the most widely discussed ways chatbots are used in recruitment are for answering frequently asked questions, prescreening candidates, and scheduling interviews. But they can also be leveraged for many other, less obvious functions.

### ANSWERING FAQs

Job hunters often favor interacting with chatbots over talking with humans because the chatbots can deliver basic information quickly. The types of questions most frequently asked of chatbots cover how to apply for jobs, details (such as salary) about open positions, and updates on the status of a submitted application. Since the pandemic began, however, new questions have cropped up on topics such as COVID-19

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preparedness, remote work and work-from-home policies, and medical and personal leave paid benefits.

When training a chatbot, organizations should be sure to include questions

that cover topics that are likely to interest applicants. Possibilities include:

- Who is a good fit?
- What are my prospects for career advancement?
- How many breaks do I get per shift?
- Where are your offices located?
- What amenities does the office have?
- What should I bring to the interview?
- Can you describe the company culture?

### AUTOMATING PRESCREENING AND OTHER PROCESSES

AI-enabled digital assistants can rapidly prescreen candidates on the basis of their applications, resumes, and other written materials, as well as prerecorded video interviews. This prescreening frees recruitment staff to focus on functions that require a human touch, including follow-up live interviews (conducted either virtually through two-way video or in

person) with the most qualified applicants. In addition to prescreening, chatbots can handle other routine recruitment processes, such as background checks, skills assessments, and requisitions routing.

### SCHEDULING INTERVIEWS

Companies need to make the most of their HR staff, and adding interview scheduling to chatbots' responsibilities gives

recruiters more time to work on sourcing and building relationships with in-demand talent.

### REPRESENTING THE COMPANY'S BRAND

Brand reputation matters to job seekers, with 39 percent of women

and 33 percent of men saying, "the reputation or brand of the company is 'very important' to them when considering a job move."<sup>7</sup> By helping a company strengthen its brand, chatbots also help boost the company's bottom line: strong employer branding can enable organizations to lower their per-hire costs by as much as 43 percent.<sup>8</sup>

### ENGAGING WITH JOB SEEKERS

Potential candidates can get turned off when companies don't get back to them ASAP. But chatbots can do much more than just initiate engagement by welcoming newcomers to an organization's career site, asking how they can help, and answering FAQs. When companies capture job seekers' contact information, chatbots can also maintain candidate engagement later by thanking them for applying, reminding them of interviews, keeping them updated on their application status, and informing them of future job openings that arise.

### SOURCING CANDIDATES

Even when current employees aren't actively looking for jobs, they are still usually interested in learning about possible job opportunities. Recruitment chatbots can reach out to—and work one-on-one with—both active job seekers and passive job seekers. (In fact, because interaction with a chatbot requires less commitment, passive job seekers may be more willing to engage with chatbots than with recruiters; this helps companies avoid wasting resources on potential candidates who are less likely to become active applicants.) With the pandemic making in-person job fairs tough (if not impossible) to pull off, chatbots can also help organizations increase their outreach by facilitating virtual job fairs while still leaving room for recruiters to manage conversations themselves if they wish.

### INCREASING DIVERSITY

Today, organizations are striving to increase their diversity across regional and national borders and across demographic factors such as ethnicity, gender, and age. Remote-work arrangements that became widespread during the pandemic are likely to continue to some degree after it ends, thus improving the geographical diversity of companies' talent pools (aided in part by chatbots' multilingual capabilities). Chatbots can also be used to help prevent unconscious bias during candidate prescreening.

### Setting up a Recruitment Chatbot

Most recruiters, HR staff, and hiring managers aren't AI experts—and they don't need to be. But they do need a general understanding of their chatbot's conversation capabilities, which can include the following functions:

- Some chatbots let candidates select from a

list of questions and receive preprogrammed answers to them. AI-powered chatbots allow job seekers to communicate fluidly, in much the same way they would talk to a person. The chatbot interprets the text and then returns a logical response (such as a direct answer to a question or a link to a helpful resource).

