

A recruitment boom upended by a hot job market, massive labor shortages and a pandemic that changed how people work has employers scurrying to dissect a new employment playbook – a playbook that puts talent squarely in the driver's seat. *Albany Business Review* market president and publisher, Walter Thorne, spoke with three industry experts during a live virtual event where they shared their tips on recruiting and retaining top talent in a challenging environment.

How has [your industry] changed over the past couple of years?

Rose Miller, GTM Payroll Services:

The big change is in technology and the use of human capital management systems. Gartner studies have said that 85% of organizations are now using some sort of technology to track resumes [and] to onboard staff. A good system like the one GTM has can streamline. You can review your resumes more orderly, read them, send assessment to candidates, and then it automatically goes to onboarding.

And from the job seekers, they complain that they never hear from the employer, and a system can be set up to acknowledge those receipts and have communication with that applicant. On the HR side, because a lot of that paperwork has subsided, HR has a trend to be used more strategically, which we do enjoy. And they're counted on to develop those best practices in hiring, recruiting, and retention strategies.

Renee Walrath, Walrath Recruiting:

In the past, most of our interviews obviously were in house. Now, 100% of our interviews are still virtual. And what we're seeing is employees' expectations have changed dramatically since COVID, whether or not they want to work a hybrid role, or in an office, or remote. We also have clients that are mandating vaccinations [and] we can't furnish resumes to our clients unless they're vaccinated, so it's been changing a lot.

Recruiting isn't easy. Right? But it's even harder now. You cannot sit back and wait for resumes just to fall on your desk. You have to go out and hunt for those candidates.

Ryan Thomas, redShift Recruiting:

In general, job creation is high. There's low unemployment. The great resignation is affecting everybody. And we have clients coming to us that are saying, "I've never used a recruiter before, never, but we need one now," so that has created a high demand for us and kept us very busy. Really interesting stat that I saw was via LinkedIn. In March of 2020, one in 67 US jobs had remote options. And in 2022, one in six offer remote options. I just think that tells such a massive story. And that's what we're seeing. Now we're heavy tech focused, so tech in the past has had remote options, but it's just creating a whole new set of challenges.

What new trends are emerging in recruiting and attracting professionals in 2022?

Thomas:

Salaries are rising. They're rising with inflation. It's over 4.4% increase. We see that continuing. We did a study of ourselves here in the office of the last 100 positions we filled - we run ads ourselves - only 28% came from the ads that we run. 72% were the hunter mentality. They were the LinkedIn and the who do you know, and having to really go out there, dig into our database to find people. And the value of us, who have experienced recruiters that have done it for a while, really, really give us a bit of an advantage over some of the companies that are trying to do it themselves out there.

Miller:

Along with the great resignation comes the silver tsunami that's happening too, where in the next 10 years, we have a lot of talent exiting and retiring, and those gaps. So it is the labor shortage will tend to continue. So with scarcity, such things like Ryan had said, scarcity makes them more valuable, so wages have to ... And what we're seeing as a trend HR wise is most companies have not looked at their comps, and they really need to evaluate and see what their rates are competitive. If they're not competitive, they're not going to be able to play in this game, so that's one of the major things we see.

How can companies stay competitive with all these changes and trends? And what can they do to ensure they're still able to find and hire the top talent?**Walrath:**

They need to listen to their employees and need to communicate with their employees. And maybe perhaps doing quarterly reviews versus annual reviews, or maybe a compensation analysis, or benefits analysis, just to see if they're paying their employees appropriately.

Thomas:

Yeah. It's listening to their employees. It's reprogramming themselves. What has worked in the past is not going to work right now from what we're seeing. So again, salaries, flexibility. Again, according to a LinkedIn survey, 87% of employees would rather work remote. So that's something that employers have to deal with right now. And it's going to exist like this for a while we think.

What are today's best practices to onboard candidates?**Miller:**

What does help and it makes a good first impression if there's a nice, streamlined way. You have a good HCM system that streamlines all that paperwork. It also helps with remote workers because it's all online and it helps them with all the paperwork and gives them choices. Doesn't matter where they are, they really like that. That really wins over and makes a candidate feel like they're with a progressive company. But it doesn't end there. Onboarding doesn't end.

