

How HR Can Usher Talent Development into The Future of Work

HR Brew | Mikaela Cohen | August 22, 2024

“If we think about talent as just disposable resources, people shuffling around organization to organization, we’re going to continue to fall short,” says Mike Ohata, talent and learning leader.



Emily Parsons

The world of work is changing, and with it how talent is developed.

Mike Ohata, a talent and learning leader who was formerly chief learning officer at consulting firm KPMG, has developed talent at several employers over the course of his career. In his recently published book, *The Talent-Fueled Enterprise: A Powerful Approach to Build Tomorrow’s Workforce*, co-written with Larry Durham and Eric Dingler, he shares his advice for developing employees for an AI-driven future.

He shared with HR Brew his views on talent transformation.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

What inspired you to write this book?

There's so much that we do to scale our people on a day-to-day basis to get work done, but the thing that became really evident is around a little bit of a disconnect [in] the need to address the development of the personal growth desires of employees...Employees want a totally different deal out of work. Part of it [is] driven by generation...but also, I think there's just this growing trend around folks want[ing] experience. They want to be valued...They want experiences that kind of challenge them. And while skills are really important...for today's workers, they're looking for more than that.

What do you predict the next five to 10 years of talent transformation will look like?

I look at the technology advances, and it is accelerating, really representing the opportunity for how we redefine work itself and the meaning behind work or meaningful work...If we think about talent as just disposable resources, people shuffling around organization to organization, we're going to continue to fall short. We're going to continue to struggle.

We've been shaped by this notion of a war for talent. We want to see the high potential...And we have, sort of, the "haves" and "have nots." And it creates this sense of scarcity and this disparity of treatment in organizations...If everybody's moving around, and every organization and enterprise is saying, "I don't have the right talent," then that tells me that we're missing something. That we actually have to refocus and really begin to rethink potential, really to understand what human potential and employee potential looks like, and then really develop the workforce education.

Your book discusses "agile talent strategy"—how would you describe that?

What it comes down to is actually thinking holistically around the developmental journey, so there's definitely business outcomes, and there's definitely professional development that has to happen...You have to combine the two. It's not an "either/or," it's an "add"...When you're looking at skill and development overall, it's not just those hard, technical kinds of skills. It's really this broader education that has to involve, "What are the core attributes or characteristics of people?"

For example, learnability is one of them. Adaptability is another one, empathy...that actually makes the workforce agile, because they're the things that drive us or help us apply skills in a new context. If we only focus around skills that are going to do, like, a set of processes or a set of tasks, and we don't teach employees how to apply that elsewhere...that actually reduces their agility.

How can HR help employees who are resistant to transformation?

We, as managers and leaders, absolutely have a commitment to our people, to help them to imagine, to help them to explore, and if their decision is that they don't feel like they want to do anything right now, I think that's okay...A lot of the workforce and the workplace today is already accustomed and resigned to a set of systems and structures that say, "Do your job. Get

your paycheck, and look for growth elsewhere.” Or you have to exert an incredible amount of energy to go and find something. You’re going to have to spend a lot of time networking. And those, to me, are all really just symptoms of the current systems that people work in today.

In my technology career...we pretty much had this expectation, “If you’re still doing this job a year from now, like we’re going to have to talk, because you should be doing something else.” That was literally the conversation we would have as managers and leaders with teams. So, I think there’s a real, huge shift that could take place, where, if everybody had that mindset, I think employees would adopt that.