

Now is the time to think about your talent.

As states start to open up from their COVID-19 shutdown orders, it's a great time to start thinking about where your business is heading and what people you will need to get you there. With changes to the business landscape and dramatic upheavals in the labor pool, now is a perfect time to start thinking critically about your talent. Many of our clients have been making hard decisions about retaining staff in a down market. The decision to let employees go is never an easy one, and to do so in such an uncertain time is difficult. I have yet to meet a business owner who is not emotionally impacted by the staffing decisions they face.

We have also seen clients recognize that with great turbulence comes the opportunity to correct some problems that may have been lingering within their organizations. On one recent industry zoom call, a business owner asked, "How many of you, like me, have discovered the weak links in your company since the pandemic hit? You know who's not cutting it, don't you?" The consensus on the call was that virtually every owner was able to see with great clarity who are their rock stars and who are their weak links. The consensus among those in attendance was that this is the right time to make strategic staffing decisions in order to have the right team to move their businesses forward during recovery.

To that end, we recommend the following:

Define what you need: It seems difficult to think strategically when operating in the crisis mode. Workplace interruptions and the push for remote work has realigned not just what employers do but how they do it. The lessons learned during this time may point to a new direction for your company as you work to minimize market or organizational threats and maximize and prepare for future opportunities.

As you contemplate that realignment, defining what you need to move forward is essential. Now is an ideal time to imagine what you will need from your people to realize that new future. Perhaps that will require re-tooling and developing the skills and capabilities of your current employees. Perhaps that will require letting go of some staff who lack the competencies or behaviors that you will need. And perhaps that will require hiring different talent for what your new future requires.

Now is the time to think very critically about what and who you will need on your team. You may not have the financial certainty at this point to hire new talent, but by defining what you will need today, you can start the process of creating space and structure for that talent so that when you can afford to hire, you will be ready and clear about what you're looking for.

Fill your funnel early: Under the best of circumstances, finding and hiring the best talent takes time. Over the past few years, Affinity's average fill time has remained 45-60 days, and this is during times of historically low unemployment rates. With the disruption in the economy and unemployment at record highs, we don't know what the fill time rate will be going forward, but there is a silver lining: in recent years, many employers have felt the need to hire sub-standard

talent to fill critical positions because there was simply not enough talent available with the skills necessary to perform at the level needed. We anticipate that current market disruptions mean that, for the first time in many years, there is going to be a large pool of highly-qualified talent available that was not available pre-pandemic – talent that may be open to entertaining new opportunities who may not have done so two months ago. Once you've determined what you need, don't wait to start looking. Even in this market, quality talent is still challenging to find.

Use technology: Despite recent efforts to ease up mandated stay-in-place orders, most indicators point to the continued need to socially distance for the months and perhaps year ahead. There is one silver lining to this as well: with new-found experience managing a remote workforce, many companies now have the tools and mindset to be able to identify, hire, and manage remote employees. With geography being less important than perhaps it was before COVID, your pool of potential candidates exponentially increases. Now is the time to start embracing video interviewing. There are many platforms that make it easy to meet and manage your employees face-to-face without leaving your home or office. We believe the new normal will find many companies using expanded technology for both video interviewing and managing ongoing performance as a standard practice for some, if not all, of their open positions.

Make offers, even if you're not quite ready: You can lock in A-players now with the understanding that onboarding may look a little different and may be slightly postponed. Consider offering delayed start dates, sign-on bonuses for delayed starts, and/or remote work/online training. Things are uncertain for everyone so candidates will be understanding of extended onboarding timelines. And, by getting commitment on both sides of the table, there's less risk of losing them to another offer.

At Affinity, we have worked with many employers as they navigate these difficult times. The uncertainty and unpredictability of the current economy is felt by literally all our clients. But there are silver linings. And today is the perfect day to take advantage of them.

By Claudia St. John, SPHR, SHRM-SCP, President – Affinity HR Group, Inc.

Claudia St. John is president of Affinity HR Group, Inc., AOCA's affiliated human resources partner. Affinity HR Group specializes in providing human resources assistance to associations such as AOCA and their member companies. To learn more, visit www.affinityhrgroup.com.