You need to prepare your managers. We see a lack of training of managerial staff to welcome their new hires and acclimate them. Companies don't have a really good orientation program. And we call it a bonding moment, and you're really missing that bonding moment. An orientation program brings them in and communicates how they fit in, how they fit into the whole, what their career paths are, but even the most fundamental things. Where's the bathrooms and the pencils? How do I get supplies? Those things are not missed, like you're hired and here you go. And I always joke, people have parties when people leave, but they have no party when they arrive. And what are they saying? What's the message?

Why is onboarding critical to recruitment, engagement, and retention?**Thomas:**

Recruit fast. I think the days of the six-step process is gone. You're not going to get 10 great people to put through your team. You're going to maybe get two people, maybe three people, maybe one person. So I also think organize. I talked to a candidate of mine yesterday, and she said that one job was number one, until there

was a Zoom meeting that the two managers were five minutes late on. And she's like, "That just gave me a bad impression." So be organized in the recruitment process because it's going to make a huge first impression when you're trying to attract top talent.

What are some of the top things that candidates are looking for when considering offers? And what might make them walk away?

Walrath:

Benefits are extremely important to candidates these days, being flexible with their work schedule. We're seeing 85% of our clients are in the office, not remote, which is interesting. But we're seeing more of our clients, even though they're in the office, that there's flexibility, like snow days, or a child's sick, a family member's sick, that they could work remote for a period of time versus, say, two years ago.

Thomas:

We're dealing with software engineers, network engineers, data folks, those are roles that can primarily be remote. And we're seeing companies do that. But we also have a lot of tier one support. Technology has come to the forefront the last couple years, so school districts needing onsite support, we do a lot of business with managed service providers. A lot of companies are outsourcing their IT to them. And a lot of those roles are in the office.

But the biggest trend, and we saw this two years ago from a technology standpoint, is companies from New York City, California, were able to come in and recruit the Albany talent. With that came these incredible salaries and the work from home. Companies here in Albany have had to really adapt to that on the technology side of things. It's also a plus because you're able to now change your workforce. I mean, you might have a Zoom call where you have somebody from California on your team, you have somebody from Boston. And that type of input and diversity is awesome.

Women in particular are leaving or being forced out of the workforce at alarming rates. What can companies do to support women in the workforce?

Miller:

Well, they really do have to examine what is going on with the major caregiver in the United States, and the lack of supports, because it really is a perfect storm of them having pressure on both sides - pressure to do work and be at the office, or complete tasks, and then balancing it with childcare, elder care, all the things the caregiver has to work in. Employers need to embrace a more inclusive environment and allow employees to talk about it and understand what their struggles are and develop ways to get work done with being respectful of what their work life balance needs are. Demonstrate that through communications and policies, and a visible, measurable leadership commitment to getting work done, but also understanding.

Because if they're going to have to make the choice, which this is a piece of the great resignation - my job or my child. Which one do you think they picked? They really have to stand behind their words and have a commitment that they will support their employees and provide ways that they can still have a career and develop with that commitment to families.

Thomas:

The tech industry was hit the hardest, tech and healthcare, with the resignation. We're seeing this a lot, and we have had some clients that are working on the maternity leave side of things, offering extended maternity leave, having it be a seamless experience so that they don't lose women in that. But in general, women and minorities make up 80% of the workforce here in the United States. That's 80%, so we have got to keep the women in the workforce.

How can companies diversify their talent? And why is it so important?

Walrath:

Studies have shown that diverse teams tend to perform better. If your team lacks diversity, a bias could occur. A CEO has to advocate for diversity in the workplace. It stems from the top, and you have to be intentional. We've always tracked race and gender [in hiring], and there's definitely been an uptick in our hiring here specifically with our clients for black and brown people.

Miller:

I ask them two questions when they say they want to have a DEI initiative. Those two questions are: Who is the point person? Who's leading this initiative? And the second question: What's the budget? Because if I get an answer, "What do you mean?" of those two questions, they haven't even started. You need a budget and you need to have a role that has teeth in it, that has decision making powers to create a plan.

And then diversity comes in many flavors, so there's things that you need to acknowledge. Is your organization ready for those changes? Because they have to be made ready. The managers, are they trained to manage a diverse workforce? And are they culturally aware? It's like the foundation pieces before you can really make this stick and make it work. And many things need to be in place so that when you attract that diverse talent, that you're set up for that success.

How do you and your company work with companies to diversify their candidates and create inclusive workspaces?

