



The Future of Work: How AI Is Transforming Hiring and Workforce Management

Intro: 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 welcome to another episode of PrideStaff Strategic Insights, the podcast that helps business owners, hiring managers, and HR professionals stay ahead of workforce trends. I'm your host, Brad Smith, and today we're diving into one of the most transformative shifts in hiring that I've seen, artificial intelligence, and how it's reshaping the future of work.

When we think about the future of work, it's changing at an unprecedented pace. AI is no longer really a futuristic concept. It's here. It's impacting everything from how we hire to how employees engage in the workplace.

I love to start off each episode by sharing some statistics, and this comes from the World Economic Forum. They report that by 2025, AI will automate 85 million jobs, but also create 97 million new roles. And that's right now. 75% of HR professionals say that AI will play a major role in recruitment over the next five years according to SHRM. And then according to LinkedIn Talent Trends, companies that leverage AI for the hiring experience are finding a 35% faster time to fill and a 50% reduction in hiring bias.

So to help us unpack this evolving landscape, I'm thrilled to welcome Pankaj Jindal, Co-Founder of Sense, a pioneer in AI-driven talent engagement and automation. Pankaj has been at the forefront of revolutionizing recruitment through AI and automation, and today, he'll help us understand how businesses can prepare for the AI-driven workforce of the future.

Pankaj, thank you so much for joining us today.

Pankaj Jindal: Brad, thank you for having me. It's a pleasure.

Brad Smith: I'm so excited. You bring such a wealth of knowledge in this space and have been such an amazing partner on the technology side, and I think we're going to share a ton of value for employers, HR professionals, hiring managers here.

And Pankaj, I want to start off with the big question. So in your eyes, you work with companies all across the globe, how is AI transforming the way that businesses hire and manage talent?

Pankaj Jindal:

Yeah, absolutely. And before I even get started, let me add one statistic to these wonderful statistics that you had shared in the beginning and that will set the tone for our conversation.

AI is now the fastest-ever, in the history of mankind, adopted technology. Up until now, and this might be a surprise statistic for somebody, but it took four years for social media to get to 50% adoption, and at the time, it was the fastest-adopted technology ever. So about 50% of the people took four years to get onto social media. AI, in the last one year, has almost gone from 0 to about 42% adoption. Nearly 42% of all tech users are either using some form of AI or LLM, so on and so forth, in their daily life.

So obviously, back to your question, it is transforming everything that we do today. The number one and the most obvious transformation is AI is taking over all sorts of repetitive and mundane tasks, things that are not revenue-generating, that are very admin-focused, that do not help you enhance relationships, but they need to be done time and time again, over and over, consistently, and have to be done well. And at the same token, companies are now leveraging their talent acquisition teams, their recruiting teams to become more customer service-focused, if you will, customers being both your talent as well as your hiring managers, so on and so forth.

So we are already seeing AI transforming how candidates are getting sourced, how they're ran through the recruiting funnel, how they're being interviewed, and we'll get into a lot more detail, but a lot of that is happening today, and I'll paint a little mental model in terms of how that is making recruiters more and more productive.

Brad Smith:

Perfect, thank you. Now, let's dig into that a little bit more. So when you talk about making recruiters more and more impactful, more and more productive and eliminating those mundane tasks, talk us through that a little bit. So how is AI improving that recruiting and hiring process?

Pankaj Jindal:

Yeah, absolutely. Let's take a little bit of a step back. So I think the first and foremost is we, probably about 10 years ago, got to a point where a lot of the recruiting tasks started getting digitized, right? I mean, we were no longer using paper resumes or we were no longer doing things ultra-manually, but we were digitizing stuff and we were moving stuff around quickly, and that gave us essentially maybe a 30% boost in recruiter productivity.

Then we got to this point where digitization led to automation. Can we automatically go talk to a thousand people and say, "We're missing this piece of information," or, "How much compensation would you like?" or, "When can you

get started?" These are just automated questions that were going to everybody that you were going to interface with. And that increased recruiter productivity by another 20% or so.

