



## EPISODE 6

### Recruiting and Employee Engagement Tips to Help Overcome the Talent Crunch

- Introduction:** Welcome to Strategic Insights, brought to you by PrideStaff. On each episode, we bring you interviews with leading management and employment experts from across the country. Your host for strategic insights is Brad Smith. And now here's Brad.
- Brad Smith:** Hello and thank you for listening in to this episode of Strategic Insights from PrideStaff. I'm your host, Brad Smith, and I am excited today that we have Jody Northcutt, Senior Staffing Consultant and recruiting expert, here to help us overcome some candidate challenges and recruiting challenges. And today's episode is all about candidate engagement best practices and filling those open positions that lately have been so hard to fill. So, Jody, thank you so much for joining us. We really appreciate your time today.
- Jody Northcutt:** Thanks, Brad. I'm really happy to be here. It's an honor.
- Brad Smith:** As I just mentioned, today's episode is all about recruiting. So over the last several years, we've dealt with a huge skill shortage. Then COVID hit and we saw this huge uptick in unemployment. What are you seeing right now?
- Jody Northcutt:** That's a really great question, Brad. And right now we're still seeing a lot of shortages in a lot of areas. There's been a lot of great talent still employed, so it's challenging, just like it's been pre COVID. It's kind of a fuzzy line. We're finding that the unemployment numbers really can be a bit inflated. Industries like hospitality are very high right now, but we all know finding top talent is always a challenge and it's constantly looking for qualified people.
- Brad Smith:** We're seeing that across the country as well. So we work with hundreds of companies, thousands across the country, and what we're finding is that, yes, overall unemployment numbers are really high, but when you really break it down, a lot of that unemployment comes in the industries like you just mentioned Jody, in hospitality. So recruiting in light industrial, recruiting in the professional sectors and other areas, has been a real challenge.

Brad Smith: I know your team recruits 24/7. You're recruiting and using a ton of different tools. What is the single most effective tool that you have right now in your toolbox for recruiting?

Jody Northcutt: I don't have to think hard about this one. It is one of my favorite, and that is referrals. Our candidates, our employees, know so many great individuals out there. All we have to do is ask and we get awesome top talent. It's funny, individuals want to help one another and that seems to be a great way. If we ask we get referrals.

Brad Smith: You've mixed this just into your kind of daily process. When you and your team are out there recruiting, you're just asking everybody? How do you bring that up? Do you just say to somebody, "Hey, are you looking a job or do you know somebody else that's looking for a job?" What's that conversation look like?

Jody Northcutt: It's a combination of all kinds of things. I've been in the industry for a long time and I don't want to tell you how long I have been, but the one thing about recruiting that I know that there's no magic to it, that it has to be creative and it has to be consistent. And with our referrals, we are consistent.

Jody Northcutt: We will bring it up all the time. When we're scheduling a candidate to come in and meet with us with the first time, we'll mention our referral program. After they leave, we'll mention the referral program. If someone maybe has found other employment, we still mention the referral program. It's just part of what we like to call our plus one. When we're on the phone, even with the possibly a client, we'll still mention that.

Brad Smith: I love that. And I'm sure you do a ton of reference checks and things like that. And I love your point too, that people want to help others. So by asking for that referral, you're not necessarily, it's not a big ask. You're asking them if there's anybody in their circle that you can help. It's a value add. So I love building that into your process.

Jody Northcutt: I agree. It's really a win-win. Plus, we do let them know that we will pay them for the referral, so that doesn't hurt either.

Brad Smith: You've got a great program there to help encourage. And what I love about referrals is that you're getting in front of oftentimes passive job seekers, so you're getting in front of people that maybe aren't out there actively looking, but might be open to an opportunity and by getting that referral, you're softening up that conversation. So again, it becomes a more friendly conversation and you're not cold calling a referral or anyone else. And being able to leverage somebody else's name, the person that referred them, I think is a great way to soften that up and have a solid conversation.

Jody Northcutt: I was just going to add one other thing, Brad. Is just, even as we're doing proactive recruiting, maybe calling a potential employee, they might be happy with where they are, but chances are, they might know someone else, and because with PrideStaff, we are recruiting for, it could be general labor, reception, clerical, accounting, finance, somebody might know somebody that's looking for work.