- Website chatbots can work on either an always-on basis or on an opt-in basis. A chatbot might proactively engage visitors to a career site by initiating the conversation with them, or it might wait until the candidate clicks on a branded chatbot widget (usually located in the lower right-hand corner of the screen) to invite the interaction.
- Using AI to analyze job seekers' motivations and frustrations, a recruitment chatbot can even be programmed to urge the candidate to apply for the job they've just looked at, allowing a company to assess the effectiveness of its job descriptions and adjust its recruitment strategies.
- Chatbots may also engage candidates via text or another messaging application. (For example, candidates can text advertised keywords to a shortcode to launch a texting chatbot.)

A chatbot can be customized in myriad ways. For example, it can be trained (using simple logic) to recognize and reply to countless questions. It can also have a distinct personality and name. Updating the chatbot is merely a matter of opening the script and making the changes.

### Looking Ahead

Chatbots are here to stay—and growing in popularity. Candidates now often expect to interact with chatbots as part of the application process, and companies are increasingly making use of these AI tools to streamline their hiring processes and improve their bottom lines. With their impressive versatility, chatbots can be customized to meet the needs of any organization. ■

*iCIMS Inc. is a leading provider of innovative Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) talent-acquisition solutions that help businesses win the war for top talent. To learn more about how iCIMS can help your organization, visit [www.icims.com](http://www.icims.com).*

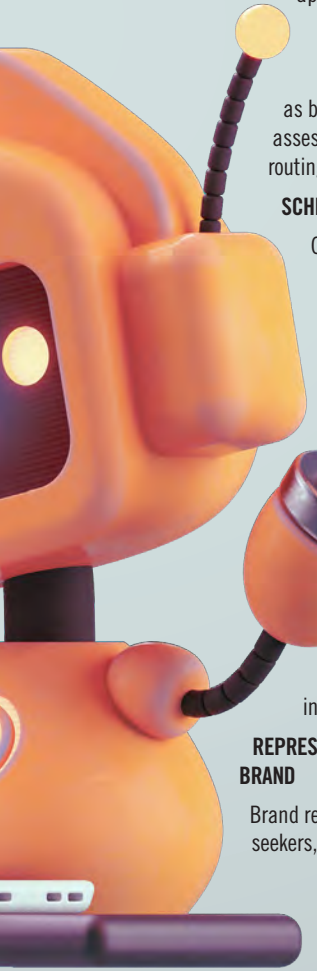
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# HOW TO MAKE DIVERSITY IN HIRING A REALITY



In their quest to achieve better hiring and retention results, organizations see improving the speed and quality of hiring as a corporate imperative and are often ready to make significant changes to win the talent they need. This desire for improved results is not new, though: organizations have wanted to hire faster and better for a long time (often targeting skills that are in scarce supply). But they have struggled to do so well and consistently.

What's new and different today is the fact that organizations are now genuinely interested in increasing the number of people of color—specifically Black talent—in leadership positions. The impetus for this shift was, of course, the murder of George Floyd, along with the subsequent high-profile Black Lives Matter awareness campaigns and marches worldwide against systemic racism. Companies can no longer ignore the data:

- » Corporate America has a shockingly low number of Black leaders. (For example, Black CEOs lead fewer than 1 percent of Fortune 500 companies.)<sup>1</sup>
- » Workplace diversity leads to improvements in enterprise value, innovation, and global economic outcomes.<sup>2</sup>
- » Most workplace diversity initiatives fail to achieve their goals.<sup>3</sup>

The confluence of these factors has inspired some organizations' senior leaders to work harder than ever to make measurable and sustained improvements to the diversity of

their workforces. Other organizations, however, don't understand—or are unwilling to acknowledge—the work required to win and retain top Black talent, and instead are satisfied with simply moving a few Black people into high-visibility jobs.

Unfortunately, poor employment practices negatively affect Black employees more than their White counterparts. For example, when people are hired or promoted into leadership positions prematurely or inappropriately, they face far less criticism and pushback when they are White than when they are Black. Unlike White leaders in that situation, Black leaders have to deal with racism-based complaints (“See what happens when we put a Black person in a position like this?”) and sabotage (“They got hired over all these other people, so let them figure out how things work around here.”), all of which harms not only them but also the overall workforce and the business.

Proper recruitment, selection, onboarding, and performance management routines are critical for the success of any new executive. This

holds particularly true when companies seek to make their leadership ranks more diverse. The old routines that may have worked reasonably well with primarily White leaders must be examined and adapted to successfully and consistently win top, diverse talent. It's time for companies to implement new strategies.