Then came the era of AI assistance, so AI actually doing some of these mundane tasks. So AI actually going out and collecting some pieces of information for you and just writing that back into your system of record. But what we are now moving towards is AI agents or agentic AI, as it is called, which will further enhance your productivity by 20%, 25%.

And the whole idea of agentic AI is you can literally talk to AI and say, "I need to hire three forklift operators in Nashville two days from now." So even though it sounds like a simple natural language sentence, there is a lot that goes on in the background. In the background, this AI is able to tackle your system of record and say, "Let's find everybody who's in Nashville. Let's find everybody who can start in two days. Let's find everybody who lists themselves as a forklift operator. Let's find everybody who actually has a license to do forklift operator work. Let's find everybody who's willing to work within the pay constraints that we are willing to pay."

Now that we have whittled down hundreds of thousands or millions of people down to these hundred people, let's go talk to these hundred people, and AI can do a lot of that as well. And then it can say, "Let's take the top 30 people, put them in front of a recruiter, or the top five people, put them in front of a recruiter."

This is an example of how it can dramatically increase productivity. It can dramatically change your recruiter's lives because today, the example we often take is a recruiter talks to 10 people, five of them are generally unqualified, three of them are mildly qualified, a couple of them are slam dunks. How about talking to 10 people who are all slam dunks? You're probably going to make a lot more hires, so on and so forth.

So if you think about these four stages going from automation to AI assistance to AI agents, and even if each of these improved your productivity by 20%, you're going to double your productivity. So that's essentially what organizations are thinking about in the future. How can they make super recruiters out of a recruiter and have them do twice of what they've typically been doing?

Brad Smith: So right now you'd say that using the AI, using the systems, we're at about a 70 to 80% reduction in the time that the recruiter needs to spend on those mundane tasks, and now they're able to spend that on that human connection on getting people into the final step of the hiring and recruitment process.

Pankaj Jindal: Absolutely, absolutely. In fact, when you think about a lot of people talk to me about, "Hey, is AI taking away the personal touch?" and my argument to them is

it's actually enhancing the personal touch. You're now spending more and more time with candidates negotiating, mentoring, guiding them to the right job. You're spending more time with the customer, same thing, negotiating, guiding the right person to the right talent, but you are spending less time with people who were not going to be a good fit to begin with.

So yes, I mean, are you not giving a human touch to every single person? Yes, but you're tripling the amount of personal touch that you can give to people who might actually be a good fit.

And the one thing that I do want to add, which a lot of people overlook, AI has this unique capability that if you have an applicant and it quickly determines that they're not a good fit for this role, they can still find out five other jobs that this person may be a good fit for. Whereas as a typical recruiter who is very focused on filling the position that you have opened, you are likely to tell these folks, "Hey, I'm sorry you're not a good fit for this role. I'll keep you in mind for future roles," and that's it. But you could have just turned down a pretty great candidate just because you don't have an overall idea of everything your organization is hiring for, but AI does.

Brad Smith:

Yeah, so I like to say speed's the new currency. So this is helping improve time to fill, it's reducing waste, it's getting the recruiter to add value quicker where they truly add that value, and then you're providing a better candidate experience all along the way.

Now, I'd love to dig into that a little bit. So you mentioned that through chat and some candidate engagement, you can have those conversations to really dig in and find out whether or not the candidates a fit, and if they're not, direct them to the right place. How does that interaction happen and how does PrideStaff work with you to make that experience a great one for candidates?

Pankaj Jindal:

Absolutely, and let me answer both parts of your question. I think you said something before which was really insightful. Speed is absolutely the new currency. There are lots of statistics on it if you just go on the internet and search for it, but 56%, so more than half of the people apply for a job after hours. If you're going to wait to reply to them until the next morning, you're probably going to get beaten by a competitor who's responding to them within seconds.

