



EPISODE 15

What Should Businesses Be Doing Now To Access The Best Talent

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 listening in to Strategic Insights from PrideStaff. I'm your host, Brad Smith. We have a terrific episode lined up today. We're going to talk about what businesses should do now to attract the best talent in such a competitive market. Joining me today is our guest, David Searns, co-CEO of Haley Marketing. Haley marketing is a leading recruitment marketing company that specializes in the staffing industry and works closely with small and mid-sized businesses on their recruitment marketing strategies. David, thank you so much for joining us today.

David Searns: Thanks Brad. Great to be here.

Brad Smith: David, if you turn on the news right now, you can hear countless stories of businesses that are struggling to survive. Not because there isn't necessarily demand, but because they can't find staff. When you work with companies across the country, do you feel like it's really that bad? Are people struggling all over the country?

David Searns: Well, first off, I do everything I can to not turn on the news right now, because it just puts me in a bad mood. But to your point, the shortage of talent is real. So, I think the latest data I saw from the end of August said there was something like 10 million job openings in the US right now and somewhere around 9, 9.1 million people available to fill those jobs. So, you know how musical chairs works. So, it's guaranteed that you've got about a 900,000 to a million jobs right now that can't be filled. And in some industries, it's much worse because we've seen people who have left the industry. An example might be the hospitality industry where, because of COVID things shut down, they left the industry and they've looked at their careers and said, "I didn't enjoy it that much and I'm not going back".

David Searns: And then let's make it even worse depending on where you live in the United States, you may be in an area that's being more or less impacted by the Delta

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variant of COVID. And beyond your personal health, you've got your family. If you are a mom or a dad and you've got school-aged children who cannot yet be vaccinated, it's pretty likely that you're going to face somebody getting, it may just be a cold, but they're going to call it COVID and send your kid home. So now how do you deal with that? And what we're seeing is a lack of willingness for people to jump back into the labor market and labor force participation rate has actually dropped from 63% of the population willing to work pre pandemic down to 61%. And this is down. It used to be as high as 66%. So, we have lost tons of people who used to work, who are right now sitting on the sidelines, either unwilling or unable to go back.

Brad Smith: So, David let's dig into that a little bit. You've been in business for 25 years. You've worked probably with thousands of companies on overcoming some challenges. When you're consulting with a company that's facing these issues that you just mentioned, where do you even begin?

David Searns: So, I always start with the goal in mind. What do I want to accomplish? If I have a hiring need, is it 1 person, is it for 10 people? Do I have a lot of turnover in my organization? But for most employers, it's also, what do you stand for? We are... And the word unprecedented is so overused, but it's also so appropriate. We're in an unprecedented time where the job seeker, the employee has more ability to choose when and where they want to work than at any time in US history. So, what does that mean? If I'm looking for a job, I'm the hot commodity. And if you are an employer, it's no longer, I have to beg you to accept me. I get to determine; do I want to work for you? Yes or no. And that may sound a little arrogant to employers, but employees have choice. And because they have choice. If you're an employer, the first question you have to answer is why should someone choose you? And more importantly, why should the right someone choose you?

David Searns: It's not that you're going to just take anybody willing to apply. You still want the best of the best. But to get those candidates to know you exist, to choose your company over another competitor or somebody else now, could be with remote work anywhere around the world, why are they going to choose you? It's about really understanding your unique value.

Brad Smith: So, David, once you determine what your real value is in that equation, how do you get that in the market? How do you attract candidates and get that in front of more people?

David Searns: So, in Marketing Speak, they talk about that value, your EVP. So, your employment value proposition. And you're defining what's in it for the job seeker. Why should they choose you? Now historically, if you look at the way people got the word out there, it was through a job post. So, I put out a post, I send it out to the job boards and it said, "Here's my job title. Here's what we need to hire". Let's invert that. You've got three to five seconds when

somebody clicks on your link in Indeed for them to go, "Ooh, this company sounds interesting". What's in it for that job seeker? What makes you special? People today want to know about your company's vision, your mission, where are you going? They want to know about your social responsibility. They want to know about where their career can go. They want to know how well you treat people.

