

POST-PANDEMIC RECRUITING

A Guide for Recruiters, Hiring Managers and Candidates





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Introduction

COVID-19 shook the hiring landscape like a hurricane. In just weeks, millions of people were laid off or furloughed. Millions more found themselves working in their dining rooms, kitchens or guest rooms.

With even local travel curtailed, recruiters had to adopt new ways of identifying and connecting with candidates. Hiring managers leveraged video platforms to conduct interviews and offer candidates a sense of their company's culture and employee experience.

The pandemic shut down offices, retail sites and other workplaces across the economy. Candidates conducted their job search while markets teetered and employers struggled to shift their business models.

The entire recruiting process, from career fairs to onboarding, became digital.

Meanwhile, the dynamics of finding the right talent shifted. Hiring managers and recruiters began sourcing candidates from within their existing workforce. According to [LinkedIn](#), employers' use of internal mobility increased by 20% between April and August 2020.

And if the right candidates weren't available locally, companies took advantage of digital technology to expand their search to distant locations. In [one study](#), 79% of employers said they'd be able to find better candidates if they weren't limited to those living within commuting distance of their office.

As for candidates, they found themselves competing in a noisy market, with more applicants pursuing each job. At the same time, the pandemic's disruption did little to quell workers' insistence on development opportunities and flexibility in how they do their jobs.

They want to spend some days in the office, some days outside of it. They demand business tools that work as well as the devices they buy for themselves. They expect their workplace to be as diverse as their community. They want their company to have a moral compass.

Each one of these people—candidates, recruiters and hiring managers—plays an important role in talent acquisition. The recruiter's job is to understand their company's business and how each candidate might contribute to its success and growth. The hiring manager sees recruiting through the prism of getting things done: Each candidate plugs a gap in a team's efforts, if only they have the right skills, experience and cultural fit. And candidates, of course, are what recruiting's all about. The right candidates are solutions to very real business problems—once you find them.

This Playbook explores how talent acquisition is changing in 2021, what it means for recruiters, hiring managers and candidates, and how they all can take advantage of new tools and trends while rebalancing their efforts in the wake of the pandemic.

On the surface, acclimating to the myriad changes in recruiting seems daunting. After all, they involve new technology, new skills, and new expectations. But they're also promising, because they revolve around workers who are intelligent, educated, and determined.

This Playbook will help you orient yourself on this new landscape, whether you're looking for new opportunities or the talent necessary to turn your organization's vision into reality.

The changing dynamics of work

The workplace of 2021 is dynamic, digital, flexible and more likely to reflect the attitudes of the outside world than it's ever been before. The workforce is more assertive about its approach to work and life, and the importance of work to many people is declining. Indeed, today's employees expect their company to offer the flexibility they need to actively pursue work and life. At the same time, they insist their organization offer development opportunities, a sense of purpose, and exhibit values that align with their own.

Whether you're a candidate, a hiring manager, or a recruiter, understanding these dynamics is important. Recruiting is intrinsically human, after all, and the process of looking for work or seeking new workers is impacted as much by personal preference as it is by business conditions and economics.

Today's workers don't think about work-life balance so much as work-life integration. They're media-savvy, socially conscious, and determined to live their lives their way. In the past, companies dictated the type of technology employees used. Today, employers must adapt to a range of brands and device types as workers choose for themselves the solutions that best fit their way of working—and their way of life.

Even before COVID-19, such trends were gaining momentum. When the pandemic struck, tens of millions were forced to work from home, although the number of remote workers had been steadily growing for years. Childcare became a crisis for many families as parents juggled their responsibilities at work with helping their children learn, crystallizing the balancing act many families had struggled with for some time. Meanwhile, workplace safety and wellness became a critical issue to the rank and file.

At the center of all this sits talent acquisition. New expectations from employees and new technology embraced by consumers have fueled changes in how candidates look for work as well as how and where they do their jobs. The workforce has undergone fundamental changes in recent years, and the most important changes will be in play for some time.



