

YOU'VE GOT THIS:

Retooling Your Team's Skills for 2021

Nobody needs to tell you how much the workplace has changed.

The question is: How can you equip your team to perform at their peak as their jobs continue to evolve?

Focus on the skills employees need in the coming months and years – and the steps you can take to develop them.



The biggest challenge for businesses in 2021?

Adapting to a post-COVID workplace.

Gartner research company, GetApp, surveyed 577 small businesses in North America regarding their response to COVID-19-related challenges.

84% reported making changes to their business to adapt to the impact of the pandemic.

20% cited the lack of employee skills as the biggest challenge they faced.

61% planned to increase their training budgets in response.

The most significant skills gaps were identified as technical and soft skills. Both of which are essential in a remote workplace.



Recognize the Importance of Ongoing Training and Education

For decades, a college degree has been the gold standard for hiring managers, but in many cases, it is only important for recent graduates.

Without continual attention, skills quickly grow stagnant.

A generation or two ago, spending 30 years in the same field or even with a single employer was not uncommon. Today, most employees work in many different positions over the course of their careers.

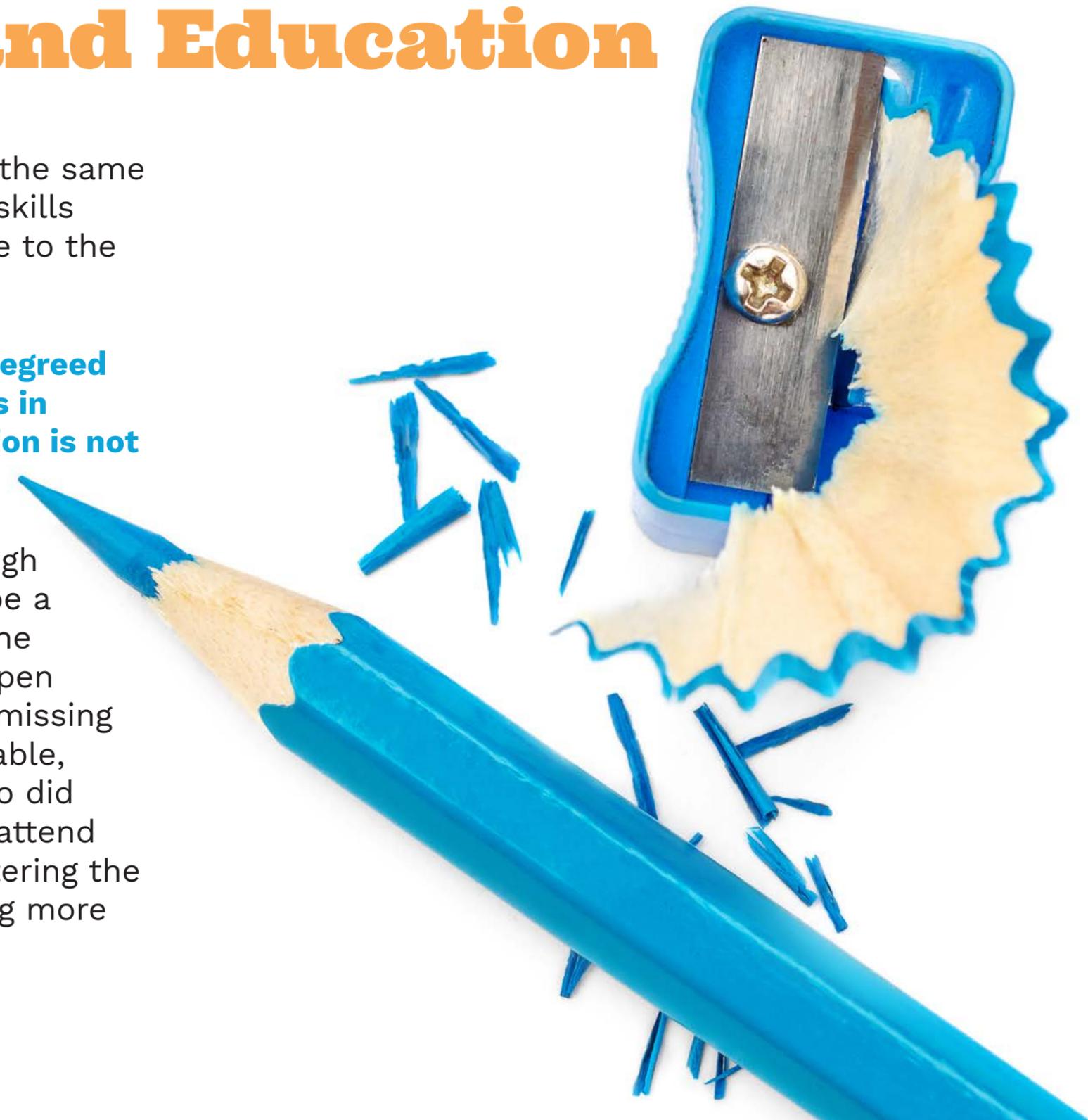
Transferrable skills have never been more essential.