David Searns: So, all of that has to come out in your job posts. On your website, do you have a career portal? Do you have a section of your website dedicated to jobs and dedicated to the reasons people should work for you and choose you over the competition? Have you made that information visual with pictures, with videos? Because I want to make sure that my website there's a section for careers that really sells my organization. And then taking that back another level. How do I get people to that information? And that's where the work I do in my community or my industry. That's where my overall company brand stands out. That's where what I do on social media and how I show off that employment brand, that employment value proposition on social, all come into play.

David Searns: So, you're thinking about where are people going to see me in the real world, what's going to then drive them to learn about my jobs and then how do I convey the company brand in such a way that we're really desirable? And that's the flow of information to get people to your jobs.

Brad Smith: So, I'm going to dig deeper into that a little bit. You mentioned a career site. Talk to me a little bit about what goes into a good career site for the end employer.

David Searns: So, if you think about somebody looking for a job, they say that in terms of people's fears in life, I don't remember exactly where looking for a job fell, but it's higher than the fear of dying. It's not as bad as the fear of public speaking. That's number one on the list, but it's really high up there. And it's because it's so uncomfortable to look for a job. You're leaving the comfort zone of what you do today to find something new. So that career site is about creating that comfort. So, when I look at your career site, am I able to see myself in your organization? The pictures you use, the kinds of people. Diversity, equity and inclusion, huge issues. Got to make sure that's shown there. But I also want to also get a glimpse of what it looks like in your office, your warehouse. What are your facilities like? Do you use new equipment, old equipment? Are there stories I can get about people? All of this should be a part of the career site. I want to see your reviews. Be transparent. What do your employees say about you?

David Searns: And then the jobs themselves. They have to be really easy to find. Easy to search, and they have to tell that story about the individual job really well. It's not a job post. It's a job advertisement and that advertisement on your

website's got to sell me. And then it's got to have a great experience. Meaning it's super easy for me to look at the jobs and to apply to the jobs, particularly if I'm on not just your website, but on my phone. Because most of the people looking for work, that's where they're searching is from a mobile device to see are they interested in you? So here, quick homework for everybody. Pull out your phone right now, go to your company website. Can you find the career site? How many clicks is it away? Does it then tell your story? When I go to apply to a job, unfortunately, with a lot of ATSs, the applicant tracking systems, it's not always that easy to apply. And we need it to be super easy. We call it frictionless. Meaning frictions is resistance, the least resistance to people applying the better.

Brad Smith: And you bring up a good point with mobile friendliness. I've seen countless cases of companies that require a resume and 70, 80, 90% of their traffic is coming from a mobile device. David, I don't know about you, but I don't have my resume on my mobile phone.

David Searns: Yeah, I don't either. Thankfully I haven't had to put one together in a long time, but I don't think most people and maybe some people have it on Dropbox or Google Drive and they can attach it. But more likely if you think about the people applying to your jobs, how do they engage with their phone? The most common way they're engaging with their phone is chat. So, is there a chat bot or can I text you to give you information about me to fill in that job application? Can I quickly fill in the blanks to give you the information you need? Or I may have uploaded my whole resume to a site like Indeed or ZipRecruiter. Can I use one click to grab the information from a third party where I already put it to send it into you because your right Brad, people don't have their resumes generally on their phones in an easy way to access them. They're going to need the information either somewhere else that it's already loaded or to use that chat/text interface to give you what you need.

Brad Smith: So, I want to revert back to something you mentioned earlier, you talked a little bit about job advertising. And historically, when we think of recruiting most people default to job advertising. So, posting a job on one of the major job boards and posting and praying that that resumes begin to come in. But walk us through what's really most important when we think about job advertising. How can companies drive more ROI? Drive more applications from their job advertising spend?

David Searns: Yeah, let me back up a second. Because one of the things I neglected to mention is when we think about recruitment marketing, because you mentioned in the introduction that that's what we do for a living in Haley Marketing. When we teach people recruitment marketing, we teach them to look at four pillars of their marketing. And so most people think about hiring as, well I have a need, I run a job post. People apply. I screen resumes. I interview. I hire. With these four pillars, we're thinking about ways to attract

people to your company and to your jobs. So, we actually did talk about pillar number one, which is the career site, which is the last mile pillar. The second and third pillars are what attract people to you. And this is the job advertising, which is the second pillar, which we'll talk more about to your question a second.

