LEADERS: LEARN TO ATTRACT TOP TALENT

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Disruptors are companies that seize enormous market share and mindshare by reimagining an industry.

Consider Airbnb, which rewrote the book on travel accommodations; SpaceX, which is redefining the new space race; 23andMe, which is bringing genetic analysis to the masses; or Lyft, which keeps ridesharing rolling. These companies, and many disruptive market leaders like them, are attracting some of the best talent from around the world.

It’s difficult to overstate the importance of hiring quality talent in the pursuit of competitive advantage. The performance differential alone between top and average workers can make the difference between a market leader and an also-ran. The best companies differentiate themselves by the people they employ. The talent pool is the “X factor.”

How can companies appeal to the best and brightest? There are many ways to attract and retain good employees. Each way can have a
significant effect on drawing the people you want to your organization. However, culture trumps most everything. Work on your company culture and you can become an irresistible talent magnet. In any organization, HR and other talent development professionals have essential roles to play—but C-level and other senior leaders have the greatest impact and highest responsibility for making the organization a talent magnet. This issue of TD at Work is intended primarily for senior leaders who care about securing, developing, and retaining talent and discusses how these leaders can work with the talent development practitioners in their organizations to put into place practices that will draw top talent.

If you sit in leadership at your company, consider this: Physics tells us that a magnetic field is created when a majority of the particles within a substance are aligned and spinning in the same direction. Senior leaders in a talent magnet organization accomplish the same thing. They leverage all the company's resources harmoniously to create a culture so powerful that it becomes a sustainable force of attraction for great people.

In this issue of TD at Work, we will explore how companies can become and remain talent magnets. We'll use these four lenses to examine the best ways to craft fantastic cultures:

• organizational identity
• human operating systems
• talent cultivation
• workplace evolution.

We will close with some thoughts on attracting the next generation of talent. This is an important consideration, because according to Robert Half, it is estimated that Generation Z, individuals born between the mid-1990s and early 2000s, will constitute 20 percent of the workforce in the next two years. With this as a backdrop, let’s begin exploring what it takes to become a talent magnet and the dynamics needed to build a rich company culture—one that people will want to be part of.

Organizational Identity

Is your company a place to come to work or a place people are eager to be? Are employees and other workers such as gig workers or contractors satisfied with the day-to-day realities of your organization or invigorated by the idea of it? (Note: In this issue, we'll use employee to encompass all organizational talent.) Good businesses draw good people based on what they do and what they offer. If you want your company to be great and draw top talent, it starts with who you are.

Create a Vision

The best people want to be part of an enterprise that's exceptional and vividly conceived. If you want them to choose your company, begin by providing employees and potential employees with a clear, compelling vision. Your organization’s story should be powerful and exciting—one in which people can see themselves. Make it a rallying cry, an imperative—not a goal the company wants to pursue but a future state you must and will attain together.

To inspire, a vision must do more than declare strategic intent and direction. It must show that organizational leaders have done the hard thinking about how everything fits together to make that vision a reality. That's the kind of company top talent want to join and stick with. The more they can see the whole picture, the more highly skilled individuals will buy into it with their whole selves. The sidebar tells more about how leaders and talent development professionals can develop and relay a vision story.

How is the company organized? How do teams work together? How do communication norms work to enable your company to deliver what customers want and need? When you can describe these aspects and more, people will want to be a part of it, making these aspirations and principles come to life. Those details also matter because different people within your company (and recruiting pool) will be more inspired by different elements of the vision. Work to discover and understand what sparks each employee and potential employee the most, and be sure to reflect all those sources of inspiration in the vision story your organization creates.

Look Outside and Forward

A company with an external, future-oriented focus naturally draws people and inspires them. Think about it: Few things can have a stronger effect on team cohesion and enthusiasm. Every part of the company touches
Town hall meetings are a good way to do this—talk regularly with your staff about what you plan for your organization's future. Help employees see the larger purpose of the individual role they play in the company's work.

It's also essential for people to believe in the company's commitment to go big on its future. True market leaders and disruptors live by the habit and discipline of regularly asking themselves “What’s next?” If you want to attract and keep great talent, think about the value of challenging your employees at every level with that same question. Taking it further is even better: Provide opportunities to work on what’s needed to make the company's future happen. Offer an environment in which individuals can think forward, constructively, and creatively, and they will want to be part of it for the long haul.

The Lure of Innovation
Companies that are future- and customer-focused are also naturally innovative, attracting people who are wired the same way. Innovative businesses are filled with people who are never content with best practices. Their focus, like the businesses they're drawn to, is always on what we like to call next practices.

Companies like Apple and Amazon that break the molds on traditional products, services, and business models are setting records for market cap and market share. It's easy—too easy—to think that visionary leaders drive their innovation. Employees likewise fuel these organizations' success in creating the next big thing.

Give them a means to share their ideas with you and each other—perhaps in an area on the company intranet—and let them know which ideas are going forward or being tested out. At the end of the day, the best people come and stay for the satisfaction of working in an organization where innovation is all around them.

Culture Wins Hearts
Most people want to be part of something bigger than themselves—this is why culture is the most important dimension of an organization's identity. It's the context—or should be—for every other dimension. Think of your company culture as the set of principles and mores that defines the organization, lived with conviction and consistency by every employee from top to bottom. Collectively,