

Building an Intentional Talent Strategy



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Introduction

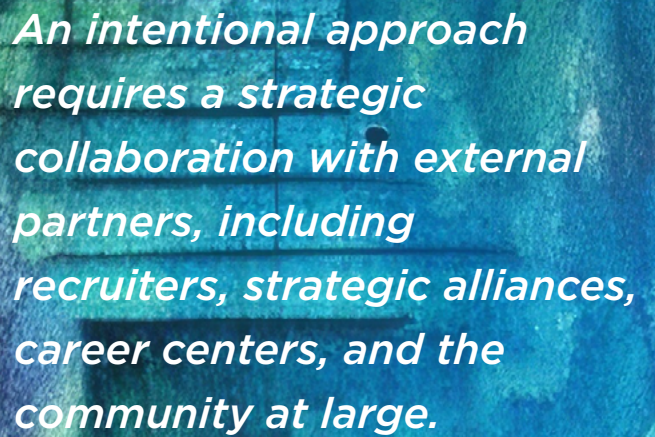
The traditional method of recruiting is transactional, meaning the need to hire is fulfilled as job vacancies occur. It is an immediate, time-sensitive process, and one with which most human resources professionals are familiar.

As nonprofit HR teams continue to find it difficult to recruit and hire key talent in a competitive talent market, many continue to work in this reactionary mode, scrambling to fill vacancies as they emerge. In a late 2023 survey of hiring challenges within nonprofit organizations, [72 percent reported job vacancies go unfilled](#) for more than 60 days.

The challenge with this reactionary approach is that by focusing solely on hiring needs as they emerge, HR teams and recruiters are racing the clock. Resources are focused on solving an immediate problem rather than future talent needs which can shift the organization's market position and mission growth trajectory.

Now more than ever, nonprofits would benefit from an **intentional talent strategy** that empowers HR teams and recruiters to successfully respond to immediate personnel needs and strategically focus on building an innovative, forward-looking talent pipeline. By recruiting for today and tomorrow, a diverse set of organizational needs for sustainable mission advancement and innovation can be met.

Intentional Talent Strategies



An intentional approach requires a strategic collaboration with external partners, including recruiters, strategic alliances, career centers, and the community at large.

An Intentional Talent Strategy has a consistent focus on business goals and objectives. HR is constantly anticipating, forecasting, and predicting talent needs. It requires close collaboration between HR and executive leadership to identify gaps and weaknesses, assess workload and upcoming demands, and think about talent as an integral part of a successful mission strategy.

In this ecosystem, individuals may frequently assume different or additional responsibilities. Skilled talent may enter the pipeline before a role is fully defined. It is a continuous assessment process that extends beyond ongoing recruiting to include staff development, reassignment, and leadership cultivation.

The approach includes:

1. **Positioning HR and your recruiting team as integral business partners, rather than transactional service providers.**
2. **Empowering HR and the organization to be proactive in anticipating and understanding market changes.**
3. **Amplifying the speed to adapt when meeting new demands.**

The Path to an Intentional Talent Strategy

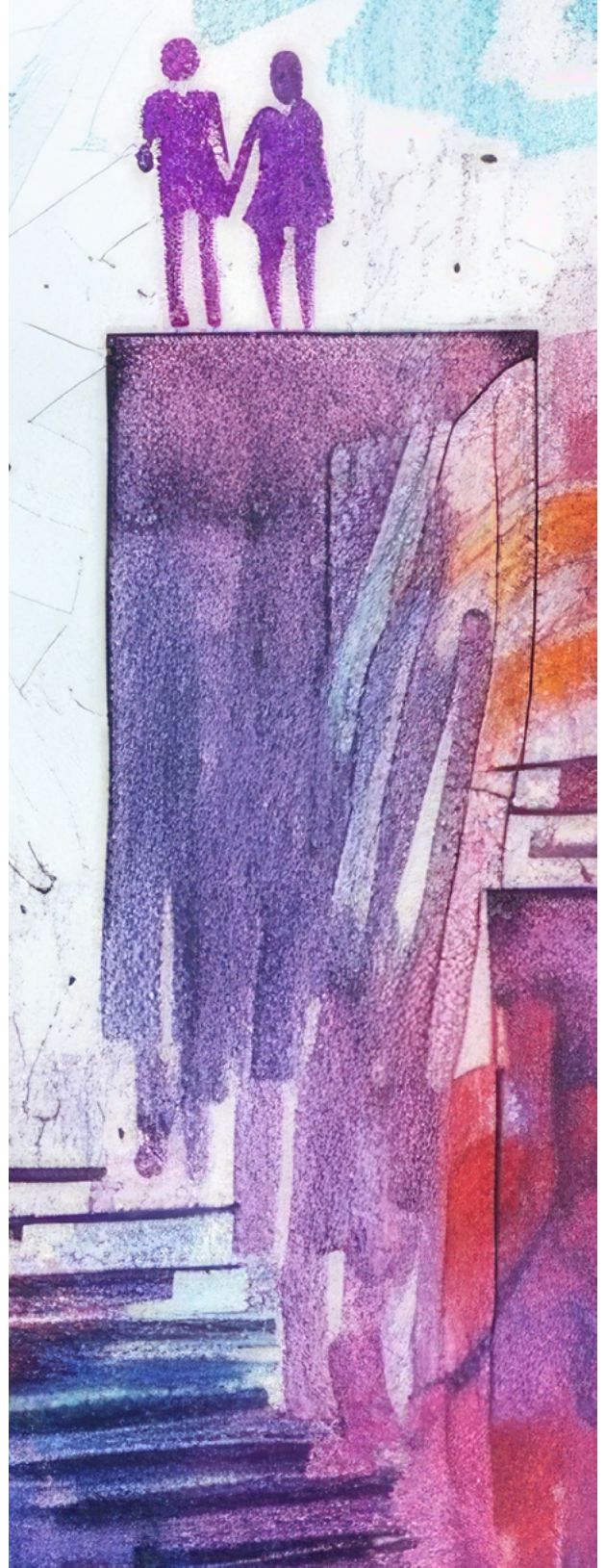
This strategy is not to the exclusion of on-demand recruiting needs. It is more aptly described as a shift in perspective and operations across the organization.