David Searns: And the third pillar is social recruiting and by using social media in a way to engage active and passive job seekers. And then the final pillar, and hopefully we'll have some time to talk more about is that employment brand. What are we known for? That's why that employee value proposition comes into play. That's also where reputation management comes into play. But let me come full circle on what you just asked. So, in job advertising, most people are thinking about what do I post? What am I going to put on Indeed, on ZipRecruiter? What am I going to put on my own website? And I said something really key earlier.

David Searns: And I remember we had a client once who had the best analogy. So, I talked about it. It's not a job post it's a job advertisement. And her analogy was, she said, "Think about your advertising like you're in the beer industry. There's the commercial for beer and there's the ingredients on the can. Now I don't know about you, but if I'm going to try a new beer, I don't figure it out by looking at the ingredients on the can. And that's a job post. The job post is the duties, responsibilities. It's what we're looking for. It's the ingredients on can. The advertisement, the one that touches your heart, that grabs you emotionally, that pulls you in that's the advertisement".

David Searns: So, when I'm thinking about spending money to post a job, I've got to get that job found and I've got to make it tell the right story. The story is the advertisement. How do I get it found? Now I got to think about what job title is somebody searching for. Now I may be hiring a secretary level two job title or whatever you call it in your business. But that may not be the job title someone's using. Maybe they are searching for secretary. Maybe they're searching for receptionist. Maybe they're searching for administrative assistant. Maybe they're searching for office help. You may want to do things like testing the same job with different titles.

David Searns: I know in our own company we were trying to hire and the job title was a customer service support specialist. And I'll spare you a long story, but just to say, we tested three different titles. The actual job title received zero applications. Another job title received 125 applications. None were qualified. We didn't interview a single person. The winning title received 25 applications. We had five candidates that were finalists and we hired from that pool. So just testing different job titles means based on where your potential candidate is searching on Google, on Indeed, on ZipRecruiter what they're typing in to find a job, you want them to find your job. So, you can have the exact same job

description, job advertisement, job post, but just testing different titles can make a huge difference.

Brad Smith: That's really interesting. And it brings up a good point because we've seen that recruitment costs or cost per application on a site like Indeed has gone up 40% over the last year. What other things beyond just AB testing should people and end employers really consider and test?

David Searns: So, if you think about what's in the job description, I've got the job title, I've got the opening few sentences. So now us humans have a bad knock that our attention spans now lower than that of a goldfish because goldfish get an eight second attention span. So somehow in less than eight seconds, we have to say something that makes that person keep reading. So, I would probably test what are my opening sentences and what are some opening bullets that I can use that sell either the specific job or my company as a whole.

David Searns: I may be selling my company mission and vision. I may be selling why this is an amazing opportunity to get your foot into the organization. I may be selling why six months from now you're going to get a promotion. I got to think what I'm selling. And I may test different variations of that. I also may be testing; how can people respond? Do they have to send a resume? Can they do a one click apply with Indeed? Can they call us? Can they text? I may test that to see what do my candidates want or I may offer all of it.

David Searns: Another thing I may test is geography. So, let's say I'm in Atlanta. Atlanta's a huge city. I could post a job as being in Atlanta, but around Atlanta, there're tons of suburbs. And I know we worked with a company that was in a Northern, not really suburb, but another city in Georgia. And we ended up testing jobs in 37 different markets around their office because what they found is if the job appeared to be more local, to some of those smaller communities, they could get people interested who weren't looking at the "big city". So, you have to think about all the geographic locations people use to look for your job or look for jobs and how would they find you if you're in Atlanta, but they're in another community surrounding it? And let's open the whole world of remote.

David Searns: You want to make sure your jobs are flagged to be remote friendly if you offer that as an option, because I know our director of recruitment marketing recently had an example where a company had an unbelievable response to a job that wasn't getting much response for other clients. And I asked him, I said, "What did you do?" And he said, "It was this simple. They were willing to take remote candidates and they were willing to let people work remote". And that's in such demand right now that it made all the difference. So not every job, if I'm picker, packer, putting stuff in a box, I probably have to do that on premise, but a lot of jobs can be done remote.