Managers may worry that well-trained employees will take their skills to another opportunity, but it's just as likely they will be able

to assume roles within the same company or hone their skills to contribute even more to the organization.

Employers often seek degreed individuals for positions in which a college education is not required.

Especially in times of high unemployment, it can be a shortcut to narrowing the candidate field for an open position. The danger is missing out on intelligent, trainable, hardworking people who did not have the means to attend college or preferred entering the workforce over spending more time in school.



How Serious Is the Skills Gap?

The skills gap among employers in the U.S. was significant even before the pandemic became a factor. Employers have struggled to find enough individuals with the skills required for their open positions.

What is driving the skills gap?

- **IT Shortages.** According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the economy will need about 100K new IT workers per year over the next ten years. Presently, only 60,000 IT workers enter the workforce each year.
- **Lack of Training.** Skilled trades and the technology sector are feeling the pinch; these jobs typically require considerable training.
- **Increasing Need for Skilled Workers.** Of the 4 to 7 million jobs that go unfilled each year, more than half fall into the skilled category.
- **Retiring Baby Boomers.** By 2029, more than 20% of the US population will be over the age of 65. Ten million workers will be needed to replace them by 2025.
- **Technological Advancement.** It's difficult for colleges to keep up with rapid changes.
- **Automation.** Lower-skilled workers have no place to go – at least not without upskilling.
- **Competition.** Even with the impact of the coronavirus, employers are fighting for top talent.

What Do You Have to Lose If You Fail to Retool Your Team?

When you're overwhelmed and under stress, it can be tough to make training a priority, but there can be significant consequences to ignoring the problem, including:

- **Lost Productivity.** People without updated skills cannot produce as much as those who have them. If managers or co-workers stop to help less-skilled workers, their productivity can also suffer.
- **Declining Sales.** Companies that don't operate at their peak can struggle to keep current customers happy and attract new customers, resulting in revenue losses.
- **Lowered Profitability.** A company without well-trained top talent will have trouble remaining profitable over the long term.
- **Lost Market Share.** As skills gaps drive down productivity, sales, and profits, the company will have trouble competing.



How Can You Rapidly Reskill Your Workforce?

Identify the skills needed to succeed in a post-COVID work environment.

Re-envision your ideal workplace. What will the day-to-day look like for your employees, and what skills will they need? For example, if retail business is shifting online, you'll need more people who understand logistics than those adept at selling face-to-face.

Invest the resources required to build these skills.

Both time and money will need to be dedicated to this effort. Improve your team's technical skills and nurture soft skills like communication, empathy, adaptability, and resilience.

Start now, even if you're not ready.

Done is better than perfect. It's better to start some training even if you need to tweak it. You'll be better able to serve your customers and increase your chances of retaining the best people.

Note what works for future disruption.

While this year's events are beyond what any of us have seen before, it's unlikely to be the last disruption we'll encounter. Apply the lessons learned now to future events.

