



## The Art of Long-Term Attraction

By Mike Cook

MIKE COOK is founding partner of Vitalwork, Inc. ([www.vitalwork.com](http://www.vitalwork.com)), an organizational development firm that helps companies and employees compete in the outsourced economy. He is available for keynote talks on “The Upside for Individuals in the Globalized Economy” and half-day workshops on “The Basic Principles of Creating an Engaged Culture.” His new book is **THRIVE: Standing on Your Own Two Feet in a Borderless World** (St. Lynn’s Press) ([www.thrivebook.com](http://www.thrivebook.com)).

If I had to list the top five challenges facing most businesses today, there is no doubt in my mind that attracting and retaining the right talent would top the list. This is a hot topic where any amount of insight can go a long way toward making yours a stronger organization. Each of us is on a steep learning curve when it comes to talent attraction and retention and there is no time to waste.

If you are neither an employer nor hiring manager, this article is written for you as well. More than ever before, you as an individual have a vested interest in the talents of your co-workers. You depend heavily on your business leaders to bring in the right people. You need your new co-workers to assist with the workload. You value their contribution and expertise. You want them to stay. You have a big stake here. It is time to find your voice in the hiring process.

### We Live in a Time of Paradox...Again

When were there not paradoxical situations facing us? Many of those we face today turn former power structures and beliefs right on their heads. Consider this:

In a time when employment opportunities are moving to other parts of the globe in unprecedented numbers, how is it that we can say the following: People who understand their talents have more choices than ever before in today’s employment market?

The problems of previous economies were not nearly as complex as those we face in today’s knowledge-driven businesses. As hard as it may be to admit, the industrial or service age businesses did not require everything we are now asking from our employees. Positions in any business where anyone had a real say in what went on were kept in short supply by a reliance on a pyramidal structure of control and authority. We needed people for execution, not



thinking. Thinking meant someone probably wanted to talk about something. Talking took time and time was money. We wanted action. Productive employees were busy employees.

Today productivity has been redefined. We don't want just *any* action. We want specific action. Specific talent. Specific expertise. We need virtually all employees to be thinking and making decisions in their special area of contribution. The message has been heard. People are now arriving at our places of work expecting to be allowed to think. Moreover they expect to get paid to think and to have their thinking considered action.

This is wonderful! More thinking people equates to more possibility for the futures of our companies, right? There is a pothole on the road ahead. As companies become more complex and specialized, they gravitate toward narrow talent bands. These bands are often in shorter supply as competitors seek the identical talents. Therefore, people who understand their talents have more choices than ever before.

### **Perception is Reality**

What do we do with this new reality? Let's assume you can get people to apply for open positions in your company. When interviewing and being interviewed by prospective talent there are some questions and barriers you will need to address:

- *Why would anyone want to work with you and in your business?* Salaries and benefits are no longer the determinants they once were. They still matter, but now there are other considerations of equal importance. For instance, what is so great about your place of employment that talented people should simply stop looking if you make them an offer? If they accept your offer, why will they want to stay?
- *Are you willing to think of your employees as investments rather than expenses, as in the past?* Investments are choices you make. You work to make them more valuable. The future value of any knowledge business can essentially be measured by the talent on board at any point in time. What you have done is not nearly as important as what you will be able to do next.
- *Are you willing to employ people who are much better than you ever thought of being at particular parts of the business and treat them as partners?* It is, after all, a free agent economy and people go where they're free to make the largest contribution. If you are the most talented person around, you have just defined the limit of your business.
- *Do you know the demographics are against you?* Simply put, the workforce today is getting smaller. Talent is in shorter supply. Oh yes, and the workforce today is also less educated than in the past. Sad, but true. You are going to have fewer great candidates



to fill your openings. This means you can afford fewer mistakes with your hiring choices and far less turnover (of course).

- *Are you willing to relinquish control and financial gain in favor of learning to facilitate value being delivered?* This is not your parents' workforce! If you are 60 like me, it may not even be the workforce you entered. Today's talented workers are not as much afraid of uncertainty as they are of not having the opportunity to express themselves. Younger people have watched their parents survive downsizings and come out OK. They are not planning to need your employment opportunity. They have plans to leverage their talents. Your place of business will either fit their plan or they will not be around. Longevity is less interesting to them than creativity. Are you willing to let them make your business better and then share in the returns received?

If you find these questions provocative or if you have an immediate emotional response that sits heavy in your chest, you are someone for whom this article was intended. Whether you are a hiring manager or the future employee's co-worker, we all have a role in attracting and retaining talent. There is a lot to learn about job seekers. About the "New Guy" that just started. About a valued co-worker who wants more freedom of expression. About ourselves.

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We welcome your inquiries about Vitalwork. Please contact us at 585.387.9222 or through our web site at [www.vitalwork.com](http://www.vitalwork.com).

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