New types of workers

In the past, classifying workers was relatively simple: They were either full-time or part-time. Then, around 2009, companies began to hire “gig” workers, independent contractors engaged on a temporary basis. Spurred by the rise of companies like Uber, DoorDash, eCourier, and Deliveroo, the gig economy grew, as did the number of businesses experimenting with new approaches to workforce strategy.

Contingent workers allow companies to reduce overhead and increase flexibility. At the same time, younger workers believe contingent work gives them more control over their lifestyles and incomes. According to the contingent workforce management firm [ProUnlimited](#), over half of skilled workers will be independent by the end of 2021. More employers in more industries will use them for everything from taking customer service calls to coding web pages.

The wide availability of contingent workers allows organizations to develop more dynamic talent strategies. Part-time and gig workers enable organizations to quickly address changes in business conditions or sales cycles by expanding or shrinking their workforce. Specialized talent can be easily engaged on-demand, for less money, and kept on for as long as their skills are needed.

Meanwhile, communications and collaboration technology allows many workers to do their jobs from pretty much anywhere. Their proximity to a physical office became less important to the organization’s operation, if it was a factor at all.

At the same time that remote work became more familiar, industries like technology, finance, and professional services searched for more candidates regardless of their location. Talent around the world is now within anyone’s reach.



Digital work

At the height of the pandemic, as hiring fell and unemployment rose, many employers set their talent acquisition teams to work strengthening pipelines and adopting new technology. In some cases, recruiting continued so the business could be kept running. In others, executives wanted to make sure they could quickly resume hiring once the economy recovered.

But hiring is trickier now, especially for organizations that rely on office workers. In-person interviews have gone by the wayside and collaboration between talent acquisition and hiring managers must be done virtually. Many companies that stopped actively recruiting in early 2020 turned their attention to sourcing job seekers and building up a pipeline of qualified talent. Here again, they were preparing for the day hiring picks up again.

Just as they had to embrace remote work in order to continue operating, many employers had little choice but to adopt new approaches to communication, such as mobile access, and addressing specific workflows, such as onboarding through digital platforms. Today, virtual job fairs and video interviews are less likely to be considered nice-to-haves. In fact, most talent acquisition professionals believe that virtual recruiting will become routine. A survey by [LinkedIn](#) found that 81% of talent acquisition professionals believe virtual recruiting will continue to be used post-COVID. Seventy percent believe digital interviews will become standard.

Video-based recruiting systems have imposed a range of administrative tasks onto talent acquisition teams. Interviews have to be set up, assessments made, references and backgrounds checked in unprecedented volumes. Meanwhile, relationships must be developed with promising candidates, even if there's no immediate need to hire them.



Internal mobility

Of course, not every job can be filled by external candidates. For one thing, there's a skills shortage, which makes attracting and hiring the right individual for any given role particularly challenging. By 2030, the global economy will be short more than 85 million people, according to [Korn Ferry](#). Demographics are behind the shortage, the firm's study says. Older workers are retiring faster than younger workers can get the training and experience they need to replace them.

Training has only grown in importance as employers emphasize the need for up-to-date, specialized skills in their workforce development plans. In response, many workers prioritize opportunities to develop new skills and obtain the experience necessary to rise. One study, for example, found that [the two top reasons](#) Millennials leave their jobs are a lack of development and mobility.

All of this made the labor market intensely competitive. As they sought more options, employers realized they had a source of talent hiding in plain sight: their own workforce. During 2020, a number of companies implemented internal mobility systems to not only fill full-time positions, but to address gig projects and job sharing, as well.

Layoffs, tightening budgets, and hiring freezes notwithstanding, employers still needed people to fill critical roles. And it wasn't lost on them that [internal mobility](#) increased engagement and retention, reduced cost and time to hire, and increased agility and flexibility throughout the organization.

Internal mobility offers another benefit: The idea's popular with younger workers, who evaluate the possibilities for movement when they're considering a new job. According to [PwC](#), 52% of Millennials say that opportunities for career progression make a prospective employer attractive.



Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

According to [Gallup](#), today's workers "demand respect, equity, and inclusion." Diversity, equity, and inclusion isn't just "nice to have," the researcher says. Instead, "it's an imperative that is core to their personal identities."

