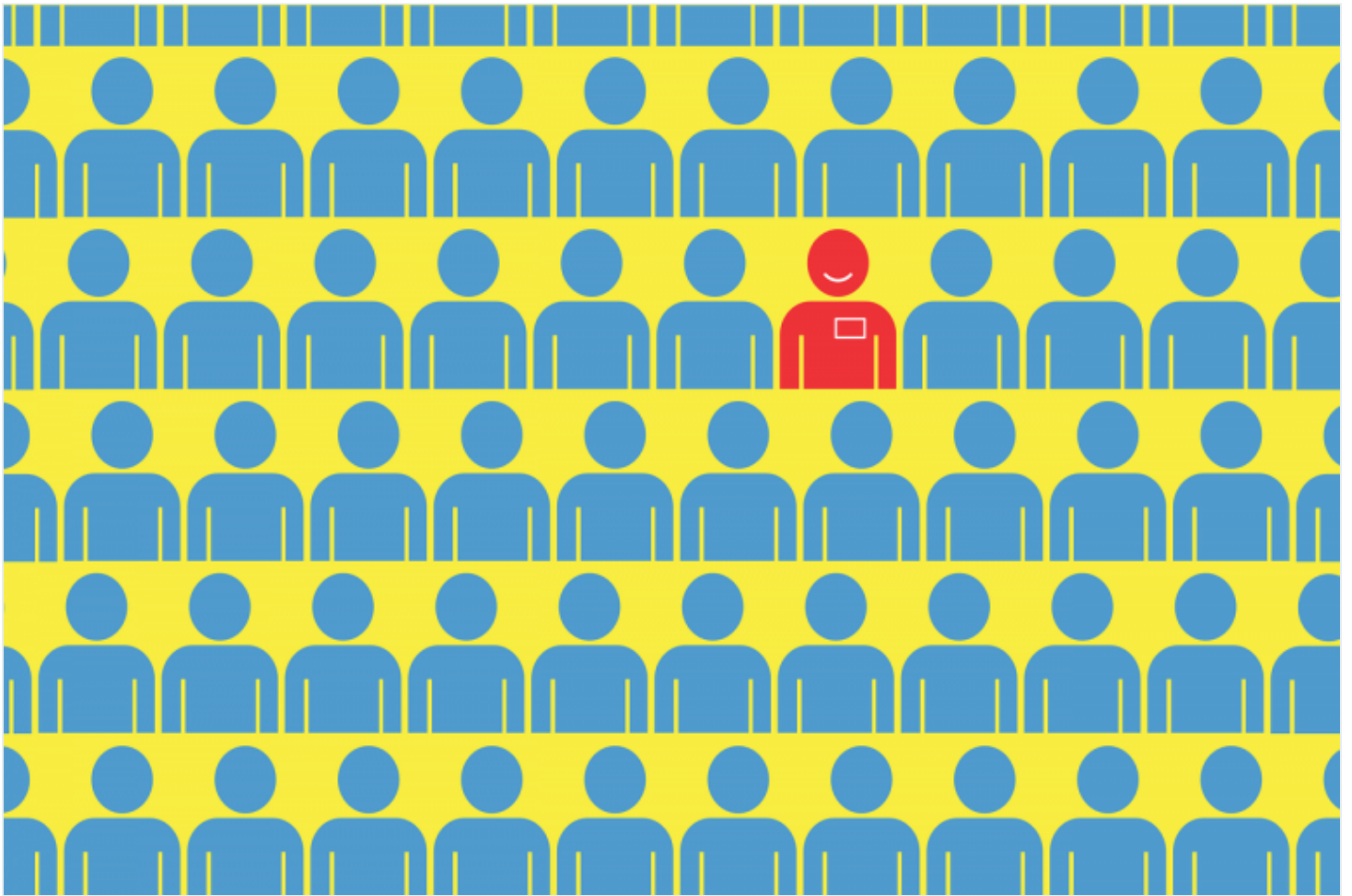


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Paul McDonald • Aug. 24, 2022



Whether you're a machine parts manufacturer or a CPA firm, your competitiveness and growth are put at risk when you can't find people with the skills you need.