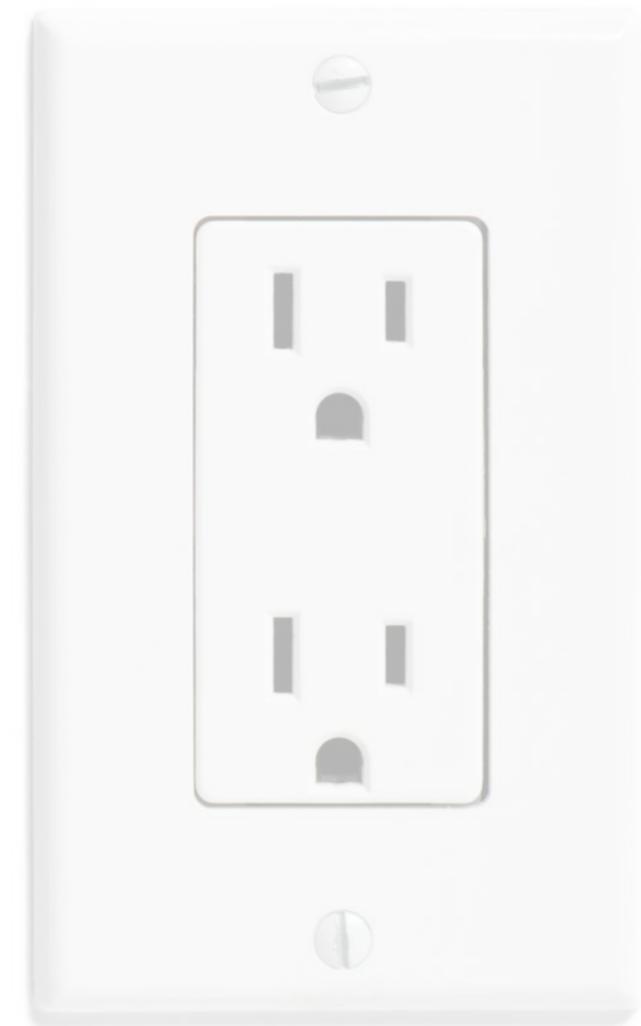
Pivot like a small company, even if you are not.

One of the greatest advantages small businesses have over larger companies

is their ability to reconfigure their workflow to changing demands quickly. Adopting their willingness to take chances and their flattened decision-making process can make your organization more agile no matter what its size.

Prioritize your learning budget.

According to the Training Industry Report, training expenditures dropped in 2009 and 2010 only to surge in 2011 and fall back to 2008 levels in 2012. Cutting back on training only postpones the inevitable and can leave you scrambling to catch up with your competitors.



On What Skills Should You Focus?

If your business pivoted to meet changing demands – for example, if you are now making masks when you had previously manufactured socks – employees might need different skills.

Your sales team may be targeting different customers or decision-makers. The supply chain team will need to identify new sources of raw materials. You'll need to retrain your frontline staff and adjust your machinery.

Shifting to an eCommerce model brings changes.

If you are moving your business into eCommerce, the skills required can be quite different from those needed in a brick and mortar environment. You'll need to adapt to a business model that is more heavily weighted to online sales and train your staff accordingly.

Remote work skills can be learned.

Remote work was on the rise even before COVID-19 hit, but many employers didn't have a training strategy to optimize the work from home environment.

Ensure the success of your remote team members by training them in:

- Video conference best practices
- Time management
- Team collaboration in a remote environment
- Managing customer relationships
- COVID specific skills
- Cross-training to cover for ill or absent employees



Soft Skills Required in a Remote Environment

Self-Management and Motivation

In addition to the ability to perform the job effectively, employees must be capable of adapting to change and communicating well in various formats, some of which may be new to them.

Employees will need to take an entrepreneurial approach to their jobs, adapting to unanticipated changes and developing creative solutions.

Empathy

It's difficult to underestimate the importance of putting yourself in another's shoes to succeed in a challenging work environment. While we all faced the same event in the coronavirus, each of us feels the impact differently. Some customers or co-workers may be juggling work with child care. They could be essential workers or recovering from COVID-19 themselves and unable to work at full capacity.

Empathy can help employees connect with others and work more effectively.

Communication Management

Increased use of videoconferencing platforms and collaboration through Google Docs, Microsoft Teams and other software requires people to learn new skills. It's important to present yourself well and to know which form of communication is appropriate.

Adaptability

As workplaces evolve to adopt health protocols, embrace remote work, or make other changes, employees must be able to adapt quickly. Encourage workers to stretch beyond their comfort zones to take on new challenges and provide the resources they need to be successful.