In fact, during 2020 employee engagement was exceptionally strong (though it dropped significantly during the summer's demonstrations in support of justice for George Floyd). Younger job seekers made it clear they were prepared to pass by opportunities with companies that didn't seem committed to DEI. Said [the Washington Post](#): "Over the past decade, highly educated young professionals have increasingly prioritized personal values in deciding where to work." One [industry survey](#) found "67% of active and passive job seekers said that diversity is an important factor when considering companies and job offers."

Many companies want to do the right thing when it comes to social issues, while others simply want to get by. As they grapple with the challenges surrounding DEI, organizations must consider their social reputation, brand, and culture in order to make sure they're accomplishing their goals while sending the desired message about what they've done.

Bear in mind, there's more to DEI than issues surrounding race or nationality. Today's workforce is closely attuned to issues of gender bias and sexual orientation, as well, and expects the workplace to operate in a more egalitarian way than previous generations, according to [National Public Radio](#).



None of these trends are particularly new. Many companies have long encouraged workers to move around the organization, for example, while some American businesses [took up diversity training](#) in the 1960s. However, the impacts of COVID-19 and civil unrest were so widely felt during 2020 and early 2021 that workers and leaders, recruiters, managers and candidates had no choice but to adapt to them, if not embrace them.

That means everyone involved with the hiring process must adjust their approach to reflect today's reality.





5 Tips for Candidates: Searching for your next role

1. UNDERSTAND THE ROLE, COMPANY, AND RECRUITING PROCESS.

Understand the organization you're applying to and how its hiring process works. Don't be afraid to ask about flexible work arrangements, compensation, opportunities for growth, and moving around the company. Ask about the hiring process itself and what you can expect at each step.

2. DEMONSTRATE THAT YOU'RE COMFORTABLE WORKING REMOTELY

For remote work, be sure you're comfortable participating in video interviews and have reliable technology. Many work-from-home opportunities also require specific skills, such as strong organization and communication. If you have these, be sure to highlight them in your resume and during interviews. For opportunities that offer a mix of in-person and remote work, ask employers to clarify their expectations around these arrangements.

3. KNOW HOW CONTINGENT WORK FITS WITH YOUR SEARCH.

If you're having trouble landing the right job, embrace contingent work. It's a great way to avoid resume gaps while developing new experiences and skills. Ask about differences between contingent roles and other employment types, especially if these opportunities are new to you. Most important, inquire where contingent work might lead in the future.

4. LEARN ABOUT THE COMPANY'S COMMITMENT TO DEI.

If you're a member of an underrepresented group or have personally worked to foster DEI, talk about it. Research the employer's commitments and initiatives, and prepare questions about the company's vision and its programs' impact. Also watch out for red flags, such as a lack of diversity in the C-suite or few program details on the website.

5. BE PREPARED, FLEXIBLE, AND RESPONSIVE.

Expect competition to increase for desirable roles. Keep your resume and LinkedIn profile updated, and always be networking. Remember that many companies use applicant tracking systems to help evaluate candidates, so tailor your resume to each job description and include experiences and skills that are relevant to the role. Look for ways to stand out: Develop existing skills or learn new ones, publish an article, produce a podcast, and share details with prospective employers.



5 Tips for Hiring Managers: Seeking Strong Candidates

1. CREATE DIRECT AND APPEALING JOB LISTINGS.

Make sure job descriptions are clear and concise. Use titles that candidates would search for, such as *product marketing manager* instead of *rock star product promoter*. Responsibilities and qualifications should be easy to understand and realistic. Most importantly, sell the job and your company. Show candidates why it's better to work for you than someone else.

2. ENSURE REMOTE HIRES ARE A PART OF THE TEAM.

Give remote candidates a sense of what it's like to work for you. Since they won't be in the workplace, virtually introduce them to your team during interviews, offer a feel for your culture, and outline expectations for collaboration and communications.