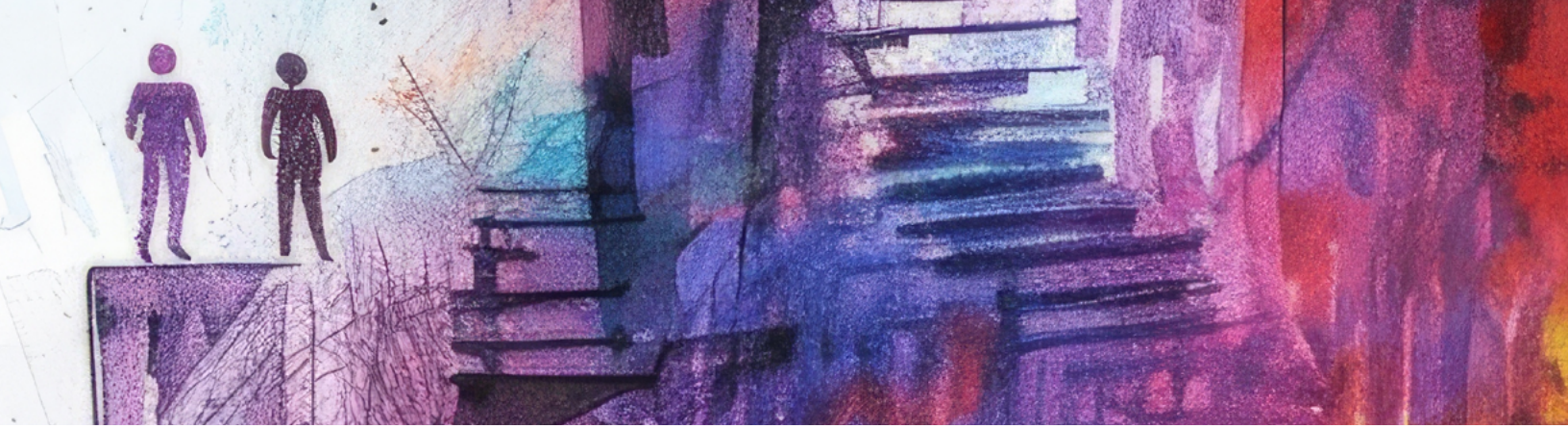
Key components when building an intentional talent strategy:

1. HR gets a seat at the table.

HR leadership becomes familiar with every area of the business and is positioned as an active part of the strategic planning team. Providing HR with an understanding of current needs, resource expectations, assessments, training gaps, and succession planning will allow them to make informed critical, proactive decisions. This alignment with strategy and mission increases the HR professional's job satisfaction which carries through in their representation of the organization.

This will allow the recruiting team to identify the candidates that meet the organization's requirements, looking more at experience and role, rather than titles. Without this depth of understanding, HR will unfortunately miss talent in their screening, someone who might have had a tremendous impact on the organization.





2. Build better talent profiles, job descriptions, and job posts.

The better your HR team understands behavioral assessments, skills requirements, and career paths, the more successful they will be in identifying new talent and assessing and cultivating current employees.

