2019 Hiring Outlook

The Employee Experience:
4 Ways To Attract, Engage, & Retain Talent In Today’s Competitive Market
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INTRO

It’s the most competitive job market in a generation. Do you have what it takes to win the war for talent?

Hiring and retaining talent in a candidate-driven market has always been tough, but today it is even more competitive. With eight consecutive years of job gains, the U.S. unemployment rate fell to a five-decade low in September 2018—signifying a powerful shift in the job market.

Despite not actively looking, 95% of professionals are open to new job opportunities. 66% of professionals are NOT planning to stay at their organization long-term.

While a candidate-driven market is definitely worth celebrating, too often, employers hear the term without fully understanding what this means for them. With professionals in the driver’s seat, they are commanding more than just higher salaries. Today, professionals consider their careers an integral part of their lives. In addition to getting paid what they know they are worth, they expect their job to provide personal fulfillment and meaning. If your employees do not feel supported, aren’t learning new skills for the future, or are disengaged with their work, they will move on.

WHY IS HIRING SO DIFFICULT RIGHT NOW?

- **MORE COMPETITION FOR TALENT**
  - 55% of professionals were interviewing for 2+ other roles while they were interviewing for their current position.

- **HIRING IS UP**
  - 62% of employers plan on hiring new staff in 2019.

- **COMPENSATION IS INCREASING**
  - 91% of professionals would change jobs if offered a significant increase in compensation.

- **CANDIDATE SHORTAGE**
  - Employers cited a lack of applicants as their top hiring challenge.
Despite this growing competition for top talent, employers are struggling to understand how engagement throughout the entire employment experience is critical to attracting and retaining talent. Poor experiences can have a ripple effect throughout an organization, bleeding into every facet of hiring and retaining employees.

73% of professionals have stopped applying to a job because of poor employee reviews

While employers may understand the effects, they are afflicted with hurdles that are difficult to overcome in order to provide the best experience possible. As a result, they’re losing top performers. Employers rated their greatest challenges toward employee retention as:

1. Inability to provide upward mobility + salary growth
2. Employee burnout
3. Poor relationships between teams and managers

While employers today can’t always offer everything an employee may want or need from their job, it is evident that employers need to work harder to improve. Without making adjustments to adapt to today’s market, companies are certain to lose their best employees to the organizations who did make those changes. Additionally, employers must not wait until it is too late to try to win over employees who have one foot out the door.
56% of employers said that they would extend a counter offer in order to keep their best employees. However, 61% of employees said that they would reject a counter offer from their current employer.

This speaks to a hard truth for employers: You don’t pick talent anymore, but rather, talent chooses you. Do you have what it takes to compete?

Read on to learn how you can become a coveted employer in the most competitive job market by:

- Attracting talent through a positive candidate experience
- Prioritizing meaningful professional development
- Engaging and empowering employees at work
- Emphasizing valuable elements of company culture

COLLECTING THE DATA:

To gain a full understanding of what professionals are seeking in their careers and whether their employers are meeting these needs, we surveyed a wide cross-section of job seekers, working professionals, and hiring decision makers.

This allowed us to gain insight from professionals at varying experience levels and from different sectors on what they value most in an employer and what they tend to prioritize in their career—making it possible to evaluate whether these findings are in line with what employers are offering their staff.
ATTRACTION TALENT IN A COMPETITIVE MARKET
In today’s candidate-driven job market, employers can’t rely on job offers to attract new hires. Instead, they need to turn inward and focus on their ability to differentiate themselves and promote this unique identity. **Since these first impressions with prospective hires often become lasting ones, employers need to set the stage for an exceptional candidate experience well before an application is even submitted.**

**CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE:** How job seekers perceive and react to an employer’s sourcing, recruiting, interviewing, and hiring processes.

This experience, from the first time a candidate interacts with your brand online to when they receive an offer, is critical. And as hiring becomes more competitive and the process moves even faster, a poor candidate experience can lead the right candidate to turn down the job. Alternatively, a good one creates a sense of excitement and urgency about working for the company. It can also lead to higher quality applicants, more hires, and new referrals.

75% of job seekers said that the hiring process for their current job, from scheduling an interview to receiving an offer, took under 4 weeks.