Increased Training = More Opportunity and Better Engagement

Training can improve retention and result in happier, more engaged employees. Teaching technical skills can prepare them for higher-paying jobs with opportunities for advancement.

Jobs that require digital skills pay an average of \$20 per hour or more. Digital skills are the gateway to a rewarding and high-paying career. Helping your team develop these skills can build loyalty as well as reduce talent shortages.

Hire for fit, train for skills.

Look for new hires with a great attitude and a willingness to learn. These attributes can often go further than the skills you may have on your checklist. Don't let the pendulum of cultural fit swing too far, though. Companies thrive when there is a diversity of thought.



What Are the Best Ways to Upskill Your Team?

E-Learning.

Employees can use a variety of online platforms to learn – often at their own pace. They can take online courses in the form of video lectures with quizzes. Other options include microlearning, which allows the employee to break lessons into manageable chunks, even using their mobile device to learn. This can be an excellent solution for remote workers. It will enable workers to move at their own pace and even revisit training as needed. Managers can track employee progress, as well.

On-the-Job Training.

Hands-on training is often the most effective. People learn faster and retain more when they can try new skills as they learn them. With today's hybrid work models

and social distancing, it's tough to place a new employee shoulder to shoulder with a veteran. It may take more creativity to achieve, but the benefits make it worthwhile.

Transferring Institutional Knowledge.

Boomers are retiring in droves and taking their hard-won skills with them. Pairing them with newer employees can improve the skills of the next generation of workers. Keep in mind that the youngest boomers are still in their fifties and could have another 10-20 years left in the workforce. Their partnership with younger employees can help keep their skills fresh, particularly technical ones, and may even teach them new approaches to work problems.

Cross-Training.

Allowing employees to train on other jobs in the organization can help enhance their skills. Cross-training also ensures you have a deeper bench of people who can step up if someone leaves and provides a greater understanding of what people in different jobs and departments do.

Cross-training can be beneficial in the current work environment where some employees may need to take time off or change their working hours. Cross-trained employees can pick up the slack for co-workers while becoming more well-rounded employees.

Need a Little Breathing Room While You Improve Your Team's Skills?

Adapting a workforce to a new and someone unpredictable business environment takes time.

While many companies have done OK flying by the seat of their pants the last few months, it's time to take a more thoughtful and measured approach.

While training is vital for your company's long-term health and your employees' careers, short-term productivity is bound to take a hit.

You can keep your workforce fully staffed while focusing on building and executing a training program with skilled temporary and contract employees.

What Temporary Staffing Can Do for You

Working with a staffing partner can provide the support you need to maximize the skills of your team. They can help you:

- **Optimize workflow.** Temporaries can pick up the slack while team members are learning online, in the classroom or on the job with another employee.
- **Keep positions filled.** When you promote someone from within, they often get stuck with the responsibilities of both jobs until a new employee is hired and onboarded. Contract employees can take over the old duties while you find their full-time replacement.
- **Identify potential hires.** Often, employers find their next great employee in their temporary pool. Because you've seen them on the job, you know their skills, work ethic, and how well they will fit with the team.
- **Support high-value employees.** While high-level staff are building their skills, they can offload some of their less critical tasks to temporary workers.

Ready to Retool Your Team for 2021?

If you're ready to build a workforce that is ready to take on the challenges of a changing work environment and want to learn more about how working with a staffing and recruitment partner can help, reach out today.



Resources

<https://www.hrdive.com/news/survey-skill-gaps-are-top-pandemic-challenge-for-1-in-5-small-businesses/584455>

<https://www.getapp.com/resources/digital-skills-gap-in-small-businesses>

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<https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/to-emerge-stronger-from-the-covid-19-crisis-companies-should-start-reskilling-their-workforces-now>

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<http://www.nhbr.com/March-30-2018/Skills-gap-or-lack-of-fit>

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<http://thehill.com/homenews/state-watch/373527-us-economy-faces-impending-skills-gap>

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<https://www.hrdive.com/news/7-actions-employers-can-take-to-address-the-skills-gap/519450>

<http://trainingtoday.blr.com/article/most-effective-training-techniques>