

Managing Talent in Uncertain Times: A Strategic Success Plan for HR



How Will You Respond to This Crisis and Emerge as a Company?

Unprecedented times call for decisive action. However, that action must be well-planned and thought through rather than knee-jerk reactions to extraordinary circumstances.

In this ebook, we will look at ways you can protect your most vital asset while still driving efficiency and managing risk.

We will discuss:

- the ways the pandemic is turning talent management on its ear;
- the importance of taking a measured response to budget cuts;
- tips for trimming the fat;
- priorities for your talent management plans;
- the reasons your leave policies matter right now;
- keeping remote teams engaged;
- tips for remote interviews and remote onboarding;
- the future of workplace safety; and
- creating a strategic partnership with a staffing agency.

Let's dig in...

But First... A Reminder!

This eBook is not a substitute for legal advice. It merely provides you with a starting point for your long-term talent management plans throughout the pandemic, and cannot guarantee conformity with the law, which only a licensed attorney can do.

We are not attorneys. We are not liable for any content, code, omissions, errors or inaccuracies. Nothing in this eBook should be considered legal advice. Further action may be required to make your business compliant with federal, state and local laws and regulations regarding business operations during the pandemic.

Please consult your legal advisor for advice on specific policies and procedures.

The Disruption to End All Disruption?

Over the course of the last 10 years, disruption has impacted the way Americans work.

As recently as January 2020, HR and talent managers were focused on disruptions like gig workers, automation, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning.

Today, we are all focused on something very different. While those tech disruptions still impact the industry, March 2020 changed everything, almost literally overnight.

In the wake of COVID-19 lockdowns, the vast majority of Americans who work white-collar jobs are now working from home (if they are still employed), and they must do it while juggling spouses, housemates, homeschooled children and a neverending schedule of Zoom meetings and happy hours.

COVID-19 has turned the workplace on its head and will likely forever change the way we approach recruiting, hiring, retention and everyday work.

Social Distancing Is Changing Talent Management

There are myriad ways COVID-19 has and will continue to impact talent management.

Business leaders and HR teams will have to adapt in areas like:

- **Remote interviewing and hiring:**

Social distancing has made it impossible to meet even local candidates in person. Companies have had to learn quickly how to make use of remote interviewing and evaluating candidates without ever seeing them in person.

- **Remote onboarding:**

Similarly, you cannot onboard remote workers in person. This has meant putting greater effort into onboarding remotely to help set up new employees for success.



- **Investments in remote work tech:**

Businesses of all sizes are scrambling to invest in effective and efficient conferencing and instant messaging platforms to keep remote teams connected.

- **Greater focus on worker health and wellbeing:**

Thanks to the pandemic, employers have begun to pay much more attention to the physical and mental health of stressed workers.

- **New best practices for workplace safety:**

It's not just lifting, driving, slips, falls and ergonomics anymore. Companies must also allow for social distancing, health checks and improved cleanliness to keep workers safe.

- **Acceptance for the need to achieve work-life balance:**

When people work from home, it can be impossible to achieve balance, but business leaders who are navigating these same challenges now understand how important it is to help employees achieve balance.

- **A focus on skill-based hiring over degrees:**

Many industries are struggling to hire people and they are quickly learning skills matter far more than whether or where someone went to college.

- **More ownership of upskilling and reskilling workers:**

Companies struggling to stay afloat are coming to understand the importance of reskilling and upskilling the workforce they have.

- **Budget cuts:**

Last, but most certainly not least are budget cuts. In any economic slide, companies must always decide whether to let people go and who to let go if they must.



Always Look Before You Leap



Lost revenue. Uncertain futures. Budget Cuts.

These financial stresses are weighing on companies of all sizes right now. With each new canceled contract, failed renewal or service cutback, it's tempting to make knee-jerk decisions that focus on the short term.

However, now is the time to be methodical when it comes to making changes – especially personnel changes.

There is no way around taking cost-cutting measures in these circumstances, but those measures must be made strategically and with an eye on that very tiny light at the end of the tunnel. The way you manage cost decisions today will determine how well your business is able to navigate this crisis and emerge ready to thrive.