With companies speeding up their hiring, those who drag their feet during the process will miss out on top talent. However, providing a strong candidate experience during this short time-period requires knowing and understanding your candidates—something that many employers struggle with.

While it’s certainly important to highlight your mission and values during the hiring process, employers also need to emphasize (and be adaptable to) the factors that are most important to today’s professionals. The following best practices can help you facilitate a strong candidate experience to better engage with top talent:

**OUTSIDE OF COMPETITIVE WAGES AND BENEFITS, WORKING PROFESSIONALS SAID THAT**

**OPPORTUNITY FOR CAREER GROWTH** WAS THE #1 FACTOR THAT ATTRACTED THEM TO THEIR ORGANIZATION
PORTRAY A STRONG EMPLOYER BRAND

Job seekers have access to a wealth of company information through websites, social media, press, and employee reviews. With professionals utilizing these resources to make informed career decisions, not having a strong employer brand can have a huge impact on your ability to attract top talent.

59% of job seekers spend 30+ minutes researching a company throughout the hiring process.

As the first introduction a prospective hire often has to a company, your online presence is far more important than you may think. Not only can it help you build a connection with a prospective hire, but it helps them learn more about who you are, what you do, and why you’re a great place to work.

BE FLEXIBLE IN YOUR REQUIREMENTS

While you may be holding out for a candidate with the perfect combination of skills and experience, the chances of finding them in the current market are slim. Consider your requirements for the job carefully and think about where you’re willing to compromise. Whether that’s the job title, compensation, or level of experience, it is likely that something on your list will have to change. When considering these compromises, it is important to look for potential within a candidate to grow into the role. When a candidate proves that they are adaptable and can learn quickly, they may be worth the extra investment.
Company culture has quickly become a top priority for many professionals. Today’s candidates are looking for an employer that offers them purpose, supports their employees both personally and professionally, and aligns with their values. Since a company’s culture can make or break a job seeker’s decision to apply for a job and ultimately accept an offer, these are factors that everyone, from the CEO to prospective team members, needs to be emphasizing throughout the hiring process.

In today’s job market, you’ll often find your top candidate interviewing with multiple companies at once. This means taking too long to make an offer—or not giving the best offer up front—can lead you to miss out on a candidate who has a better experience elsewhere.

70% of employers say they typically give candidates updates on where they stand in the hiring process, yet a lack of updates is reportedly the most frustrating part of the interview process for job seekers.
PRIORITIZING MEANINGFUL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
Today’s competition for top talent among employers makes one thing clear: many employers are losing this battle. Whether they’re struggling to find candidates in the hiring process or having difficulty retaining their best employees, the growing skills gap often plays a role.

As the skills requirements of employers drift farther from the actual skillsets candidates possess, employers must take action by investing in professional development—both for new hires and top employees. However, professionals do not feel their employers are handling this responsibility well.

While 78% of employers said that they are providing training or development opportunities, the majority of professionals (58%) disagreed. This disconnect between employers and their staff shows that companies are struggling to deal with the skills shortage. Without a considerable investment in professional development, organizations can continue to expect lower-quality candidates, higher turnover of dissatisfied employees, and still no solution to the skills lacking in their business operations.

Additionally, this investment doesn’t stop with building employees’ skills to perform their current job responsibilities, but also to train employees who show potential to grow within the company and become future leaders in the organization. And yet, professionals report that this is not happening:

In order for organizations to provide their staff with skills development that is valuable to the company, training opportunities must motivate employees to learn more and work harder. So, what kind of professional development opportunities do employees want? Professionals say they want the following professional development opportunities from their employer:

1. hands-on training
2. coaching or mentoring
3. management training
4. encouragement to collaborate

While it is no easy task to foster the growth of dedicated employees, employers can start by taking these steps:
BE OPEN TO TEMPORARY EMPLOYEES

Allowing a position to go unfilled due to a lack of candidates can lead to lost profits and overworked employees. This is where a temporary employee, contractor, or consultant can step in. Armed with the industry skills and experience needed to hit the ground running, they can be especially valuable during periods of high demand, project implementations, or to cover positions that will eventually be filled by full-time employees.