Brad Smith: Now one-to-one referrals can be extremely powerful, as you've noted. But you have a full team of recruiters that are doing this, as you mentioned, day in and day out. You have this process behind them. They're doing it consistently. For those listening today that might have limited hiring resources or might be the only individual in the organization doing the hiring or in their department doing the hiring, it might be hard for them to scale this. So we've also seen online reviews be powerful. What's your take on online reviews and do these help drive more referrals? Do you find them valuable? Do you feel like it helps with a company's employment brand?

Jody Northcutt: Absolutely. I heard not too long ago that individuals will seek out and value an online review, even over friends and family. So I think it's something that's very, very important. We are constantly, it's another ask for us, is to have someone share their experience.

Brad Smith: I love that. And if you think about it, Google Facebook, Indeed, Glassdoor, there's dozens of sites out there. So you mentioned that this is an ask that you have of your candidates, of your employees. How do you go about it?

Jody Northcutt: Good question. It's basically just presenting it to them that if you've had a great experience, which we hope you have, we would appreciate them sharing that with the rest of the community. And again, it's just like asking for referrals. If you don't ask, we won't know. And luckily we've had a really great success with that.

Brad Smith: I love your point too, that people will trust online reviews. I've seen that same stat. Sometimes they'll trust an online review just as much or more as a close friend or family member. So for those listening, if you're having a challenge hiring right now, start by looking at your online presence. Look at what people are saying about working for your organization, make sure that it presents you in the proper light. If it does, terrific, build on that. Ask your internal team to leave reviews on sites like Glassdoor or Google, and make sure that you're a warm and welcoming place where people want to work, and that can go a long way in helping you fill your open positions, but also help you fill them with more talented people. People want to work at an organization where they feel part of a family, where they feel connected. It's a safe environment. And those online reviews can go a long way in validating that.

Brad Smith: Jody, I know that you mentioned that referrals were a big part of your recruiting efforts. Where do you get the rest of your candidates? Because I'm assuming not all of them come from referrals, so what other tools are you using to drive more candidate traffic? Are you using job boards, job postings, other tools?

Jody Northcutt: All of the above, yes. We are using all kinds of job boards, postings, you name it. You have to cast a really wide net because we're looking for so many types of individuals. And then we do a lot of proactive recruiting as well, where we're going in and we're calling into an organization that might be similar to the job that we're actually recruiting for. Plus, we're lucky our particular private staff office has been in business for over 20 years. So we've got a really great database that we can pull from and search from where maybe other organizations are not that fortunate.

Brad Smith: That's terrific. And that database can be invaluable. Even if you're not directly pulling from that database, those people know people who know people who know people, so it can be extremely powerful. And I know in many cases when organizations need to staff up quickly, maybe you need to hire 10, 20, 30 people, having a database of that size can be essential because you have some mass communication tools that you can use to reach that database too, and get those opportunities in front of people, don't you?

Jody Northcutt: Absolutely. And we can reach them extremely quickly, which is key. We have a couple of different things. We have the PrideStaff Edge app, which is an app that's free to our employees and they can download that and get notifications right from their phone and apply for jobs right from their phone. And we also have something called PrideStaff Connect, where we're constantly engaged with our employees that come to us, and that's just as simple as typing something out and it gets right in the hands of the individual very, very quickly.

Brad Smith: Now staying on job boards for just a moment here, there's a ton out there. There's Indeed, ZipRecruiter, CareerBuilder, Monster. You name it. There's local job boards. There's no shortage of places to post your job opportunities. Do you find one to be more effective over others or does it really depend?

Jody Northcutt: It really depends, Brad. It depends on the position that we're recruiting for. Sometimes we might find one board that is better than another. And we seek them all out, every one is a little different and that's the great thing. We've got so many tools at PrideStaff to use that we're not just pigeonholed into one particular type of recruiting effort.

Brad Smith: So it's really not just kind of post and pray. We're not just putting a job up there and praying resumes come in. There's some science behind it and some

data that you use to match the right job boards for the right type of position to get the most effective results and to drive the quickest best result, right?