3. MAKE YOUR EXPECTATIONS CLEAR.

Make sure contingent workers understand the expectations for their role and have opportunities to get their questions answered. Pursue a thorough, disciplined hiring process. Don't skip steps like screening because a position is "just" contingent. You want to make sure contingent workers are committed to doing their jobs well and pose no security risk.

4. MATCH CANDIDATES TO APPROPRIATE JOBS.

Pay attention to how resumes align with each job. An ATS that allows candidates to upload social profiles can give you added insight into their strengths and weaknesses. Have people demonstrate how they'll approach their work. For example, ask sales candidates to conduct mock sales calls or product marketers to deliver presentations.

5. EMBRACE QUESTIONS, DON'T FEAR THEM.

Be prepared to answer tough questions. Candidates will want to know how COVID-19 affected your team's operations or about what you're doing to foster DEI. If people are asking similar questions, begin proactively reaching out to address them. Technology, in the form of automation or digital assistants, for example, can make this less of a burden.



5 Tips for Recruiters: Attracting and Engaging Talent

1. EXPAND OUTREACH TO NEW TARGETS AND CHANNELS.

Cast a wide net. Reach out to everyone – both active or passive candidates. Even workers who aren't actively searching are open to taking on roles with higher compensation, more flexibility, improved mobility, and the like. To reach the right candidates, use a wide range of channels and platforms like LinkedIn, Stack Overflow, Angellist, or Facebook. And make sure your outreach efforts are organized. Contacting the same person multiple times reflects poorly on you and your business.

2. PERSONALIZE THE ENTIRE CANDIDATE PROCESS.

Personalize your career sites and candidate communications. If you're looking for business analysts or new college graduates, for example, develop messages and build out landing pages that speak specifically to those segments. Personalized experiences increase the likelihood of candidates responding and can be instrumental in convincing them to choose your company over its competitors. At the same time, ensure your brand and culture don't get lost in the weeds.

3. SHOWCASE NEW OPPORTUNITIES TO CURRENT EMPLOYEES.

Share jobs internally and reach out to employees. Use communication channels that they regularly interact with and partner with other departments to promote positions across the organization. When communicating with internal targets, make yourself as available as you would for external candidates, and make sure they understand how the transition process works.

4. ASSESS SOURCING BIAS AND TALK ABOUT DEI.

To drive diversity, regularly assess sourcing bias and incorporate DEI into your message. Assess job descriptions, career site copy and pictures, and other communications to ensure language is unbiased and images reflect a diverse workplace. Talk proactively about DEI, before candidates even bring it up. If you're worried about unconscious bias, consider using artificial intelligence to minimize it in hiring decisions.

5. KEEP TEAMS ORGANIZED AND IN-TOUCH.

For recruiting leaders looking to maintain productivity while working from home, make sure structured processes are in place and teams stay organized. Ensure recruiters have access to tools that enable collaboration with others. Clearly communicate responsibilities and deadlines to stakeholders. Keep everyone up-to-date on what's happening with each applicant and what's coming next. All of this keeps tasks from falling through the cracks and ensures deadlines are met.



Conclusion

COVID-19 stress tested recruiting and sharpened the expectations of candidates. More often than they did before, employees weigh a position's satisfaction and potential against their desire for education and advancement. Employers seek forward-looking skills from a diverse range of candidates, many of whom are already in their corporate "family."

Talent acquisition is about understanding the skills and ambitions of each candidate, the requirements of each role, and the ability to match them both as quickly as possible. For that to happen, employers must respond, and even anticipate, the candidate's needs. That begins the process of building a relationship that is deep, rewarding and long-term.

For candidates, preparation and flexibility are the keys. The better you understand a prospective employer and their business, the more confident you'll be during interviews with recruiters and hiring managers. Using contingent work to gain experience as well as pay, and finding ways to stand out from others in the field, builds credibility and encourages managers to see you as a solution to the challenges they face in getting work done.

The business world has never offered so much opportunity and the labor pool has never held such potential. Whether you're looking for a new job or a new member of your team, you can manage today's market dynamics by understanding the trends we've discussed and planning your strategy to reflect them.



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