David Searns: And if you remove the barrier of geography, you can open up a much larger talent pool, so that's another thing that's worthwhile to test. So, you got the title, the job description, the location, the ability to have remote work and then pay rates. Now this one may be a little more controversial, but we're discovering that every geographic market has its new effective minimum wage. Now the enhanced federal unemployment benefits have ended. However, you can't pay what you did in 2020 pre pandemic and still get people to apply to your jobs. And what we're discovering is that every market has a different effective minimum wage. If your actual minimum wage is \$10 an hour, in your community because of commute times and daycare issues and just the competition, it might be \$12 an hour. It might be \$15 an hour.

David Searns: I saw Amazon just announced, 125,000 new hires at \$18 an hour. I've seen some companies with lower-level manufacturing jobs starting pay of \$20 an hour at what probably was \$12 an hour two years ago. There's been a lot of wage inflation, but you have to test that to see in your market, where do you need to be priced? Where do you need wages to be in order to get the level of talent you want? And that's creating huge problems for businesses. I recognize it. You can't just price a new hire higher than incumbents, but it has to be factored in if you're going to attract talent.

Brad Smith: Yeah. And just a little self-promotion here. At PrideStaff, we can help you really determine what your salary should look like. We have access to a supply and demand portal. So, if you're not sure what the wage or salary needs to be, if you're not sure what the demand in your market for a specific position is reach out to your local office and we can help you uncover that information and really set you up for success. Now David, I want to transition a little bit. You mentioned one of the other pillars is social recruiting and Glassdoor released some data that showed that nearly 80% of people use social media when conducting a job search. How can companies better leverage social to help in the recruitment and build their local recruitment brand?

David Searns: All right. I get like two hours to answer this question, right?

Brad Smith: You sure do.

David Searns: It's really a big loaded question and there's not one right answer that's here's how to use social media. So, let's start with a few things. Number one, what am I trying to do? Well. I'm trying to find candidates or have them find me on social media and have them reach out to me. Now, if I'm trying to find them, I can use paid advertise. So, all the social channels allow you to pay to sponsor content. Now when it's job advertising, you're limited in how you can target, but I might target people based on their job title, based on the city that they're in, based on the other interests that they have. So, I can do some targeting if I'm going to try to reach out to them, but mostly on social media, it's about the candidate finding you.

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David Searns: So, the first thing is to know, who am I trying to reach? What does the profile of my ideal employee look like? And it may be there's more than one profile. So once I know those profiles, and in marketing speak, we talk about creating personas, which is defining who is this audience? What age are they? Income level? Other demographic factors. Now we're going to be using things in defining personas that we don't use to hire. Meaning there are things when you create a persona that would be seen as being discriminatory. You would never use that in the actual hiring process, but you use that to figure out where the people are. If I've got a younger demographic, I'm more likely to find them on Instagram and TikTok. If I've got older professionals, I'm more likely to find them on LinkedIn.

David Searns: There's a huge population that I'm likely to find on Facebook, but it's going to be less of the younger demographic and more of the mid-career demographic. So, knowing where to find certain audiences, I can then know what social media to use. I talked about people coming to your career site. They need to see themselves in your career site. So the imagery that I'm using on the social platforms, and I can use pictures, I can use words. I can use video. I can create stories, multiple pictures. I can use these to get people to see themselves in our organization based on what I share. How do I show off our employment brand when I'm creating these videos and stories? I can really take people behind the scenes. What's it like to work for us? I can show off the company culture. Are you a buttoned up very professional organization?

David Searns: That's going to appeal to one type of person on social media. A loose, casual, very friendly organization might appeal to a different kind of person on social media. So, in the content that I share, I want to give people a peek behind the scenes. I might want to interview current employees on video. I might want to write up case studies where people talk about what it's like to work for us or the kinds of projects we do. I might want to showcase awards our organization has won, maybe as an employer, but maybe just in the industry we serve because people want to work for successful companies. And so that whole employment brand, which I know, hopefully we'll talk a little bit more about, but that's what comes out in social media is it's showing off who you are, what you stand for in a way that makes people want to say, "Oh, tell me more about you". You're not always just pitching jobs. That will turn off job seekers. You're celebrating your culture and making people want to be part of what you're all about.

Brad Smith: All right. So, you've piqued my interest. You alluded to employment brand as I believe the final pillar here. Tell us a little bit more about how to effectively build a good employment brand and what that actually is.

