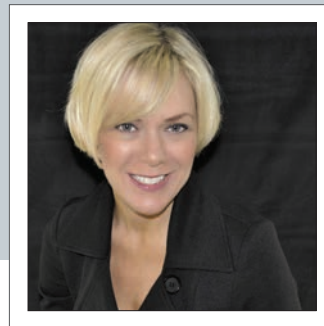


The Talent Pool

Beyond Head-Hunting

Why authentic community is the most sustainable strategy in the war for talent.

By Lisa Maxwell



"Oh, so you're a headhunter!" I hear this a lot when I tell folks what I do for a living, and I must confess the label never fails to give me pause. Not because I think people see *me* as the Webster Dictionary's definition of "one who preserves the decapitated heads of enemies as trophies," but because it reminds me of the competitiveness of our business.

No question, competition is not only inherent but also necessary in the search for highly qualified candidates for executive human resources positions. And although the recruitment industry has remained busier than ever in these lean economic times, I can't help but wonder if a paradigm shift toward more cooperation is necessary as we envision the future of human resources within the larger cultural and social shifts of the twenty-first century.

As we head into economic recovery, it is more important than ever that we collectively and cooperatively strive to create and maintain secure and robust workplaces where we put people first. To best do this, internal HR and external recruitment organizations must find ways to co-exist in what I call an "authentic community" where our common aim is to recruit and retain the best and brightest for the businesses we serve. Authentic communities in HR that are people-focused are essential to companies that are dedicated to not only building their financial reserves but more importantly, their human resource reserves.

The identity of human resources and recruitment is forged by and connected to the ability to acquire human talent and manage human capital. While the concept of executive recruitment can be traced to the 1920s, as a spin-off of the management consulting business, it was the 1990s that established today's concept of talent acquisition when Silicon Valley's super competitive, high-tech labor market boomed. The birth of RPO in the early 2000s was brought about by other processes associated with recruitment such as on-boarding, administration, and technology, which could also be outsourced. In the aftermath of the dot-com bubble, today's workers often change employers more often than previous generations, and deregulation in labor markets has created a shift toward contract and part-time labor and shorter work tenures. All these trends have encouraged the use of both external search firms and corporate recruitment.

These practical and demographic shifts, combined with our raised awareness of the complexity of human nature, has complicated recruitment, it requires our attention on the need for an authentic community. Building an authentic community however, requires an ability to reflect on our practices with the aim of improving our services and building relationships with people. It requires us to ask ourselves two central questions: 1. What do recruiters both our clients and internal hiring managers and the candidates we recruit?

And 2. What best practices can bring our industry together and improve our appreciation for the people in our profession as well as our impact on organizations?

The need for community is universal. A sense of belonging makes our lives meaningful and significant. According to the whitepaper *Retaining Top Talent* from Achievers that ran in the October issue of *HRO Today*:

"With the economy gradually but definitely improving, focusing on retention of top employees will become increasingly important for HR managers in the months ahead. Management experts in general know that top performers are a unique group and that they share at least these traits: They want to be appreciated, adequately compensated, and recognized and rewarded for their efforts."

An authentic community can help HR organizations, recruitment firms and candidates be transformed from a collection of "I's" to a collective "we," thus providing them with a unique and enduring sense of identity, belonging, and place. Authentic community-building depends on each individual organization defining its own culture and creating its own practice. This requires a considerable amount of reflection by recruitment firms and talent acquisition organizations about who they are, what they hope to become, and how they will organize, teach, learn, and live together.

Thoughtfulness, empathy, consistency, and compassion should characterize our communication with others as we build authentic community. Did we consistently follow-up with candidates? Did we prepare candidates for interviews and provide meaningful feedback? Did we take the time to answer questions and give detailed responses to candidate's queries?

Clearly, recruitment's durability has proven resilient through market fluctuations. So are we appropriately humble in our approach to our work to the point where we can put the moniker headhunter to rest? Or is it a pejorative we deserve? In other words, have we replaced the human factor in HR with trophies that are symbolic of our company's financial success but have little to do with building authentic communities characterized by empathy and understanding? When we look back at our careers in human resources what will we remember, and what will we be most proud of? Our personal growth and our impact on others within authentic communities is what we will cherish and remember. Or not.

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