Do Not Forget Your Number One Asset

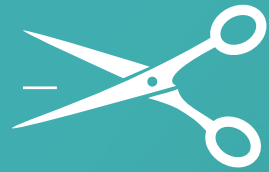
Payroll is typically the biggest expense for any company and that's why it's so often the first line-item business leaders look at when they need to make cuts.

But it's necessary to remember **people** are your number one asset. The most well-planned business strategies in the world mean nothing without the right people to execute them.

That's why it is so necessary to be creative and come up with ways to work as efficiently as possible without compromising your talent.



Tips for Trimming the Fat



The key to reducing personnel cuts is to focus first on optimizing budgets. Before making far-reaching, knee-jerk decisions, there are some areas HR can start to save money immediately.

- **Target immediate impact items:**

These are things you pay for weekly, monthly or quarterly rather than annually. The key is to free up as much cash as you can right now.

- **Reduce spend, don't eliminate:**

Don't cut out major functions. Try to reduce them to save money, instead.

- **Negotiate prices:**

Get on the phone and start negotiating cost-reductions with vendors, even if only for a few months. Most companies want to keep your business and will work with you to lower costs in the short-term.

- **Look at fixed and variable costs, alike:**

It's easy to focus on one or the other, but make sure you account for both fixed costs like payroll as well as variable costs like contractors when making decisions.

**Whatever you do,
do it once!**

This is especially true if you must cut back on hours or staff members. Continually coming back to the well and eliminating more people or reducing more hours can have a deep impact on morale and will greatly disrupt productivity.

How To Manage Talent In Uncertain Times

Before making sweeping cuts in personnel, remember that, in most cases, fewer workers will not solve fundamental problems and will (in the long-term) likely worsen the culture of your company and the motivation of your staff.

Even though we are living in unprecedented times, it is necessary to focus on the growth and development of your current workforce, so you are poised to recover quickly.

As you develop a plan for your workforce, keep the following in mind:

- **Focus on incremental improvements.**

Don't look for the greatest quantitative adjustment first. Instead, find ways to intervene and make incremental but meaningful improvements.

- **Design flexible systems.**

Flexibility is a hallmark of any adaptable organization.

- **Look for leaders.**

In times of crisis, you will find employees who step up and take charge naturally. Pay attention to the employees you see who have natural leadership abilities and tap them for important tasks and projects.

- **Expand learning.**

Your current employees may need to take on new responsibilities in a crisis, they may be required to cover for someone else who is sick, new projects may

require new skills. Promote cross-training and other learning opportunities to boost employee skill and engagement.

- **Identify future needs.**

The pandemic will change your company and your industry over the long term. Stay plugged into what those changes might be and start looking ahead to the types of skills you will need to fill those gaps.

- **Have a plan for illnesses.**

Even if your area is not hit hard right now, some experts predict "rolling" hot spots will emerge until there is a treatment, vaccine or cure. This means you must have a plan for covering gaps if people fall ill or must quarantine with an ill family member. This may include hiring temporary workers or contractors on short notice.

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

Even if your industry has not been hard-hit by the pandemic, your employees are scared. They are scared for their health and safety and they are scared for the future of their jobs. Let employees know what steps you are taking to manage the workforce and keep people employed. This will ease their fears, increase engagement and have a positive impact on their loyalty to the company.



Your Leave Policies Matter More Than Ever Before

Whether your employees work from home or not, sick leave is incredibly important right now. The mantra from federal, state and local governments is, “stay home if you feel sick” but if not showing up means not getting paid, people will come to work when they are sick.

There is an added layer when it comes to COVID-19. If someone is sick in an employee’s home, they are supposed to quarantine. However, if you lack a liberal policy for this, employees could come to work potentially carrying the virus.

Now is not the time to cut benefits or give people a hard time about leave.



Americans have a lot of time on their hands and they want to do business with companies that treat their people well – especially during a pandemic. If your organization gets branded as a company that skimmed on leave, you will have problems with clients, customers, and you will likely struggle to attract talent in the future.

