



EPISODE 9

Employment Branding and Talent Engagement

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 so much for joining us for this episode of Strategic Insights from PrideStaff. This is Brad and I am pleased to have Eric Gregg founder and CEO of Independent Research Firm, ClearlyRated join us today, Eric. Thanks so much for taking the time.

Eric Gregg: I appreciate it, Brad. Glad to be here.

Brad Smith: So before we jump in Eric, your organization does some amazing research in several different industries. Today, we're talking specifically about employment and the workforce sector. So give us a little bit of background about ClearlyRated experience in this area, if you don't mind.

Eric Gregg: Thank you Brad I appreciate it. We have been studying the employment space for well over a decade actually it's now starting to get closer to two decades as a part of this. So this is now our second recession and recovery as we go through here and the focus of our firm is really working with staffing and recruiting agencies, helping them deliver exceptional service, helping them measure that through an online survey platform and then helping to bring transparency to the industry around which firms are actually providing the top service at [unclear speech]rated.com. So we follow this very, very closely. We've worked with over 300 different staffing and recruiting firms in North America and it's a passionate sport for us, especially in times like these where the industry typically leads out of a recession and is doing so again this time around. So it's a pretty exciting time to be in the flexible workforce place and especially the research side of it because there is a lot that's changing right now.

Brad Smith: Excellent, so you mentioned that you've been through two recessions, so you've learned some lessons from the past and some of those carry over. Now this one's been a little bit different. So tell us a little bit about what you've

seen when it comes to hiring, recruitment and unemployment. Overall, what are you seeing and what should our listeners today be on the lookout for?

Eric Gregg: So unlike every other recession that we've studied and we've gone all the way back to the 70s, looking at how they impact not just overall employment, but also temporary employment in that space, in that flexible workforce. What we see are some things that are the same, which is that the temporary workforce tends to lead into a recession, which means that it gets reduced first, but it also tends to lead back where it tends to be the first hiring that happens as people go back as they sort of get on their feet, dust themselves off and realize, okay, now we're done triaging and we're back to getting to growth and having to deliver on our business schools and promises so we've seen that happen.

Eric Gregg: This one is of course different for so many different reasons. The slope of the decline down into the higher levels of unemployment was much steeper than it has been historically, but also we have come back much more rapidly as well. The bottom for the temporary workforce was around May and so from that middle of May, we've been consistently seeing the industry grow some sectors more than others, but we're starting to see people putting their capital back to work, needing to continue to revitalize their products, take on additional projects and candidly just deliver what the economy is demanding as the economy continues to spend.

Brad Smith: Eric, you just touched on this a little bit, but with economic uncertainty, we often see companies switching more to a contingent model. So they're afraid to invest and tie up money in direct hires in increasing their overall spend. Are you seeing that more and more companies are turning to temporary or contingent workforces that maybe haven't in the past?

Eric Gregg: Yeah, absolutely and it's interesting Brad, because every single time as we recover from a recession, we set a new plateau, which is the percentage of overall employment that is actually temporary help or flexible labor and that's because as we came out, for example, 2008, and as we started to recover in 2009, 2010, by the time we got to 2014, a temporary help as a percentage of overall employment was over 2% consistently, which is still a very small number, but compared to historical levels of 1.6, 1.7%, that's a huge gain in terms of the percentage.

Eric Gregg: We held that all the way until we went into this last recession and I suspect when we come out and instead of 2.06 or 2.1%, you're going to see 2.3, 2.4% and that'll become the new bar because not only are people utilizing it as a tool to give them some flexibility in uncertain times, they're also understanding that they need to be more strategic about a flexible component of their workforce long-term. Whether that be talent marketplaces like Upwork or staffing agencies such as PrideStaff and others, they're

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understanding that it's really critical for them to continue to build out a flexible workforce that they can utilize in good times and in bad.