Jody Northcutt: Absolutely.

Brad Smith: Well, switching gears a little bit, I want to talk about the job seeker. So you have the chance to talk with hundreds of different job seekers. Your team might talk to thousands. What's most important to them when considering a new job opportunity? What would get them to pay attention or switch jobs?

Jody Northcutt: Well, things have changed a little bit with COVID and I would say now, since we are in the midst of the pandemic, it's really a lot of work from home. For example, yesterday, I had five interviews with five excellent candidates and three of them only wanted remote work, only, not even a combination. So I think if a company can offer remote work, maybe, of some sort, that is going to attract a lot of individuals.

Jody Northcutt: I also think that, well, this goes with everybody, we all want to feel valued and I think candidates want to feel valued and they're looking for in an organization that values their employees. And that loops back around to what you said about the reviews online. Companies need to take a look at their reviews to make sure that employees, their own employees, are showing that they are valued. It is a great place to work.

Jody Northcutt: Also of course, people are always looking for a career path, looking for that opportunity and stability. I think now with the world that we're in stability that can be offered is really, really key.

Brad Smith: One thing that I didn't hear you mention was pay. Is that still important?

Jody Northcutt: It's still important, absolutely. It's got to be competitive. But those other factors that we discussed are really just as important.

Brad Smith: I think all things being equal, those other factors are going to push one company over the other, but I love your point on competitive pay. So if you're grossly under what the market is paying, and you're having an extremely hard time recruiting no matter how good the other benefits are. So what can companies listening today do to make sure that their pay and their compensation is on par with others in the area?

Jody Northcutt: That's an easy one, call PrideStaff and we can actually come up with a data report, it's absolutely free to them, and tailor it for the particular position and also the individual market. A lot of times that's a great tool resource, maybe for a manager that might be listening today that can take that information back to the HR manager and say, "This is what we're offering, but this is what we're finding is out in the market."

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Brad Smith: So you're really more consultative when you're working with clients. Another issue that I see, even beyond pay and benefits and things like that, is in how many companies write their job descriptions. So you might come across a job that has 100 different required skills. You know that there's not a single person on this planet that can meet all of those 100 required skills. Do you run into that? And what do you do if the list of required skills is just unreasonable?

Jody Northcutt: It all goes back to that consultative relationship that we like to have with our clients that we're dealing with. And I think it's an open and honest conversation. In a tight labor market, you really need to make sometimes some concessions. If there's a list of 10 things that someone needs, maybe we need to rate those from one to 10, and what's the top three? And if we can provide that, is there some wiggle room on the others? Sometimes there are what's required and what is desired, and a lot of times we need to focus on the required and maybe the desired will be a bonus.

Brad Smith: What are some other reasons? You mentioned compensation reports, your great consulting and insight on job descriptions and things like that, your huge network, what are some other reasons why someone would work with a staffing partner like PrideStaff, as opposed to just trying to bootstrap and do the hiring on their own?

Jody Northcutt: I think because PrideStaff really can act as an extension of their HR and recruiting team. We like to say that we are a partner, we're not into it for a one-time fill or a one-time assist, we want to be there on the ups and the downs. That's something that we've prided ourselves with during the whole COVID situation, the retention of our clients, and to be there and to offer information.

Jody Northcutt: HR is dealing with a lot of responsibilities, and it can be anywhere from recruiting and benefits and employee relationships, so by hiring someone like PrideStaff to assist with the open positions, they can get back to work on other things that are a lot more valuable for their time. So many positions that we're coming across are really hard to fill, and it's not something where you can just pull up a database and fill it that quickly. It might take some time to proactively try to find the qualified individuals. And if you can hire PrideStaff to do it, why not and get to do something else?

Brad Smith: We've covered a lot of ground about the importance of referrals, building your employment brand, job boards, job postings. What about newer tools, digital tools, like social media? How important are those to have in your recruitment mix?

Jody Northcutt: Well, probably five years ago, I'd say not valuable at all, but things have changed and I've kind of gone in there kicking and screaming a little bit, but absolutely, I think it's super important.