To protect your employer brand and keep current employee morale high:

- Consider looking into ways to provide financial assistance to hourly and part-time employees that go beyond your legal obligations.
- Pay wages to those who are quarantined, unable to work or ineligible for sick leave or disability pay.
- Communicate leave policies to employees.
- Provide educational resources for FMLA for employees who must care for a sick or recovering COVID-19 patient.
- Create an environment where people feel safe calling off work.

Do you employ less than 50 people?

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act stipulates that the federal Department of Labor can exempt businesses with fewer than 50 employees from providing workers with paid emergency leave “when the imposition of such requirements would jeopardize the viability of the business.”

Consider doing whatever you can for your employees during this time even though you may not be legally obligated to do so.



Navigating a Remote Workforce: Keeping Your Team Together When Everyone Is Apart

Managing remote employees does come with some challenges and requires you to adjust your approach.

- **Choose great tools.**

The easier you make it for remote team members to communicate, the more connected they will feel. Digital communication tools can help create those opportunities for remote employees. Have a variety of tools in place including:

- chat platforms
- video conferencing
- screen sharing
- project management tools
- cloud-based document collaboration tools

- **Work on team building.**

Lack of proximity can make remote workers feel they are not part of the team. You can boost a sense of togetherness by:

- celebrating their successes in newsletters, emails or in group meetings;

- checking in regularly one-on-one with each team member;
- having group lunches and happy hours over video conferencing;
- creating channels in your instant messaging platform where people can share fun things they are doing from home; and
- leaving some time before and after team meetings just to check in with one another and chit chat.

- **Reinforce the importance of process.**

In the office, it's easy to see who is following defined processes, but remote workers can quickly fall into their own habits and methods for getting things done. Be sure to reinforce that standard processes still apply.

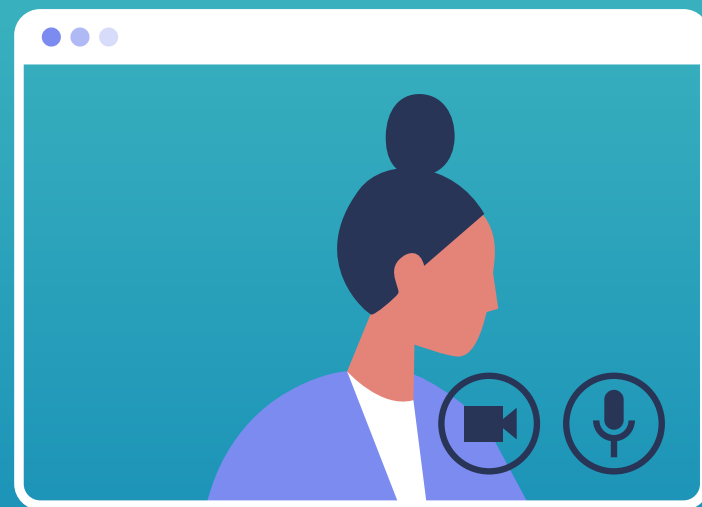
- **Check in regularly.**

Micromanagement is counterproductive and you should trust your remote workers to get their jobs done. That said, it is important to check on progress regularly and to check in to provide feedback, solicit feedback and let them know that their work is important.

Navigating a Remote Workforce: Tips for Interviewing Candidates

Even as we look to the future when social distancing is finally relaxed, it's highly likely that businesses will continue remote interviewing not just to add a layer of protection but also to save time and access talent from other geographic locations.

If you are new to video interviews, don't be intimidated. With the right tools and preparation, you can be effective from a distance.

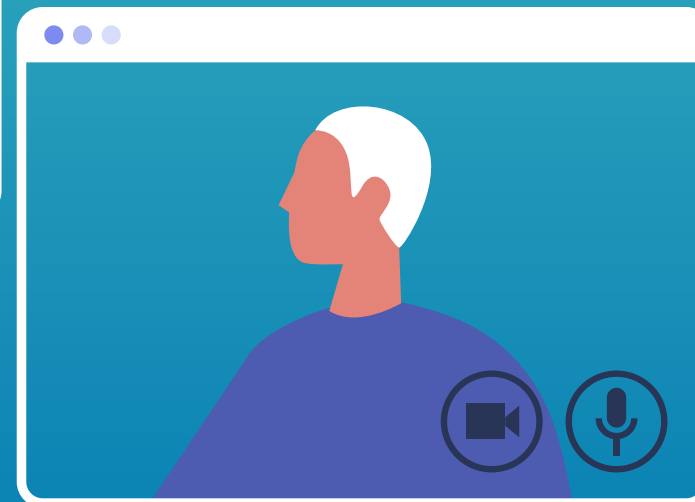


- **Invest in reliable software.**

You want crisp, clear sound and picture and it must be simple to use for both you and your candidates.

