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## From the Team

In the ever-tightening battle for talent, how do you compete with a company that's better known for innovation or fast growth? What if your industry is struggling? What if your organization is going through bigger challenges? For example, you've been acquired by an enterprise headquartered elsewhere, or you've encountered bad press?

We all know it's tough competing for top talent today. Add these challenges to the mix, and you're facing a steep uphill climb. But we believe challenge is another word for opportunity. We believe constraint can sometimes help define your talent assets.

In our many years of experience, we've seen our share of organizations struggling through these challenges. And we've helped successfully meet them more than once. Each time, we identified and recommended top talent to help in the clutch. In the following pages, we'll share our own advice along with insights and best practices from the field.

We hope the information we're sharing today is something you can file away for "just in case." But if not — if you're facing a market or other industry curveball — please call us. We can offer another viewpoint. We may have ideas to share that you haven't considered. And we're always ready with a sympathetic ear. We're here to help.

*The Welsh & Associates Team*



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## Attracting Talent in Times of Trouble

By Sheri Welsh

We know of no business that remains vibrant and growing without hitting a few bumps along the way. Key leaders leave unexpectedly. The market shifts. Your competitor introduces a game-changing new solution. The housing market crashes and the economy tanks...

When facing a difficult market cycle — for any reason — among the biggest challenges managers face is balancing the competing demands for their time and attention. It's the preverbal swamp versus alligator dilemma. We'd like to offer some perspective and our help.

One of the first steps we recommend is strategizing about your short and long-term talent needs. Assess who you have on board to help navigate the choppy waters. Make sure HR or a direct manager is talking to these employees about career development and future goals. You don't need new surprises.

When you discuss career opportunities, determine if you have the talent on hand to fill

transition gaps. If not, you'll need to consider adding new talent. Depending on the curve you've hit, you may have to reach outside your normal channels. Don't give up, and don't settle. More than at any other time, finding a candidate with both the right skills and the right temperament to weather challenge is essential.

Of course, there's a good chance we may already have candidates for you in our talent pipeline. Many passive job seekers may not be actively looking, but are open to the right opportunity. Because we pre-interview our top candidates long before we have a job in mind, we already know their career goals and objectives. And we've taken their temperament pulse.

When it is time to talk about a specific opportunity, we can address your company's challenging situation candidly. We can position your company — objectively — in the best light. Put another way, when we tell candidates, "This is a great company with a solid plan for navigating forward," we're speaking from an outsider's view of your situation. And in response, candidates

can ask frank questions that they may not ask of an inside manager. This approach is especially effective when getting passive candidates to a ready-to-move state.

### Challenge as Opportunity

When going through tough times, it's easy to let our concern about the future influence our interactions with candidates. But a company in trouble can offer tangible benefits, says Mark Feffer in *HR Magazine*. When selling to top talent, don't forget that you offer an unprecedented opportunity for the right person. Topping the list of benefits are:

- Working at a transitioning business can allow employees to develop advanced skills earlier in their careers.
- It may enable them to assume positions not available elsewhere.
- Contributing to a turnaround looks great on a resume and can help build a career faster.





## Leading Talent Through Change

Whether you've encountered a public relations catastrophe or your industry's experiencing a market disruption, you need to understand the short and long-term implications on talent — current employees and the new talent needed to help you move forward.

Writing for the *Houston Chronicle*, Keith Evans of StudioD, offers advice on how to help motivate employees during changes in leadership. We've expanded on his suggestions to include tips for acquiring talent during any big change.

### 1. Use employee feedback and participation to foster inclusion.

**Our advice:** Go beyond inclusion. Use employee feedback to build on what's working within your corporate culture, and address what's not. This way, current employees become part of the solution. It will strengthen your employment brand and may make your current team your best ambassadors for finding new talent.

### 2. Continue to train and develop employees to show that you remain committed to them.

**Our advice:** By training existing staff, you may find you need to bring in fewer new employees — or none at all. You may be surprised to learn who on hand is both willing and able to rise to new challenges.

### 3. Help employees concentrate on reaching organizational goals.

**Our advice:** It may be harder to stay focused on long-term goals during transition, but keeping the company's "why" top-of-mind is essential during good times and bad. A *McKinsey* report on acquiring tech-savvy talent found, "...as long as the pay is competitive, an inspiring mission and value proposition is what motivates the best talent."

## Lessons From the Front

Quick, name an organization that consistently ranks among the best of the best when recruiting top talent into tough challenges. Here's a hint, they do so by making it very clear they don't accept just anyone. In fact, only a few proud men and women will do.

Maybe we're bending the rules a bit by using a branch of the U.S. military as an example of best-in-class recruiting, but we think there's a lot to be learned from the Marines. Their messages are simple, direct, and transparent. They don't shy away from the challenge at hand. In fact, they make it part of the appeal.

Here are three takeaways to glean from the Marines:

1. Be clear and specific in describing the challenges at hand.
2. Appeal to a sense of doing more, digging deeper, reaching higher.
3. Be selective. It may make the search longer, but you're more likely to find a great fit.

## Best Practices From Oil & Gas

The oil and gas industry is a poster child for market disruption. From the BP oil spill — a PR nightmare — to threats from new technologies, controversies over fracking and constant price fluctuations, it's faced multiple and simultaneous challenges. Where better to learn talent attraction best practices?

Managing consultant Oliver Wyman and global talent consultant Mercer both have deep experience advising oil and gas industry leaders. They advocate for change as an opportunity. In their 2015 publication, "Oil's Wild Ride: Rounding up the Right Talent," they pose tough questions to spark strategic thinking. We've paraphrased their ideas to apply to a broader range of markets.

Q: What impact will your disruption have on your company? Develop best and worst case scenarios to anticipate the kind of talent you'll need in the short and mid-term as your transition plays out. BP, for example, knew their cleanup was at least a two-year project. But the negative public perceptions would persist for years.

Q: Benchmark against top companies within your industry. What talent do you have that's on par with theirs? What gaps exist? Do you have any opportunities to move ahead of the competition through talent strategies?

Q: Look to your supply chain for help. Can you offload responsibilities previously managed in-house? Can you bring responsibilities inside?

Q: What other creative solutions may exist? For example, can you redesign your benefits package? The configuration of your workforce? Can you move work among divisions or work groups to alleviate short-term challenges?

*Most people hear the sounds of chaos and run in the opposite direction. But there are a few who listen intently for these sounds, not in the hopes of hearing them, but to help rid the world of them.*

— 2012 U.S. Marine Corp commercial voiceover