Thomas:

We recently had a high-level CIO search that wanted a diverse slate. And I think more companies should request that. It's part of what we talk about when companies say they want a more diverse workplace, diversity is a fact. The numbers are what they are. But inclusion is a choice. And I agree 100% with what Renee said, it starts from the top. You need the CEO, the executives to put an initiative into what they're doing. It's just a proven fact that companies that are more diverse are more productive. That is one of the great things about remote work. You have the ability to pull from diverse populations that you might not necessarily have done in the past with just working from Albany.

With such a dramatic shift in the power balance in favor of the employee or candidate, are you advising your employer clients to lower their standards and expectations, especially if they need to fill a larger number of spots?

Walrath:

I'm all about quality, so no, I wouldn't tell them to reduce their standards. But I would probably say, "If we can't find these five attributes that they're looking for, or the skillset, what are the top three?" It might take a little bit

longer to get that A player, but it's worth the wait because, when you hire somebody, and if they leave within a month or two, just that training cost is so expensive to an organization. So you want to hire right the first time.

Thomas:

I would agree with that. I think what a lot of the clients I've worked with in the past, and what's changed is clients want choices. Managers say, "All right, well, I like Susie, but I'd like to see more." And we are advising them that maybe take a second look right now at Susie. The act of going to more could take another three, five days. And now Susie's gone in this market.

Miller:

Employees want accountability. They like accountability. They like to be recognized when they're doing a good job. That's the complete opposite of trying to go to the lowest denominator, is you go to the highest denominator and give them the reason why they're rewarded and recognized for doing a good job. The talent wants that. The job seeker wants that.

What types of success have you seen from companies hiring top talent, while at the same time, improving culture?**Miller:**

The job seekers are looking for that culture fit, so they really want to know that organization. In a tight labor market, it's time to look at yourself. What's your reputation management look like? Who are you attracting? What's the message you want to convey? I hear over and over again, "I want to get behind the company because I like what the company does."

What are some best practices in interviewing candidates? And how do you know if someone is a good fit or not?**Walrath:**

If the position is 100% remote, obviously you're going to be interviewing remote. I had a client that did four or five interviews remote. They interviewed [with] different parts of the team so they could get to know the team that they'd be working with, even though it would be a remote atmosphere. And even when you're interviewing virtually, but if the job is going to be in the office, make sure you interview in that office.

Employees are interviewing the companies as much as vice versa. It's important because then they know whether or not they feel like they fit in or not. As far as knowing if it's a good culture fit, knowing, as an employer, your vision, your goals. Do they align in ethics? Do they align with this person that you're interviewing and vice versa?

Thomas:

Be organized. I think if you're going to do videos, have those steps lined out. If the manager talks to somebody and likes them, pass them on to the team. Have a clear timeframe and keep the candidate up to date as far as where you're at in that process. I think right now when you're trying to really find out what that culture fit is, a PI assessment is a good way when you don't have 20 people to choose from to diagnose if that person's going to be a good fit.

Miller:

I really like assessment tools. There's so many good ones. It helps you know if that candidate is a good culture fit. But I can't stress enough the message to train, train, train your hiring managers. You can have a good candidate, and the manager that does not know how to interview well totally blows it. [Train] them to use behavioral interviewing techniques and knowing the right questions to ask.

When is the right time for a company to work with a professional and outsource that?**Thomas:**

We understand the cost. We talked about the cost of not filling positions. But certainly, when you run an ad, when you check your internal system, when you check your pipeline, and the minute you know that you don't have responses, and you don't have anybody that looks good, the ad's not working, reach out to us. Again, going to what I said earlier in regard to our study here, of the 28% that we filled from an ad ourselves, only 2% were the actual position that they were applying to.

Walrath:

When they're working on the job when their skillset is something totally different, that's when they need to definitely come to a recruiter.

Can you give us a sense of the impact that immigration restrictions are having on employers who often bring in international talent for high skilled technology and engineering jobs? How can employers make up for this shortage?**Miller:**

This has been a problem that's been for decades. There was more first-generation, second-generation US citizens. Now it's rare to find a first generation. Most employers and employees are third, fourth generation, which demonstrates the problem. It demonstrates how long this hasn't been fixed because we needed those people yesterday.