Brad Smith: So let's talk about that flexible workforce a little bit. Your team recently wrapped up a job candidate sentiment survey. You dug into some of the reasons or the benefits of working with a staffing agency, you looked at overall employee sentiment or job seeker sentiment. So at a very level, what did your team find there?

Eric Gregg: Well, we found is actually that people in general are getting more and more open to the idea of gig work and as they look at uncertainty from a job candidates perspective, some of the same things apply. If you look at this recession more than any other, it sort of rocked people to their core, right? People are questioning whether or not they want to be in the same career arc questioning whether or not they want to live in the same place that they have been living in much more so than we see during the typical recession and so what we're seeing is turnover is higher, optimism is actually higher and I think you've seen a lot of job candidates that are starting to take more active control again of their career and taking meaningful assignments through a staffing and recruiting firm is one of the ways that they can really do that.

Eric Gregg: It's one of the ways that they can bridge across a career to a position that's maybe not directly the next line that they would be able to get on their own, it's where they get guidance. A lot of people who have been out of searching for a while, if you've worked at the same company for five plus years you go into a job search just a little bit overwhelmed, right. You know, the thing that last time I was in a job search indeed wasn't even really there. I didn't even have the same players and I didn't have to think about what should my resume look like now? How good are my skills? Right.

Eric Gregg: Nobody has a really good understanding of how good their skills are, or maybe they've atrophied some and that's where a really good recruiter can actually add a ton of value to somebody in giving them some of that coaching, as well as giving them access to opportunities that just wouldn't be there otherwise and that's, I think the exciting part and where candidates are actually looking more to some of that guidance from staffing and recruiting firms than they do during normal times.

Brad Smith: One thing that you mentioned there that really stuck out is that a job search can be overwhelming and I think your point in working with a recruiter can really help that process, but when we think about technology and how fast things are growing, we see new job boards, social media has come into play. Do candidates feel that overwhelm, or do they like the opportunity to use different technology and different tools? What was your finding there?

Eric Gregg: That's a really good question and we are seeing a lot of changes there Brad, but just to underline the point that you made about the anxiety of a job search, we asked a question that we hadn't asked for a few years and we asked job candidates. We say, compared to other life events, how stressful is your current job search? What we found is that nine out of 10 people found their current job search to be more stressful than things that we know were stressful, like planning a wedding or the birth of a child about 2/3 said it was more stressful than the anxiety they feel around COVID-19 about half said it was more stressful than the death of a loved one, which is amazing as we start to think about this, but essentially what that's saying is that if I looked around my table at Thanksgiving, I might be willing to trade for, I don't have to be in this job searching anymore for that one uncle that nobody likes.

Eric Gregg: Right, and it's really kind of puts into this stark contrast that the emotional state that people are when they do that job search. So the short answer to your question is that people want it all and it's part of a job search. I want a recruiter that's giving me context and guidance and I want technology that is moving this along efficiently and giving me access to information when I want it and so really much like we're going to be seeing a lot of things I think we'll talk about it a little bit later. Things around flexible work schedules and remote work what we're really seeing, especially gen Y and younger is that they want that blend and that's how most of us are, right. We've all kind of been in that mode where I love to go on Amazon and be able to research on my own time at my own space and make that purchase, but also when something goes wrong, I want to be able to get somebody, when I have a question that maybe isn't easily answered through a portal or a piece of technology, I want an expert to tell me what we should be doing and that's, I think the key blend there is to have that technology laid on top of a really strong network of recruiters.

Brad Smith: So Eric, let's talk a little bit about the employer side of things. How can an employer make the job or the candidate search a little bit more effective? Should they be leveraging employment partners? Should they be using an outside source to help recruit?