- **Communicate well with candidates.**

Send candidates a link to their interview several days prior so that they have time to test that link. Confirm the time 24 hours before and let them know if you expect them to share their screen, or prepare any additional documents in advance.

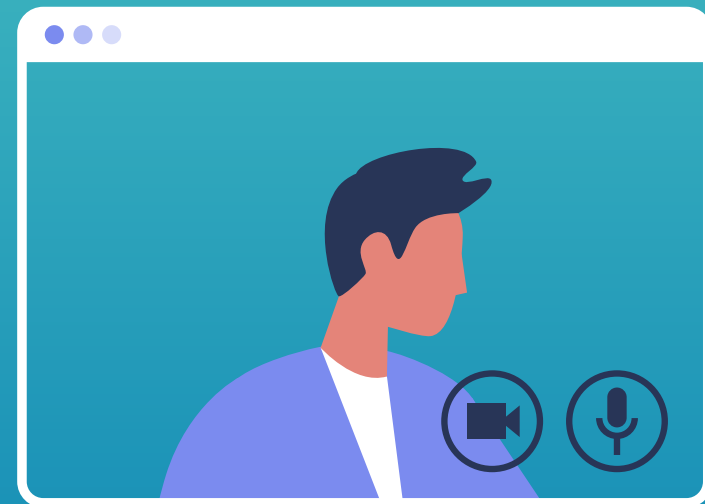


- **Break the ice.**

Spend a few extra minutes breaking the ice and easing into the conversation to help everyone relax.

- **Stick to a structure.**

You don't have to change the structure of your interviews just because you are doing it via video. Use your usual questions and if you are going to be interviewing with other members of your team, make sure everyone understands who is taking the lead so you aren't talking over one another.

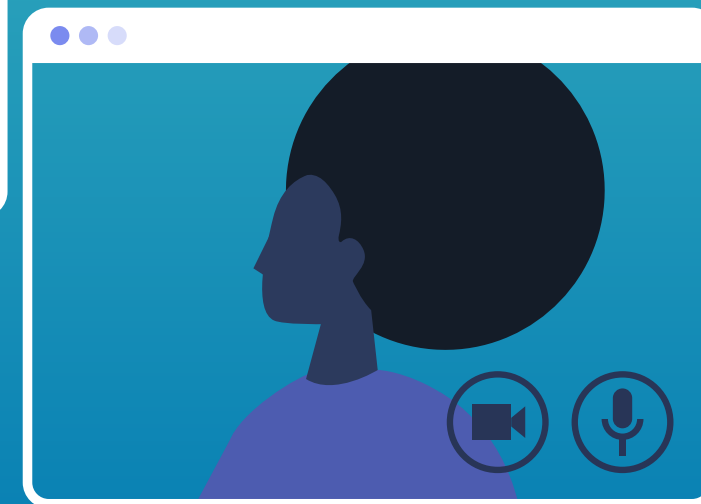


- **Be flexible.**

Unless someone lives alone, it's difficult to find a comfortable, quiet place to conduct meetings right now. As long as you can see and hear the candidate clearly, be flexible and focus on the substance of their answers, not what's going on around them.

- **Expect technical problems.**

Also, cut candidates some slack if they experience technical issues. They can happen to anyone at any time, so don't hold a frozen screen against someone.



Navigating a Remote Workforce: Onboarding New Employees

Onboarding can be challenging no matter the circumstances and when a new hire – or the entire team – is working remotely, those challenges can add up quickly. However, with the right approach, you can give your new remote hires the tools to succeed – and to love their jobs.