In the era of the "Great Resignation" and declining numbers of students graduating with accounting degrees, many firms are staring straight at this particular problem. Candidates with solid skills and credentials can expect to field multiple job offers right now, leading to a kind of arms race in which employers offer ever-more generous compensation packages to get standout hires through the door.

The talent is out there

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How does such talent get overlooked? In some firms, the answer is simple: in the name of efficiency, recruiters and hiring managers are screening too many candidates out of consideration. Their hiring processes focus on what candidates lack (credentials and an unbroken employment history) rather than on what they have (raw talent and potential). The result is that a diverse population of skilled employees (CPAs or otherwise) either aren't targeted by employers or get left out by an applicant tracking system (ATS) designed to minimize the number of people considered.

5 tips for finding talent

There are actions you can take today to kick-start the process of finding and hiring talent. Consider these five tips.

Review your job descriptions

Job descriptions can grow out of control if left unchecked. As time goes on, hiring managers often add new requirements and nice-to-have skills without removing legacy ones. This results in unwieldy job descriptions that can be off-putting to potential employees, who may not have had recent opportunities to sharpen their skills and therefore feel they don't meet your (out-of-date) requirements.

Start pruning. Ask your incumbent CPAs to assess how closely your job descriptions match their actual, day-to-day responsibilities. How much value do all those nice-to-have skills add to their work — and how easy would it have been for them to acquire those skills on the job or with training? When redrafting your job descriptions, you may also find that outlining critical soft skills (e.g. “ability to adapt to new challenges in a dynamic and fast-paced environment”) is more effective at reaching hidden talent than using vaguely worded descriptions of nice-to-have technical skills (e.g. “Experience with ERP systems.”)

Reconfigure your ATS

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Then there's the term "unsuitable." Your ATS may be winnowing out hidden talent that doesn't tick all the boxes but could perform at the highest level with a little support and training. Do you really want to leave people out because they have a gap in their employment history or have let their CPA license lapse? Reconfigure your ATS so that it eliminates fewer candidates with the potential to succeed in the role. If that means more interviews, so be it — in the era of [video interviewing](#), that may not unbalance your workload as much as you'd expect.

Customize your onboarding and training programs

It's not a given that every top performer needs to hit the ground running. While experienced candidates with up-to-date skill sets may quickly reach their expected productivity levels, hidden talent may need a bit longer of an onboarding and training runway. Failure to provide such resources may lead groups such as entry-level professionals and people returning to the workforce to assume they're a poor fit for your organization.

Furthermore, the business case for upskilling, mentoring and other career development programs is easily made. In a period of skyrocketing quit rates and attrition, any investment to foster employee engagement and loyalty should deliver a strong return. Hidden talent may be harder to find, but with the right training and support, it's also harder to lose.

Update your organizational culture

Your ability to recruit hidden talent depends on more than your recruiters. You can have the world's most flexible and inclusive hiring process, but if those very same qualities don't permeate your organizational culture, new hires may start eyeing the exit soon after they arrive — or before you even offer them a position.

Even the smallest firm can apply the principles of [diversity, equity and inclusion](#)

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way to attract top talent in general, and hidden talent in particular — including groups such as working parents and informal caregivers who need such flexibility.

Reach out to passive candidates

Not all hidden talent has been marginalized or excluded in the current hiring market. In fact, it could be that the person you need most has been happily employed by one of your competitors for years and doesn't even have an updated resume.

We call these professionals passive candidates — and they're notoriously hard to reach. Even if they're open to the right opportunity, they're unlikely to advertise that fact on LinkedIn. A smart approach is to work with a [talent solutions firm](#), which will have large candidate networks and works with passive candidates every day. They can act as trusted intermediaries, connecting your firm with a candidate you otherwise would never know existed.

The struggle for talent is real, but it's not unwinnable. By widening your lens to focus on candidates your rivals may have missed, you can retain your competitiveness at the time you need it most.

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[Paul McDonald](#) is a senior executive director at talent solutions and recruiting firm [Robert Half](#). He writes and speaks frequently on hiring, workplace, leadership and career-management topics. Over the course of more than 35 years in the staffing industry, he has advised thousands of company leaders and job seekers on how to hire and get hired.

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