Eric Gregg: What's interesting is we've actually seen just similar in a lot of trends. We've seen utilization of outside staffing partners whether it be through [RPOs] Recruitment Process Outsourcing or whether it be through traditional staffing firms or some other blend of that. We've seen organizations turn to recruiting partners at a higher level than they traditionally have and that's been a trend that's been happening and it got accelerated as we went into COVID-19 and I think with everybody being very lean, as they have started to hire back, maybe they had layoffs, maybe they hit pause, maybe they were doing great and continue to grow, but almost everybody whether their businesses thriving or surviving, they are making decisions about employment and they're turning to the experts to be able to do that, not just the experts to be able to help them

improve that hiring process, but the experts to help them speed up the hiring process, the experts to help them navigate where they should be posting.

Eric Gregg: We're seeing staffing and recruiting firms get asked questions that they haven't historically had been asked, which is, hey, where can you post this job to where we get a more diverse applicant pool? What can you tell us about your hiring process to make sure that we are doing whatever we can to remove unconscious bias? And so that partnership is actually growing in strength and in the research that we did with the American Staffing Association recently, what we found is that across the board hiring managers are expecting their staffing firms to be a bigger role as they emerge from this recession and help them balance that as they continue to grow.

Brad Smith: Eric, you brought up so many good topics there and I love that concept of working with a Strategic-Partner to help broaden your reach. That's a big in and we talked a minute ago about how job seekers are inundated with a variety of new technology and new tools. It can be slightly overwhelming, but working with a staffing partner who already is active on a variety of different job boards already is active and has built a strong social network is proactively and constantly recruiting and working hand in hand with employees and making their job search less filled with anxiety and making it easier for them. I think only sets employees up for success once they are finally placed at the end employer.

Eric Gregg: Yeah there's no question that that's the case and you have to really make that decision thoughtfully, that staffing firm becomes an extension of your brand, and it's a big part of the first really experiences that people have potentially engaging in working with your organization and their staffing firms out there like PrideStaff that candidly do a great job of not just holding true to your employment brand, but actually enhancing that employment brand and there's staffing agencies out there that don't, and it's an important distinction to be able to really vet the firms that that are you're considering to know that they're going to be delivering that type of experience that you want for your job candidates as an extension of your brand.

Brad Smith: Eric, when recruiting, whether you're doing the recruiting internally for yourself, whether you're working with a staffing partner, pay is obviously at the top of the list. So everybody wants to earn a good wage, they want to be fairly compensated, let's say pays equal across the board. Beyond pay, what are the most impactful things that candidates are looking for? What's most important to them?

Eric Gregg: There's actually a lot and when answering this question, you have to understand that it goes beyond a simple answer, it's different in different industries, it's different by age, it's different across that side and one of the most important things that people can do is to actually ask that question of

their own staff as a part of that, but generally speaking beyond compensation, it starts to be things like benefits, how the job fits into their life. So that can be, the commute, that could be the flexibility, that can be the ability to work remote part of the time, those aspects of it and then the next level on that would be what I would say is sort of the professional development potential. So what, what does this do for my career and growth there as a part of that?

Eric Gregg: And then a really big piece of that comes down to culture. Am I going to like it there? Right. There's a reason why people spend a lot of time on Glassdoor looking at those reviews, there's a reason why people are trying to understand the company culture and things along those lines. In fact, a couple years ago, we asked a question where we said, what is the lowest annual salary that you would accept for a position? Let's say somebody put in \$50,000, we came back with the very next question we said, you're offered a position that you're interested in at a company that has a strong reputation for being a great employer or we said, in a company that has strong online reviews, something along those lines, and we said, would you accept the position? So we literally said, what's the lowest you'll accept.

Eric Gregg: And then we came back at 10% lower than what they said and what we found is about 2/3 of people would accept that position lower than what they stated they would ever consider if the culture was right, if they had evidence that people really loved working there as part of that. So I think when people look at that employment brand, they look at it is okay, that's how I attract top talent, but it is an investment that actually does pay dividends in terms of what people expect to get paid to be a part of that environment.

Brad Smith: Eric would you say that online reviews like Glassdoor, Google, other places are a big chunk of employment brand?