- **Prepare in advance.**

Send remote employees their new hire paperwork as soon as you receive their signed offer letter. Then, make sure the IT team sets up all logins and credentials well in advance. Working ahead ensures plenty of time to deal with any potential problems.

- **Plan a video welcome session.**

You'd meet a new in-house employee at the door, so do the same with your remote employees. Set up a video call first thing in the

morning on their first day to welcome them and go over the onboarding process. Then invite the rest of their team to join in and introduce themselves.

- **Plan their first week.**

New employees should have a structured schedule for their first week, so they don't have to wonder what to do next. Don't forget to add the new employee to all meeting invitations, as well.

- **Schedule team-building sessions.**

To inject a bit of fun and help build relationships, schedule a video "luncheon" or happy hour where the team can get together online to chat and make the new person feel included in the group.

- **Set clear expectations.**

New employees need to know exactly what you want from them and how you will be measuring success. Provide clear deadlines for training, milestones and skill-building.

- **Give them resources.**

Provide them with a list of people who can help when they have questions about specific processes or systems.

- **Meet regularly.**

It can be very easy to forget about new remote employees as you move through your regular routine. That's why it's important to set a regular schedule to check in to see how things are going, offer constructive feedback and monitor progress.



The Future of Workplace Safety

In 2020, workplace safety took on a whole new meaning. As more and more people are allowed to come back to work, it will be necessary to focus intensely on worker health and safety.

- **First, thank them.**

Every employee who must come to work is potentially exposing themselves to harm. First and foremost, create a work environment that celebrates your team, shows appreciation and provides real support. Thank them at every opportunity and ask about their families and how they are coping, as well.

- **Make safety the #1 priority.**

There can be no shortcuts to safety right now. Perhaps you were lax in the past about PPE, but now is not the time to allow people to cut corners.

- **Create a space where reporting is safe.**
Make sure employees know how to report breaches in safety protocols, as well. If someone is asking their team to do something that puts them in harm's way, employees should be empowered to not only say no, but to report the behavior, as well.
- **Send sick employees home.**
Now is not the time to force a sick employee to tough it out. In fact, doing so could cost lives. Now is the time to make it easy for employees to stay home until they are well.



- **Clean, clean clean.**

Whatever your minimal standards for cleanliness are on a worksite or project, increase them by a factor of 100. Provide access to handwashing stations, give out hand sanitizer and PPE, disinfect smooth and shared surfaces and ensure that everyone can work six feet apart as often as possible. When this is not possible, make sure employees in close contact are well protected and can wash their hands immediately afterward.

- **Offer more breaks.**

Schedule workflow so you can offer more breaks than usual throughout the day.

- **Stagger start times.**

Don't schedule everyone for the same start time and end time. Reduce crowds by staggering start times by 15 minutes.

- **Encourage PTO.**

People are under tremendous stress both at work and at home, and if you see someone struggling mentally, ask them if they need a day off.



Communicate Safety Measures and Priorities Often

Make sure you are in constant communication with employees so they understand the steps that you are taking to keep them as safe as possible. It's also important to give them time to ask questions, share things they need from you and even to vent some frustrations.



ALWAYS FOLLOW STATE AND LOCAL REGULATIONS



Every state has its own guidelines and regulations for onsite work right now. If you are managing teams working outside the home, make sure you understand your state and local regulations and follow them to a “t.”

You Don't Have to Do This Alone

A strategic staffing partner can help you navigate this current crisis and plan for the future.

Now, you may be saying to yourself, “I have to cut my budget... why would I hire a staffing partner?”

The right staffing partner will help you control costs and will generate real ROI for your company.

Leveraging their expertise, you can:

- **improve the flexibility of your workforce;**
- **reduce overhead;**
- **save time by conducting remote screening and initial interviewing;**
- **allow you to quickly scale operations when the time comes;**
- **upgrade your team's talent by capitalizing on the short-term availability of great people in the employment market;**
- **provide coverage for ill or caregiving employees;**
- **help you develop long-term talent acquisition plans for economic recovery; and**
- **help you find skilled, well-aligned talent if your business pivots into new markets.**

**If you are ready to respond to these uncertain times with certainty,
partner with a staffing expert today.**