When people apply for a job, and obviously it varies a little bit by industry, but when they apply for a job, they apply to 10 to 12 jobs at the same time. They're looking for a job, they're on it, they want to make this a complete process. The companies that reach out to them immediately and can immediately do a bit of a screening to tell them their disposition, "We're interested in you," or, "we're not interested in you," are the ones that candidates tend to latch onto and those are the ones that will get them into the recruiting process much faster. So first of all, I could not agree more when you said, "Speed is the new currency."

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And secondly, let me walk you through part of what PrideStaff's process is today, which I think is almost at the cutting edge of anybody that we've seen. So imagine you are a stray candidate. You saunter onto either the PrideStaff's website or an actual job posting or however it is that you essentially came into what we call the top of the funnel. They will instantly be captured by an LLM-powered chatbot, so a chatbot that is very able to have a conversation with you just like a human being. You go through a few quick questions. In fact, we have this mantra where we say you could go from hello to hire in 30 seconds. So literally, after somebody has said, "Hello," you can ask them a few questions on, "Hey, what are you here for?" "I'm looking for a job." "What kind of job? How much money do you want? Does it have to be remote or hybrid or onsite? Here are a few questions we have."

So path one is that you go through this screening really quickly and then essentially go, "You're a great fit for this role we have. I'm going to have you talk to a recruiter right now and move this conversation forward. Please pick a time here that works for you." And all this is happening right within your chatbot experience. It can obviously happen within seconds. And then you pick a time that works for you, which is, by the way, one of the most amazing things that AI and automation are able to do today. I remember a time when we just spent days going back and forth scheduling a meeting because we're like, "Oh, Monday doesn't work for me. Does Tuesday work for you? Does this time work for you?" Now you just pick a time that works for you, so you're very likely to show up. You took your convenience in mind and not the recruiter's, and then you talk to the recruiter and you're off to the races.

The second scenario here is imagine that same person was having the conversation with the chatbot and the chatbot actually decides or actually figures out you're not a great fit for this role, but the beauty of the chatbot says that they are meant to screen people in, not screen people out. Very rarely would you see a chatbot say, "Sorry, you're not a good fit," and have no other information to convey to the candidate.

So to your point, oftentimes what a chatbot can do now is they can ask you a few questions and then instantly go, "I'm sorry, you're not a great fit for this role, but guess what? I've got three other roles that you're a good fit for." You didn't even know this, but the chatbot, based on your answers, is able to match you against a thousand other open jobs, pick up the top three that might be a great fit for you, present them to you, some of them might actually pay you more money than what you applied for, and see if you're interested in moving forward in that process. So essentially, it is screening people in. And when it is not able to do that, when there isn't a single job that you're good fit for, they can still let you down gently and send you to your career's website, or in this example, PrideStaff's website and say, "Maybe there are other roles you could be a fit for."

So great candidate experience, which is the point you made earlier. People like to get a disposition within seconds. People like to be told within 30 seconds,

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"We're interested," or, "we're not interested," rather than having them wait for a while or send them to a black hole.

Brad Smith: Yeah, and in Pankaj, I will give you a story. I frequently am involved in the hiring process and I've got a lot going on, and any job that I post might get a hundred applications within the first two, three days. It can be very challenging to go through all of that manually. And then you don't want to provide a poor employment branding experience for those candidates that just aren't a great fit. So I feel obligated to respond, and this is streamlining that process. Not only streamlining it, but to your point, candidates are getting an answer immediately and they know where they stand and they know where to take that next step. It's just a great experience all the way around from the recruiter seat to the candidate seat, and that's what I love most about it.

Pankaj Jindal: Absolutely. And this is to say nothing of the fact that AI would actually help you reduce bias when you think about it because how often do recruiters go, "Hey, this candidate went to the same school as I did or likes the same sports team that I do," versus AI that is just very objectively going, "as long as you meet these certain qualifications, I'm not worried about your age, your gender, your alma mater," so on and so forth.