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Jody Northcutt: Instagram, I think is key. We do a lot of social media impact with Instagram. We're posting daily. Facebook, we're finding that is a really strong following and audience. Also, we're doing Facebook Live hirings, where we're talking about job opportunities. So we're, gosh, we've reached over 1000 individuals within a 30 minute period. So that's been really exciting. And then of course, I mentioned it before, the PrideStaff app. To have our own app and to be able to reach thousands and thousands of individuals in our marketplace is super exciting.

Brad Smith: Jody, so far a lot of what we talked about has been getting candidates into the top of the funnel, but that's really just the starting point, getting an application, getting a candidate excited about a potential opportunity, is just step one. And you really have to drive them further down that funnel. And especially when there's a shortage of talent, we find that often that top talent gets scooped up quickly. What tips do you have to help engage your talent pool or your candidate pool? What can you do to stay connected with those people and increase the chances that they're going to accept a job offer?

Jody Northcutt: I think communication is the key. Talking to individuals, showing respect, of course, but also staying engaged with them all the time. We use email, text, phone calls, automated reminders, along the way. And now, during the pandemic, we've also started doing things virtually as well with connections, and that seems to work out really well.

Brad Smith: Do you find now that you're doing most of your hiring and interviewing over Zoom?

Jody Northcutt: Yes, absolutely.

Brad Smith: Any tips there or has it been less effective? What's your experience been with online Zoom interviews like this?

Jody Northcutt: I'm old school, so a year ago, I would've said, "There's no way I'm going to do an interview over the phone, or over Zoom or Google Meets, because I want to meet you." But it really has been very enlightening. We get to see people in their own element. I think I almost like it better, Brad. People seem to be a lot more engaged. We have their focus. They don't seem to be quite as nervous. And then for PrideStaff, I know that we're able to talk to them about positions, because we've got the computer in front of us. So, so far so good.

Brad Smith: We've heard that across the board, that people were a little reluctant at first, but then once they actually started using this technology and these tools, that they formed deeper bonds, have been able to have a more personal connection with people, as strange as that sounds. So I love that you're using technology there to really make recruiting and outreach more effective and faster, really.

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Jody Northcutt: Absolutely.

Brad Smith: Jody, one final item that I wanted to talk to you about is really the last step of that hiring process, and it's giving that job offer and getting acceptance. In such a tight labor market, how fast do companies need to actually make that decision?

Jody Northcutt: Fast. We find that if clients are waiting too long, if there's too much red tape, the employees are going to go elsewhere. People are hungry to work and they don't want to wait around. They've got bills to pay and the quicker that an organization can make a decision to hire, the better.

Brad Smith: Thank you so much for your time today. You've given us some extremely valuable tips on overall employment branding, where we can find candidates, how to approach a tough candidate market, and how important it is to make some fast decisions here. And make the right decision, not just a fast decision, but an educated one with the help of a partner like PrideStaff. Any closing words of wisdom for those listening that are out there trying to hire right now and having a challenge?

Jody Northcutt: Well, obviously I'm going to say, you need to partner with someone like PrideStaff. We really value the resources that we have in place and how we can really become a partner. I think too, with the recruiting, if nothing else, be consistent. If you don't have a referral program, I think it's something that's key for the organization. And people want to be valued. Treat everyone with respect. And I think that goes a long way.

Brad Smith: I think that's a really important one. I think if you treat people with respect, if you show them that you value them, you value their time, that you're in it to help them succeed, and you want to provide them with a great career opportunity, I think you're going to be [inaudible 00:21:21]. Jody, I love that you're incorporating that all into your recruitment program there at PrideStaff.

Jody Northcutt: Thanks, Brad.

Brad Smith: I hope everyone listening found value in today's episode. If you have a tough recruiting challenge, don't be shy. Reach out to your local PrideStaff office. Visit [PrideStaff.com](https://www.pridestaff.com). Find an office near you. We have a team that is recruiting 24/7. We're using all these amazing tools that Jody mentioned. We're using technology to improve candidate engagement and make sure that we have talent that is ready to work when you need them. So reach out to your local office. Thank you again for listening.

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