David Searns: So, let me start with what it's not. So, a brand isn't some marketing thing. It's not what you want to be. It's what you are. So, a really good employment brand starts with understanding what your company's all about. If you were

going to describe the personality of your organization to somebody else, how would you describe it? Or more importantly, how would you want them to describe it to their friends? That's your employment brand. It's about your company's values. What do you stand for? What are the lines in the sand that your organization draws and says, "We won't cross these lines. This is how we treat people. This is how we treat our clients. This is what we really believe in at our core". It's not something that's a phrase or a poster on the wall. It's this is how we really live every day. So employment brands starts with understanding those things.

David Searns: It's maybe the HR department. It may be the CEO. But it's people doing a deep dive to really understand this is what we believe in. These are the people we want on the team. If you're a sports fan, you can see great sports teams have chemistry. That chemistry makes them champions. And sometimes the organizations that just pay for the top athletes fail, because they don't have that cohesiveness. That's the brand. And it's hard to put into the exact words, but you can start with their values. You can start by asking people to describe what it's like to work here. I would go to all your best employees and interview them. Why do you like working here? What makes it a best place to work to you?

David Searns: Those are the things that become the videos on social media. Those are the things that you turn around and create that EVP, that employee value proposition we talked about earlier. It's what you want to be known for. Then the other side to it is it's got to then translate into what people say about you. And because I can stand on my soapbox and pitch what I want to be seen as all day long, but what matters is what our employees really say.

Brad Smith: And that's what I was just going to ask you. You mentioned earlier the importance of reputation management, how important are online reviews, reviews on Glassdoor, on LinkedIn, on Google, on Indeed? How important are they to your overall employment brand?

David Searns: Well, I'd ask everyone to ask themselves a question. When was the last time you went to a restaurant, went on vacation, stayed at a hotel where you either didn't look at a review site or ask a friend for a recommendation? So we are a recommendation culture now. If you're best friend doesn't give you five stars, that's not your best friend. We look for reviews in everything we do. And so employers it's equally true. I want to see if I go to Glassdoor, I go to Indeed, I go to Facebook, I want to see that people rate you highly. It's critical. There's been and studies done that if your number of your reviews on a site like Glassdoor is less than 3... And I apologize, I don't remember the exact data. But the number of people who will apply to your job falls off of a cliff.

David Searns: If it's between 3 and 4, it gets dramatically better between 4 and 4.5, it gets dramatically better again. Between 4.5 and 5, doesn't actually matter that

much. In fact, if you're perfect, that's not so great because it doesn't look real. No one's perfect. So that 4 to 4.5 is probably the ideal range for your reviews on again, Facebook, Indeed, Glassdoor combined with on your own websites, the stories that a review can't tell. What's it really like to work with you? The videos, the first-person endorsements from your people. But Brad to answer your question is reviews are critical. There's a absolute correlation between your star rating as an employer and the number of applications you get.

Brad Smith: David, absolutely great insight today. I think you've provided some extremely valuable tips. Any closing words of wisdom for companies, for hiring managers that are struggling to find people right now?

David Searns: Yeah. Simply is, don't go it alone. Right now we're playing that game of musical chairs. So there're more jobs than people. If it's just you against the world, trying to figure out your value, trying to figure out how to recruit. You're really at a disadvantage and I'll give kudos to PrideStaff as an organization, I know they do a great job helping companies to build a more robust recruiting strategy. They spend every single day out in the marketplace trying to find and screen talent. So an organization like PrideStaff can do so much to help you come up with better ways to find people, tell the right story, position yourself in the right light.

David Searns: Brad, you mentioned the employment information, provide that wage and salary information to help you price your jobs appropriately and be proactively looking for talent even when you may not be hiring so that you can be ahead of the need to hire rather than trying to react to a chair that's missing.

Brad Smith: As David just mentioned, if you do have challenges with hiring, please reach out to a local PrideStaff office. Visit us at pridestaff.com. Talk to one of our local offices about your challenges, about the type of person that you're looking for. We can give you some market data to identify the proper pay rate. We can look at competition. We can outline the things that you need to do to actively recruit the people that you need to create a competitive advantage in your market. David, thank you so much for your time today. We really appreciate it.

David Searns: Thanks Brad. Glad to be a part of today's podcast.

Brad Smith: Take care, everyone.

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.