Everything DiSC® and PXT Select® are two of the most versatile, sophisticated, and reliable assessment tools currently on the market. PXT Select® measures an individual's strengths and weaknesses to reveal the 'Total Person' by measuring Thinking and Reasoning Style, Behavioral Traits, and Occupational Interests, among other job-related qualities. Everything DiSC® (DiSC stands for Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, and Conscientiousness) helps people understand their behavioral style and priorities, and how these traits relate to interpersonal communications and actions in the workplace.

Hiring for today and tomorrow means threading the Intentional Talent Strategy throughout talent assessments and profiles, performance reviews, job descriptions, and job posts to encourage more responses from innovative individuals who see themselves as an agile partner for current and future roles in the organization.

3. Make the whole organization think about recruiting talent.

Intentional talent strategies require a shift in perspective across the organization.

Typically, HR pre-screens candidates and forwards only those who meet pre-determined criteria to fulfill an immediate talent need. Encouraging everyone in the organization to engage in a broader perspective, to actively look for talent, *build relationships*, and promote opportunities to join the mission is important in building an intentional talent pipeline that can help the organization meet emerging market needs.

4. Stay connected.

While job boards remain nonprofit organizations' [top source](#) for new candidates, fewer than 50% say they are reaching [the best candidates](#). An Intentional Talent Strategy adopts an approach that builds the pipeline with *relationships* – not just contacts.

- Be present, active, and engaged on social media, at networking events, in online forums, and other strategic partnerships like university career services and academic programs.
- Be visible, speaking at conferences or as a guest lecturer. Join industry associations, attend, and volunteer for leadership roles.
- Be genuine in building new relationships, give actively where you can share your expertise.
- See the interview as an opportunity to promote your mission and your culture. Regardless of the outcome, this allows the candidate to leave with a positive feeling about your organization.

5. Break out of 'silo classification.'

Encourage HR teams and recruiters to 'think outside of the box' when evaluating someone, looking at experience and role, rather than title, uncovering strengths, successes, and skills. For example, an experienced marketer or PR professional might make an excellent community engagement manager or be a great fit for a development role. Consider cross-functional skills, adjacent titles, and broader industry experience to avoid falling into a silo mentality.

The use of applicant tracking systems (ATS) and automated resume screening can accelerate candidate acquisition, but it also disqualifies exceptional talent – and sometimes game-changing talent – based on required narrow search parameters.

Intentional Talent Strategy *& The Employer of Choice Brand*

A key factor in implementing an Intentional Talent Strategy is cultivating an outstanding brand as an ‘Employer of Choice.’ This includes hiring and retaining employees with the mindset and skills to embrace change, and to cultivate a brand reputation as an organization committed to agility, fairness, innovation, and an employee-focused culture.

Tips for building an ‘Employer of Choice’ brand:

- **Focus on the value of your mission.**

Factors that carry the most weight in hiring vary depending on the role, yet a genuine passion for the cause cannot be understated. A study of nonprofit organizations conducted in late 2023 reported that [mission alignment was one of the three most crucial factors in hire](#).

When recruiting, share specific examples of talented teams delivering on critical issues, highlighting the sense of purpose and value of employees making a difference.

- **Put candidates and employees at the center.**

Create a people-centric workplace culture that values pay equity, continuous professional development opportunities, skills training, engaged performance reviews, fair compensation, and DEIB (diversity-equity-inclusion-belonging) values and initiatives. Showcase stories of employees who have thrived, and how you can meet an individual’s desire to find meaning and purpose in their work. Share the systems and processes you have in place to support them across the employee journey.

- **Leverage employee advocacy.**


Encourage employee advocacy and representation at recruiting fairs, college placement programs, and during candidate interviews. Encourage authentic stories and testimonials about the opportunities to work with a clear sense of purpose and the benefits of career mobility within an agile talent structure.

- **Refine onboarding.**

Create an onboarding process that includes not only training in organizational systems, but also equips new hires to contribute quickly and feel like part of the team. Assigning a mentor to help employees seamlessly transition through multiple roles reinforces the organizational commitment to employees and creates a community who can be ambassadors for the organization.

- **Solicit feedback.**

Ask employees about what works well and what they might suggest you do differently. Encourage individuals to express their insights freely and share how those employee insights have led to growth in the past.



Adopting an Intentional Talent Strategy allows nonprofits to adapt quickly to evolving internal and external market factors, optimize resource allocation, and gain a competitive edge when it comes to attracting and retaining talent in key roles.

HR and recruiters can benefit employers in more ways than simply filling a transactional role. Together, they can serve as a strategic asset in maximizing mission impact, driving innovation, and helping people - and organizations - grow.