68% of professionals are open to freelance or contract work, an increase from 62% in 2018

BUILD ON POTENTIAL

Because the skillset you require may not be readily available, be open to training employees who exhibit the soft skills to thrive in the role. Look for signs of:

- critical thinking
- ability to learn quickly
- problem solving
- initiative/drive

Not only can you train an employee with these qualities to become a valuable member of your team, but you can also foster loyalty and encourage those star employees to seek leadership roles within the organization. However, according to employees, companies are struggling to accomplish this:

66% of professionals said that there is not much support for those wishing to take on leadership roles

LEARN MORE
GET MANAGERS INVOLVED

For each employee, their immediate supervisor has an incredible impact on their overall employment experience. As a result, managers should take an active role in developing each employee. When managers take this on, they can:

- speak candidly about each employee’s goals
- recognize when an employee isn’t feeling fulfilled
- direct an employee’s enthusiasm in ways that support business objectives
- allow them new learning opportunities outside of their normal responsibilities

OFFER MEANINGFUL DEVELOPMENT

For many employees, it is understood that building on your skillset is how you continue advancing in your career. Without access to meaningful opportunities that make a real impact on the company, employees start to feel stagnant and undervalued.

86% of professionals said that they would change jobs if they were offered more opportunities for professional development.

Keep in mind that it’s not just career advancement on their minds; continuous learning and development helps employees understand that they are worth investing in. While e-Learning and webinars are helpful, hands-on training is what employees will value most. When they are offered those opportunities, you are not only building a stronger team, but you are fostering long-term job satisfaction and loyalty.
ENGAGING & EMPOWERING EMPLOYEES AT WORK
When employers consider how they can create the best working environment for their employees, it’s easy to think about larger initiatives: company events, overall company performance, the behavior of executive leadership, etc. While these elements do matter, it’s important to keep in mind that each employee’s individual experience varies, and their daily life at the company has little to do with those larger initiatives.

It’s critical to note that what employees value most is their daily work and the people with whom they interact the most. Not only do they rate support from their manager as #1, but strong team rapport was rated highly as well. Additionally, professional development and flexible scheduling are both heavily influenced by an employee’s direct supervisor.

As a result, when you’re looking at how you can make the most impact on employees, look no further than their manager. This relationship, along with an employee’s relationship with the rest of their team is what actually keeps them engaged. To work to strengthen that relationship, consider how managers within your organization can improve in the following ways:
STRONG TEAM INTRODUCTION

First impressions often become lasting ones, and it is up to a new hire’s team and supervisor to welcome them and help facilitate a smooth onboarding process. However, professionals reported that companies do not do a good job of onboarding employees:

50% of professionals said that they did not have sufficient training and resources

In order to start on a strong foot, managers can take steps in the first days and weeks to ease the transition and make their new employee feel welcome by:

- getting their team excited about meeting the new hire
- organizing a team lunch or outing
- setting expectations for what the new hire can expect to accomplish
- encouraging them to ask questions
- checking in often in the first few months

SHOW SUPPORT

As the relationship between manager and employee has evolved over the years, employees have come to expect more from this relationship. When they say that the most important factor of company culture is support from leadership and management, this doesn’t simply relate to their work. Employees today want to not only feel like their work is valued, but they want to feel valued as a person. To communicate this effectively, managers can:

- Make it clear that the employee’s well-being is important
- Make an effort to check in with employees and know what’s going on in their lives
- Build an environment where the employee knows they can come to you with any issue
- Make an effort to be more flexible when it’s clear an employee may be struggling
BE TRANSPARENT

In any team, communication is the foundation of that dynamic. Not only should managers stress open communication between team members, but they should also stress open communication between manager and subordinate. This should go for personal issues and work-related issues, especially as it relates to the individual’s role and professional goals. However, managers are often less clear in their communication than they think:

Because of this disconnect, managers should work diligently to make sure that their team members have a clear understanding of:

- Your expectations of them
- The team’s goals
- Why they’re completing certain tasks
- How they fit into the larger company goals

57% of employees say that they do not have a clear understanding of what’s required of them in order to earn a promotion.