Eric Gregg: Huge, a huge chunk of that in and it really plays in two ways, right? So we'll talk about it just in the employer side of it and Glassdoor is really the King when it comes to the employer side of that, they have the best reviews and the most accurate views when you look at sort of the employment brand aspect of that, I suspect over time, you'll see more organizations that are providing those types of reviews on the employment experience there but right now they are really the Kings on that side of it and we see people utilizing that a lot. We also see, and this is an important distinction too, if you're going to partner with the staffing and recruiting firm, you need to go do as part of your due diligence and see what their reviews say about them. Not just because that's actually good due diligence to see what their clients say about them, but also because how they treat the talent is going to matter, right?

Eric Gregg: We talked about it being an extension of your employment brand. It also is a barrier or a tailwind in terms of their ability to get you top talent as you go through that process and so I think you really have to understand what that

experience is going to be like and right now, the best way to understand that is through online reviews. In fact, for the first time ever job candidates across all age groups said that they trust online reviews even more than a personal recommendation about which organization to work for. Two years ago, we passed the threshold where gen Y and younger trusted it more than a personal referral but now even when you impact the fact that gen X and baby boomers do that a little bit less authoritatively, we find that across all job candidates, that that is the case and it makes sense, right?

Eric Gregg: Brad, if you tell me that, hey, this XYZ company is a great place to work well, that's great, but that may be just your experience. Maybe you have a uniquely great manager and other people don't have that same experience. So why in the world would I not go out and see what 75 other people that have worked at that organization say about working there? It's the same thing that we think about when we look at restaurants, when we look at products.

Eric Gregg: You could tell me that the Mexican Taqueria down the road is the best one in town but if I go and I see that it has a 3.2 star rating and three different people said that they got sick there, I don't care how much you love it with your gut of steel, that apparently can take any kind of taco on the planet, I'm going to go with the wisdom of the crowds and I'm not alone and that's why we see that online reputation every single year for the past decade, it's gone up and we've been talking about it and talking about it and we're starting to see now people really paying attention to that and investing in, in the way that they should.

Brad Smith: Yeah, it's amazing how influential online reviews can be and an amazing part of your employment brand and you touched on an important part when you're looking at aligning yourself with a workforce partner, you do need to do that due diligence. So talk to me a little bit more about how an end employer out there, how a company can choose and find the right staffing partner.

Eric Gregg: So we actually have not only the largest, but I believe the only marketplace of staffing and recruiting firms in the United States that Clearlyrated.com and that's a place where you can go and you can see ratings from the clients, from their talent in the next six months, you'll be able to see it from their internal employees as well.

Eric Gregg: There's never been an industry in the B2B space has had more transparency than the staffing industry does on Clearlyrated.com and what that does is it allows you to go and essentially mark that box that says, okay, I think, I believe what the salesperson is telling me what this Strategic-Partner is telling me what this recruiters telling me, but I want to be able to go and prove that they're actually able to deliver on that and that's where the validated reviews and one of the things that we do different than anybody else, is that our star ratings and the testimonials that we share are from validated, accurate, actual customers, actual placed talent that have been placed on that assignment, as

opposed to some of the other review sites where there's not nearly as strict of an adherence to that work relationship.

Eric Gregg: So, we typically have more ratings and we have more current and accurate ratings than anybody else. That being said, you're still going to want to look and see what people say on Google, you're still going to want to look and see what people say on Glassdoor, and you're going to want to build sort of the entirety of that and then the other things that I would say is, you need to ask them ,who else do you work with that looks like me? Who else do you work with that is a small technology company in the Pacific Northwest? And if they don't have answers to that, then they better have really good answers to everything else. It doesn't mean that you shouldn't consider them, but it does mean that they need to be really head and shoulders above somebody who does have that sort of industry level expertise.

Brad Smith: Eric, in the past, the term temp or temporary help or staffing, sometimes it had a negative connotation, as, we move forward. We talked about how this past year has really kind of changed the world of work. Do you see temporary flexible contingent workforce as being a key to business success moving forward?