## **Conduct a diversity audit of the company's recent and current workforces.**

Analyze at least two years of hiring, internal movement, and attrition data by level, job type, geography, business unit, compensation, ethnicity, gender, age, and other relevant factors.

- » What is the status of attrition, retention, and retirement of the current workforce?
- » What positions and skills are hard to find and retain—and why?
- » What are the organization's trends related to diversity hiring, mobility, and retention?
- » What are the priority and specificity of diversity needs by business unit, location, level, etc.?



### Determine workforce needs for the near future.

Key questions to answer include:

- » What is the optimal workforce profile (in terms of size, shape, mix, diversity, and capabilities) for the organization today compared to what it will need during the next two to three years?
- » What will the workforce require to meet the organization's business objectives now and during the next two to three years?
- » What emerging technology and skills are critical to ensure business success and competitive advantage today and during the next two to three years?

### Identify priority areas for workforce diversity.

Before using the future needs analysis to determine the priority areas for diversity hiring, first define what diversity means with regard to job type, location, etc. Does this mean women? Black people? Any person of color? Clarity on this issue is key to moving diversity hiring and retention outcomes forward.

### Assess the organization's current ability to win passive talent.

Because the competition for top talent remains fierce, any company that wants to hire more high-performing diverse

employees needs to examine how it measures up in the following areas:

- » Prioritized, specific, measurable sourcing plans based on business demands
- » Broad research on industry competition for talent
- » A consistent and well-documented methodology for identifying, connecting with, and tracking high-performing passive talent
- » Developing talent pipelines and engagement levels over time for key roles
- » Working with hiring managers to successfully attract passive talent to consider the organization
- » Success in winning top passive talent that stays and performs well over time

### Assess the organization's current ability to effectively onboard and retain talent.

Because companies need to not only hire diverse talent but also ensure that it stays and performs well over time, they must assess their onboarding and retention practices. The data obtained by the initial diversity analysis will indicate where (in terms of geography, roles, levels, etc.) in the organization diversity hiring is succeeding and where it is failing. With this information,

the company can answer the following questions:

- » Is there a structured and documented approach to onboarding that clearly defines roles, responsibilities, and measures of success?
- » Is there survey data from new hires that indicate the effectiveness of the onboarding experience?
- » Is the company successful at integrating new hires and helping them to become acclimated and productive quickly?
- » Do managers get personally involved in the orientation, assimilation, and development of their team members? (And are they held accountable for doing so?) Are these activities a stated investment priority for the organization?

The need for new approaches to achieve workplace diversity is clear. By taking bold steps to retool their hiring practices, organizations can make the shift from merely wanting to hire diverse talent to actually doing it. ■

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# Upskilling and Reskilling:

The Art of Coping with Change

BY THE REWORK EDITORS



Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, preparing for constant change has become a fact of everyday life for businesses. In recent months, organizations have had to rapidly digitize processes—faster than ever before—and employees’ responsiveness and adaptability have been critical to the success of this shift. Over the past year, leaders learned (if they didn’t know it already) that companies that can reinvent themselves are better positioned to weather crises and thrive. Even when the pandemic ends, though, organizations must continue to give their teams the tools they need to be resilient and able to cope with uncertainty and adapt so that the efforts made throughout the past year can be sustained and amplified.

## The Heart of the Matter: Training

Because skills play a huge role in organizations’ success, the HR function must focus on skills development for existing positions (upskilling) and create development plans for new functions (reskilling). Even if a job title does not change, over time, some of the tasks assigned to that role will become obsolete and replaced by new ones. To remain competitive, each employee must learn to integrate these new tasks into their role and understand how those tasks affect the business. At the same time, organizations need to create new professions and career opportunities to respond to market changes so they can fully satisfy their customers. The simultaneous use of reskilling and upskilling enables organizations to remain successful and gain a competitive advantage.

The World Economic Forum anticipates that “at least 54 percent of all employees will need reskilling and upskilling by 2022” in order to perform well in their roles and allow their businesses to thrive.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, employees themselves recognize this change in workplaces and the need for regular training: 77 percent of respondents in a 2019 PWC survey “said they would be willing to upskill in order to become more employable.”<sup>2</sup>

## Artificial Intelligence and the Transformation of Skills Management

To achieve the highest return they can on their investments in upskilling and reskilling, organizations need to go much further in the implementation and management of training. Because of the misperception that training isn’t work (and vice versa), today’s employees do not spend nearly enough time on training. Organizations that want to see increases in efficiency, productivity, and quality need to recognize that training and work are linked and interdependent.