Brad Smith: And that is a big objection or roadblock for a lot of hiring companies in using AI in their platform because they're afraid of regulatory or compliance issues tied to bias. So how do you overcome that? I know you talked a little bit about it, but are there certain things or audits or something like that that you need to pass?

Pankaj Jindal: Absolutely. There is a whole slew of things. Well, first of all, you have to just build your actual product responsibly. Let's just start there. So for instance, at Sense, the large language model, the LLM that we use is very ethical, is very safe. So first of all, your platform itself matters.

Secondly, yes, there is going to be increasing regulation in this space, and it's our job to track that. New York, for example, now needs you to pass a bias audit, and we were one of the first companies to do that. And if New York did that, California is probably going to follow suit, and then Illinois and then the rest of the country. So it's our job as a software provider to make sure we keep our eye on that and make sure our software is bias-audited.

And then the third thing, which is, I think, just a best practice in general, you certainly don't want AI making the final decision for you. You want AI to help you get to a decision. So maybe AI can help you get to, "Here are the top 10 people for this job," or, "I talked to these 10 candidates, and here they are stack-ranked based on the answers they gave them." But ultimately, you still have a recruiter looking at those answers, looking at the transcription of those answers, using their own mind and saying, "Okay, here are the two or three or four people we are going to offer this job to."

So a variety of factors come into play here, how is your software built, AI isn't making the final decision, your bias-compliant, but I would say to all of our listeners that this is absolutely where everybody is moving. So I would just make sure that you embrace it and embrace it within the right sort of boundary gates versus being scared of it.

Brad Smith: I agree. And Pankaj, that's a nice segue into my final question for you is thinking about the future, how can businesses and their staffing agency partners use AI effectively while still maintaining that human-centered approach? And you just mentioned not making that final decision without the human, but what else plays into this and where else in the entire employment lifecycle does AI and these platforms integrate?

Pankaj Jindal: Yeah, yeah. Well, let me start by telling you a little anecdote. We once did a time study across a thousand different companies that essentially looked at what their recruiters did for 30 days continuously, and the intent wasn't to find out if they're spending time goofing off or browsing the internet. The intent was to find out what does their day look like?

And at a very high level, obviously the study had a lot more details, but at a very high level, it turned out that recruiters typically spend about 40% of their time prospecting for candidates, about 30% of their time screening and scheduling those candidates, about 20% of their time essentially presenting them to a hiring manager, getting them interviewed, so on and so forth, and then about 10% of the time preparing offers, making them offers, getting them onboarded.

If you think about it, the first 70% here, so this is 40/30/20/10, that's 100% of their time, the first 70% of their time is very automation-favored. They can absolutely automate prospecting. They can absolutely automate reaching out to candidates. And of course now with the advent of voice AI, where you're actually talking to an AI chatbot in a very human-like voice, very, very little latency, and they can absolutely answer any question you throw at them.

You can get the top, the first 60, 70% of the recruiter's time just out of the equation. And if you did that, you're, one, obviously making them way more productive, two, you are finally giving people that warm and fuzzy candidate experience where some actual human being is always available to talk to them. You're making sure that you are eliminating bias. You're taking all the inputs from the AI and so on and so forth, but at the end of the day, you're having the ultimate conversation.

So this, to me, is man and machine working together, which is something I've said for a long time, that some people confuse AI with man versus the machine, and this is actually man and machine versus the problem, and your problem is hiring faster, giving them a great candidate experience, getting to candidates faster, so on and so forth.

Brad Smith: Wonderful.

Pankaj Jindal: To your second question about where can you use this, pretty much everywhere. I mean, we've talked about hiring, but you're going to see this getting used in the back office, in time card collection, in invoices-generation, in doing surveys.