But what do you do in the meantime? You need to embrace internships. Our HCM has a university, where you can build your staff. What used to happen that really changed in the '70s is that you could work your way up in the company. That almost was abandoned. They went straight to the candidates with degrees rather than look at their own staff and say, "How can I develop them? How can I have the working and earning skills and degrees and certifications?" And that is an excellent way to start.

Some companies [are] going to the community colleges and they're building feeder programs into their companies. So those are the couple of strategies until we fix immigration.

Thomas:

In 2019, immigrants made up 13.7% of the workforce. That's 44 million people. Technology is historically an area where there are a lot of immigrants. To sponsor somebody, it's relatively costly. You're going to do it upfront and then you're going to have to do it a few years later. We try to educate companies on what that is and how they can do it.

What are some strategies that you see for workforce retention that companies can implement right now?**Thomas:**

A robust rewards recognition program. Educate the leaders of companies to the importance of that. I think the way an office looks is important. I think truly understanding and educating, having best practices to the best of their ability on what that looks like, and how to include everybody. There has to be people reaching out. If there's a 20-person team, you can't just always talk to five of the people. It has to be an inclusive environment. And I think more than ever, being inclusive is important.

Miller:

If you're going to be doing new models, new ways of doing business, new ways of keeping talent, you can't do same old, same old. You have to have new processes, new policies, new procedures that capture the new way that you're doing business. You really need to upgrade your technology. You need to look at your culture. You need to devise new ways to communicate. They love to feel like they're connected, so you need to devise ways to keep that connectivity.

Walrath:

Again, listening to your people and communicating, and letting them know what's going on in the organization. Meet with them quarterly. What are their goals? What is the company's goals? What's the future look like? I think again, it's just back to communication.

Do companies need to pay New York City and California salaries to retain local talent in Albany and other Upstate New York markets?**Thomas:**

No. I don't think so. I think that when push comes to shove and it's a local candidate, there are still a lot of things that are very appealing. I think companies here in Albany can still retain local talent by appealing to other things. As long as the salary's competitive and the benefits are competitive, and there's opportunity for growth, I think they can still appeal to being part of Albany, being part of the growth of an Albany company.

How do you reduce candidate ghosting?**Thomas:**

We talk a lot about that. It is a trend that we could have a whole program on. I try to talk to my people about just really being honest with them and saying, "Listen, we need to know now if you're not going to be there tomorrow. If you're not, okay. We can deal with that. But just please," and walk-through scenarios. What happens if you wake up tomorrow and you don't want to go in, or the house is on fire? Just please call us. Please. We try to walk through situations of what can happen, and it still does.

Miller:

Yeah. I will tell you that candidates and job seekers will say that they've been ghosted by employers for years, so they kind of started the ghosting. They'll tell you, I don't hear, I put a resume, I don't know they got it. I went for

an interview; I didn't hear if I got the job or if someone else got the job. So, we did kind of start the ghosting and we have to remember that.

But to combat the job seekers ghosting, it comes to communication. No more assuming you have a job offer, especially if they have a more than a two weeks' notice. Touch base and say, "If anything," like Ryan said, "If anything changes, please be respectful. Let me know. Just don't ghost me. Be right out there with it. Just let me know if you change your mind." And keep communicating until they show up at your front door because sometimes, they don't show up on start date either. It's quite the thing that's going on.

What do you want to leave our audience with? What's the last word you would leave our audience with on today's discussion?

Thomas:

Well, whether we like it or not, we have to listen to employees right now. And hopefully, we like it because that's the market we're in. So, what's going on with wanting to work remote, or wanting more money, that's the market. And we've all seen, I'm sure myself, Renee, Rose, Walter, you've seen the market's going to shift. It always does. In my 20 years doing this, I've seen a little bit of everything. But I think we have to listen to the employees right now. I guess I would plead to them, based on the other question, consider Albany. We want to keep top talent here in Albany. And I think going back to another thing I said, I think companies have to continue to kind of reprogram what they're doing.

Miller:

I think the quicker that you can get your employer to embrace upgrading their technology, so processes are streamlined, the quicker they can get their house in order, the quicker they can update their hiring practices to modern day, the better they will fare in both sourcing, attracting, and keeping talent.

Walrath:

[For employees] be confident in yourself. And if you feel that you're deserving of whether it's a raise, or something else, to talk to your employer. Again, it's just communication and talking to each other. Like you said, a relationship.



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