A close look at the practices of leading organizations reveals that their success stems in part from having in place a thorough training strategy at all stages of an employee’s time in their company.

Artificial intelligence plays a key role in this strategy by helping companies monitor the skills that each employee—and the organization at large—already has, as well as those they need.

Companies need to know, as precisely as possible, what each employee is currently able to do, which skills they have, and which new skills they want or need to learn. By linking this information to job descriptions and development plans, an organization will know which skills its candidates need when they are being recruited. It will also know which career development opportunities to offer to employees as well as any relevant training a team needs to achieve its goals. Therefore, artificial intelligence has a positive impact not only on the efficacy of skills management but also on career development.

## Looking Ahead

Companies that use data science to identify new skills and effectively upskill and reskill their employees will have a clear edge in the ongoing war for talent. Key strategies include the creation of academies or in-house training centers, the deployment of regulatory training in line with company strategy, and the provision of other resources that employees need to improve their skills. Much more is needed, though, and companies should keep looking for ways to reduce today’s skills gaps as much as possible and to prepare employees for tomorrow by giving them the skills they will most certainly need in the future. ■

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*This article was written by the editorial team of Cornerstone’s ReWork blog ([cornerstoneondemand.com/rework](http://cornerstoneondemand.com/rework)), a guide to the changing talent-management industry that helps executives and HR leaders succeed in the new, technology-driven economy. It is reprinted here with permission.*

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“ At least 54 percent of all employees will need reskilling and upskilling by 2022. ”

# WHY TEAM MEMBERS *Should Get to Know Each Other*

BY TERRI KLASS

During this unsettling time, when more people than ever are working remotely, many people are feeling isolated. Virtual meetings tend to focus on deadlines and data, leaving little time for team members to loop each other into their personal lives. Although the question “How are you doing today?” comes up, it usually elicits only brief responses—and the conversation then turns to the work at hand. Instead of treating remote gatherings as merely work-related meetings, leaders need to include in them a dimension of relationship building. Not only does getting to know team members address isolation concerns, but it can also yield several other benefits.

## Community Building

When “gathering together” involves staring at boxes of faces on a screen (and switching between speaker view and gallery view doesn’t do much to help people feel closer to each other), leading virtual teams can present many challenges to connection. Learning about each other can help with community building, and one great way to do this is to ask interesting questions and listen carefully to everyone’s responses. Possible questions include:

- ▶ What is your favorite food for dinner?
- ▶ Where do you spend time when you want to escape your home office?
- ▶ What words might describe your state of mind?

## Pinpointing Strengths (and Weaknesses)

When team members get to know each other better, they also learn about each other’s strengths and areas of expertise. At the same time, learning about teammates can also provide insights into people’s areas of weakness, which could, for example, lead to a better understanding of why someone might need more time to complete part of an assignment. With all of this knowledge about strengths and weaknesses, a team can more easily create a workflow that improves results by assigning work based on each member’s strengths and interests and quickly identifying (and mitigating) roadblocks. (For example, a team that discovers that one member is a talented artist might try to figure out how to leverage those skills to help promote a product.)





A stylized illustration of a hand holding a plant. The hand is purple and yellow, with fingers spread. The plant is green and yellow, with a thick stem and several leaves. The background is a mix of purple, yellow, and green, with a large yellow circle and a green circle. The overall style is modern and colorful.

## Opportunities for Innovation

When team members get to know—and trust—each other, they become more willing to listen to others' ideas, step outside of their comfort zones, and take more risks. They also become more likely to share insights that they think could create a better approach to a project. These exchanges of ideas often serve as launch points for greater innovation.

## Team Growth

Relationships with each other enable teams to build a culture in which each person feels valued. To grow teams successfully, leaders must prioritize people over projects by encouraging team members to listen actively to each other, to ask each other meaningful questions to make sure everyone is really okay, to respond with respect to different perspectives, and to keep open hearts and minds.