EMPOWER EMPLOYEES

Not only is it up to managers to set clear expectations and make employees feel valued, but they have the power to go a step further. Employees not only need to feel satisfied by their work, they need to feel motivated by their work. Often, employees don’t feel motivated when their accomplishments and ideas continuously go unnoticed. As a result, managers can continue to empower their team by:

- Celebrating accomplishments
- Encouraging out-of-the-box ideas
- Listening to the employee’s goals
- Showing the impact of their work
WHY CULTURE MATTERS MORE THAN MONEY
Most companies will agree that their employees are critical to growth and success. But, many leaders are stumped as to how to retain them in this tight market. The obvious answer may seem to be through compensation, but what else is there?

When asked what motivates them most in their career, outside of getting paid well, respondents answered:

- work-life balance
- work that is meaningful to me
- feeling appreciated by my employer

Although competitive pay shouldn’t be disregarded, money isn’t everything. These factors all speak to an employee’s basic desire to feel like an asset to the company. This sense of belonging is a key element of culture, which affects every aspect of a company from attracting talent to improving employee engagement.

In short, culture is the backbone of an organization. Without an engaging company culture, employees will struggle to find meaning in their work—something that will not only impact your employees’ productivity and overall happiness, but can also affect how clients, customers, and prospective new hires perceive your company.

With your ability to attract and retain talent on the line, employers need to make a commitment to their culture and values. While these factors will vary by company, the following steps can help you promote a happy and healthy workplace:
REINFORCE CULTURE THROUGH LEADERSHIP

While every employee plays an important role in culture, leaders are the ones that shape it. The choices they make, their communication style, and how they handle success and failures can have a ripple effect on employee engagement and performance.

86%

88% of working professionals feel that the actions of executive leadership affect the overall company culture at their organization.

With culture set at the top, leadership has a responsibility to empower employees to achieve the company’s mission and reflect their values.

OFFER VALUABLE BENEFITS

Many employers mistakenly focus on offering free snacks and social events when trying to improve their company culture. On the surface, it may seem like these “fun” perks are things that working professionals—especially millennials—are seeking. However, these are not the types of company benefits that will keep your top employees around. Outside of pay and health benefits, professionals said they would be happier at their current company with:

- support for training and development
- greater vacation allowance
- flexible scheduling
- opportunities to make a direct impact

Employees today are advocating for benefits that will allow them to grow their skills quickly, find meaning in their work, and maintain a healthy work-life balance. If this is something that you can’t offer your staff, they will take their talent elsewhere.

LEARN MORE
PROMOTE WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Today’s technology means that the “traditional” 9-5 workday is quickly disappearing in some industries. With employees checking emails and doing work after hours, they are looking for ways to better manage their personal time and relationships. Believing that productivity shouldn’t be measured by hours in the office, but rather by results, they want to utilize technology to achieve greater flexibility in the workplace.

92% of professionals make an active effort to maintain a healthy work-life balance. However, 45% of professionals feel that their company does not promote a healthy work-life balance.

EMPHASIZE EMPLOYEE WELLNESS

Investing in wellness can make a big difference for companies. This is especially true given the fact that people spend so much of their time in the workplace, and often have a difficult time balancing their health with their work. This stress, which has been linked to physical ailments and mental health issues, can have major consequences for employees and companies alike. However, wellness is something many employers have struggled to figure out in recent years:

Only 20% of employers feel their company excels at providing wellness initiatives.

It is clear that there is work to be done. While many employers focus on the cost-saving benefits of wellness programs, this is not what matters most. Wellness programs should be geared toward improving employees’ physical, mental, social, and financial well-being.
SOURCES:
2. The Execu|Search Group 2019 Hiring Outlook

ABOUT THE EXECU|SEARCH GROUP

The Execu|Search Group is a leading recruitment, temporary staffing, and workforce management solutions firm headquartered in New York City with additional offices in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Florida, and Illinois. Since opening our doors in 1985, we’ve been committed to finding people jobs they’ll love and connecting companies with the talent they need. Today, we serve the following practice areas:

ACCOUNTING/FINANCE | CREATIVE & DIGITAL | ENGINEERING | FINANCIAL SERVICES
HEALTHCARE | HUMAN RESOURCES | LEGAL SERVICES | NONPROFIT
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