One of the things is once you hire somebody, you want to make sure they're having a great experience. So think about hiring somebody, sending a thousand different people a survey, and AI will now create a sentiment cloud for you. Based on those thousand responses, AI can come back and say, "Hey, 30% of your people are talking about problem number one, 20% are talking about problem number two," so you can make overall changes rather than worrying about going through a thousand responses or figuring out which one is more important. AI will do that for you

Brad Smith: Yeah, and you can catch a problem before it really truly becomes a problem. I assume that with that sentiment analysis, you're able to improve retention rates.

Pankaj Jindal: 100%. We actually have a ton of case studies on where people have found out issues from an NPS survey, addressed it by changing one of their policies, and immediately seen their NPS scores go way higher during the next quarter survey. So yes, it absolutely works as an early warning system.

Brad Smith: Now, I know you have the opportunity to work with a lot of employers, a lot of different staffing companies. For employers out there that are looking to integrate some of this in their recruiting efforts, when they're working with a staffing partner, are there certain questions or things that they should be asking about that staffing partner's AI usage?

Pankaj Jindal: Absolutely. In fact, this is happening now. Customers are actually reaching out to staffing companies and saying, "Give us a little flow chart of your recruiting process." It used to be that some companies out there had a 25-step recruiting process, which tells you that if you have a candidate go through those many steps, at some point, they're going to drop off. You're just not a good machinery to catch people into your world quickly enough. But a lot of the companies now will tell you that, "Hey, 17 out of those 20 steps are automated for us, it happens automatically, it moves instantly. Here are the two or three times then we talk to a candidate and move them along." So it'll tell you that you are working with a technology-forward organization that's going to give a better candidate experience to the candidates.

I'll tell you, a lot of the customers today, the end customers, will come and ask staffing companies for an NPS survey of their own employees, and if the NPS survey is low, that's their indication that they're not being given a good experience. So as you use technology, you're going to completely change the

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game, and that is not only going to endear you to your end customer, I would argue that it is going to bring you new customers and more business.

Brad Smith: Pankaj, great insight today, and I can't thank you enough. For those that are listening, any takeaways that you want them to think about when they're preparing for AI in their recruiting process, their employee engagement process, or their workforce overall?

Pankaj Jindal: Yeah. I mean, I'll start by saying that first of all, start embracing this change. It's very much here. You can be a leader or you can be a laggard, but this is now not going to be a trend that is going to go away or you're not going to be able to stop it. So just to stay competitive with your peers, you want to understand this better, you want to understand how to partner with somebody who uses this well, so on and so forth, first of all.

Secondly, every organization has some inefficiencies. You want to use AI to essentially get rid of those inefficiencies, get rid of stuff that is non-revenue-generating for you, and actually focus on better customer service.

Third, I mean, obviously every organization has staffing needs. Partner with an organization that leverages these same technologies. I mean, we couldn't speak highly enough of PrideStaff. They're, I think, one of the leading organizations in the use of technology towards hiring, even contingent and temp workforce.

So from what I would essentially summarize it as embrace the change, figure out the low-hanging fruit that you can automate right away before you get to more complex problems, and partner with organizations that are already using this well and you will also be able to learn from their own experiences.

Brad Smith: Terrific, Pankaj. Great insight. And for those that are listening, to back up what Pankaj just said, PrideStaff has incorporated all of these things that we've talked about into their recruiting, into their screening processes, and can help make sure that you have a competitive advantage, that you leverage speed in your hiring process, fill open positions faster, and take advantage of the opportunities that that will present.

For more insights on how AI's shaping the workforce, visit pridestaff.com. This is a topic we often talk about. Connect with our team for expert staffing and workforce solutions and reach out to your local PrideStaff office.

Pankaj, thank you again so much for the insight today. We greatly appreciate it.

Pankaj Jindal: My pleasure, Brad. Thank you for having me.

Brad Smith: And thank you all for listening. Take care.

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Closing:

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