Getting to know team members is not just a good idea during pandemic-related times of physical distancing and isolation, but a good practice to incorporate all the time. When people connect with each other, they work together better. And when they work together better, everyone benefits. ■

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# WHAT DO EMPLOYEES EXPECT IN 2021?

BY MIKE MCKERNS

One of the most surprising aftereffects of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic is that while unemployment is high, it's still tough to fill open positions. In part, that's because the crisis revealed weaknesses in systems we rely on, including healthcare, schools, employment, and infrastructure. As a result, employees are questioning several aspects of their work lives. Hit their hot-button issues out of the park, and you'll attract in-demand candidates.

## Pay Rates

One of the issues that gathered attention during the pandemic is that the minimum wage has not kept up with the cost of living. Depending on location and the nature of the work being done, it will be tough to get people to take minimum wage jobs at the current rate. For most individuals, it's simply not realistic to pay for transportation, childcare, rent, groceries, healthcare, and other necessities for \$7.25 an hour. The federal minimum has stagnated at this rate for more than ten years. A raise to \$15.00 an hour is proposed but will be stepped up gradually until 2025, after which it will continue to rise with the national median wage. Until then, employers may be wise to experiment with higher rates on tough-to-fill positions to gain more applicant interest.

## Remote Work

Another reality revealed by the pandemic is that a lot more work can be done remotely than expected. When faced with a crisis, we found that not only can many jobs be performed effectively remotely, but work can often be done at different times. This has been an adjustment for traditional managers accustomed to managing by walking around. They might measure productivity by viewing people in their seats looking busy. It turns out many tasks can be performed just as effectively at home. Some can even be

done as well at nine o'clock in the evening on someone's couch as it could in the office at two in the afternoon. Quantify desired results rather than process so success can be easily measured.

## Schedule Flexibility

An additional challenge exposed during the pandemic is the shortage and expense of childcare. Flexible shifts can give people a low-cost option to keep their kids cared for in the home. As an employer, you can present second shift positions as a family-friendly option. Because employees will save on daycare costs and some positions offer a shift differential, this option provides advantages for employers and workers. Also, if it's realistic to allow employees to set their own hours within reason or take off time for appointments or emergencies they can make up later, it will go a long way toward building goodwill and loyalty.

Employees want to be thought of as people with individual needs, not cogs in the machine. You'll gain productivity and boost engagement by offering a safe and healthy workplace and putting yourself in employees' shoes. Adapt your approach to hiring to address these factors, and your recruiting job is likely to get a little easier. ■

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**RECIPE**

## Vanilla Pudding

Some foods are at their peak and ideal to enjoy at certain times of the year, such as strawberries in June, corn on the cob in August, and pumpkin pie in November. Some foods span all seasons, though, and are just perfect year round. Vanilla pudding is one of them, and with ingredients that are usually kitchen staples, it's a breeze to make. Once you've tried the homemade version, you'll ever go back to the powder in a box!

**Yield:** 6 servings **Time:** 15 min. (+ time to chill)

**What you'll need:**

- ▶ 2 Tb cornstarch
- ▶ 1 cup sugar
- ▶ 3 cups whole milk
- ▶ 4 egg yolks, lightly beaten
- ▶ 2 t vanilla
- ▶ 1 Tb butter
- ▶ ¼ tsp salt

**Directions:**

- ▶ Put the egg yolks in a small mixing bowl. Set aside.
- ▶ Combine the cornstarch, sugar, and milk in a medium saucepan. Cook over medium heat (while stirring) until the mixture starts to simmer, then continue simmering (and stirring!) for another 3 minutes.
- ▶ Remove the pot from the heat, add about 1 cup of the mixture to the egg yolks, then slowly add (while whisking) the new egg-yolk mixture to the saucepan.
- ▶ Bring the mixture to a gentle boil over medium-high heat, then turn the heat to low and cook (don't forget to stir!) for 3 more minutes.
- ▶ Remove the pot from the heat, then add the vanilla, butter, and salt and stir well. Pour the pudding into a large bowl, cover it with plastic wrap, and refrigerate for several hours until chilled.

**Nutrition Facts**

Amount per Serving

**Calories:** 247 cal

**Fat:** 6 g

**Dietary fiber:** 0 g

**Sugars:** 40 g

**Protein:** 6 g

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