Eric Gregg: Yeah, there's no question that it is and you're hitting on this absolute, a hot button topic for me, Brad, because the industry is guilty of this as well, but certainly organizations talk about their temps or they talk about their contingence because we talk about contingent labor as well and I will tell you right now that is the most derogatory term that you can utilize for these individuals and think about it for a second. Like, you know what high school kid is looking at the next step in their career and saying, you know what, I'm going to be a temp, I'm going to be a contingent and the very definition of contingent is derogatory as it pertains to somebody's skills and their ability to deliver value for an organization and so I, if there's one thing, anybody listening today, if I could just implore you, don't use temp, don't use contingent, it's an outdated, derogatory term, use talent.

Eric Gregg: That's what they are. They're talented individuals, some of them may be talented in different ways than others, some of them may be talented in ways that are super unique, some of them may be talented in ways that aren't as unique, but they're all talent. They all create value for our organization, for our industry and the opportunity now is to really broaden the view of what we look for in flexible workforce and that may be to help with ebbs and flows and production capacity. It may be utilized in ebbs and flows of a busy season versus your normal time, it may be because there's a specific project that you need some skills that you don't have, so often we think about the traditional sort of old school view of temporary employment as being, Oh, okay.

Eric Gregg: Betty is out for three weeks and so we need somebody to replace Betty, Joe is going to be gone and so we need somebody to replace Joe for a short period of time and that's not really how the top organizations utilize flexible talent now they utilize it far more strategically recognizing that some portion of their employment is always going to be with a flexible workforce and that they're going to augment their staff, not just based on when they need resources, which is an important time to do it, but also based on when they need skills that maybe they don't need full-time for the rest of time, but they do need it for a particular project or a particular time in space.

Brad Smith: Eric, thank you so much for your time and insight today. It was extremely beneficial I hope everyone listening, found some great takeaways, any closing words of wisdom you have for employers that are really looking to enhance their brand and attract superstars.

Eric Gregg: What we just went through in 2020 and what we're still to some extent going through in 2021 has been generationaly defining and to think that we wouldn't come out of the other end of that radically different as a society and what we expect from the institutions in our lives, including our employment would be a little bit naïve and we're seeing that happen already and so my advice for anybody listening to this is really make sure that you have a pulse on what your employees are thinking, feeling, the actions that they're taking, look at how you are intentionally or unintentionally creating a work environment around that organization, and just understand that it's changing and that the first step to changing in a positive way is to understand that what worked in the past is not likely to be what works in the future.

Eric Gregg: I think the more that you can partner with the experts in the space and those people that are doing hiring and recruiting at scale every single day, the better off you're going to be, not just in the hires that you make through a PrideStaff or a temporary employer, but also the hires that you make directly and filling traditional jobs within your organization. We all have to be better, we all have to look at what we're offering and continue to evolve that, to meet the needs of not just the majority, but also the minority and if we do that, then we will find ourselves in a position where we will be able to attract top talent. It's not just about compensation, it's about the entirety of that employment situation and I think the firms that really understand that and do a good job of creating an exceptional workplace and also getting credit for that exceptional workplace externally, those are going to be the ones that really win .

Brad Smith: Eric amazing takeaways and for those listening, I want to encourage you to visit pridestaff.com. Eric has been kind enough to also record a live webinar under our innovations live webinars series and he's going to dig into a lot of the information that he shared on the episode today, share tips and best practices for attracting the right talent, what's most important to them and

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how you can set yourself and your workforce up for success moving forward. Eric, thank you again so much we really, really appreciate it.

Eric Gregg:

Thanks Brad. I appreciate it.

Closing:

Thank you for listening to Strategic Insights brought to you by PrideStaff. Whether you're looking for high level workforce consulting or staffing help to meet demands, PrideStaff is here to help.