

CORSICA PARTNERS | APRIL 2020

NAVIGATING EMPLOYMENT
AND RECRUITING PIPELINE
DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES
THROUGH A PANDEMIC (COVID-19)



As our global, interconnected business community confronts the unprecedented challenge manifested by the COVID-19 pandemic, inspiring leaders and market-leading companies are stepping forward with responsible, creative, and innovative actions to do more than simply survive these circumstances.



Navigating Employment and Recruiting Pipeline Development Priorities Through a Pandemic (COVID-19)

Revealing how progressive firms and market leaders plan to THRIVE post-pandemic, not simply settle for survival.

As our global, interconnected business community confronts the unprecedented challenge manifested by the COVID-19 pandemic, the interdependence of the world's economies and cultures has never been more obvious and certainly has never been so uniformly tested. In the face of the greatest public health and economic contraction in many generations, continents, countries, communities, and families are adjusting to a new reality – the reality of facing an invisible adversary that may discriminate but does not promise to spare any demographic, industry, or cause. In the face of our collective battle to endure and overcome, there will rise up great strength of resolve, new innovations, and a shared effort to recover and reshape the way we operate and pursue continued growth and success.

This infallible truth must be acknowledged as a guidepost to all: Every organization will emerge from this COVID-19 crisis either stronger or notably weaker. The question that every leader, every organization, every individual must ask themselves is this: Which side of the balance do I intend to be counted on?

In the midst of our shared struggle, inspiring leaders and admirable companies are stepping forward with responsible, creative, and innovative actions to do more than simply survive these circumstances. They are literally demonstrating their resolve to thrive once the curve

does flatten, the threat retreats, and the impact of this current pandemic begins to subside.

Unlike many organizational functions that are directly impaired by the sensible quarantine requirements in place, the business of building your talent pipeline and progressing talent through the recruiting process should actually be accelerated. It is critically important that we do not confuse the priority of talent pipeline development and recruiting with setting a start date for new employees. In the current global economic climate, candidates are making clear that they understand the requirement for a delayed start date or the need to postpone new employee orientation. For discerning candidates, this is the time when they are doubling down on what is important to them and evaluating who they really want to work with and for. The start date should not be confused with closing the best candidates now, with a shared agreement to move forward once the ability to confirm start dates has arrived.

In response to the challenges and restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, the best practices that follow are being applied by public and private sector organizations, respected recruiting firms, and discerning candidates to address pointed questions and thoughtful business objectives, including:

- How do we preserve the momentum we had developed prior to COVID-19 to recruit and onboard exceptional talent in a fiercely competitive marketplace?
- How do we stay a step ahead in the war for talent under the current restricted work environments?
- Is it possible to avoid the inevitable bottleneck that will emerge once all companies are focused on getting back to the normal rhythm of business?
- What is the best way to disposition and care for candidates during this time of crisis?
- Is this the best time to consider new opportunities?
- Can we responsibly mitigate cost without introducing further risk to our talent pipeline?
- How can we avoid the crippling effect of a hiring freeze and the drastic reduction in talent pipeline development that is a temptation when an actual “start date” cannot be defined?

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Our experience indicates that the strategic and bold minority are in fact marching forward, responsibly but also deliberately, with a clear intention to thrive, not simply survive. They are leveraging technology and asserting a deliberate focus to responsibly ensure that recruiting and talent pipeline development does not suffer the same contraction that other parts of their business are experiencing, given the quarantine and social distancing protocols in place. The best practices asserted herein are being exercised by organizations that are fully or partially operational given their approved status as essential and required in the interest of public health, safety, or national defense, as well as product and services companies that are restricted but determined to emerge stronger to best serve clients and offer a positive environment for returning employees.

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Following are the TOP 10 BEST PRACTICES being exercised by leaders and organizations committed to driving their businesses towards the objective to thrive:

#1 Comply and Apply



First and foremost, responsible leaders and the businesses, institutions, and organizations they lead have been first to acknowledge the very real health, welfare, and economic consequences created by this global pandemic (COVID-19). It is absolutely essential that a current understanding of the recommendations and requirements issued by government and public health and medical experts be consulted, understood, and implemented in order to limit the spread of COVID-19 and to protect the most vulnerable who are particularly at risk. We have a shared obligation to apply social distancing and appropriate quarantine protocols.

#2 Focus On What You Control



Investors, leaders, and candidates are becoming increasingly focused on what they actually control while taking care to be aware of what they do not. A day, and perhaps an hour does not go by that decision makers are not exposed to

further developments, public policy changes, legislative interventions, and statistics that should guide their decisions. Effective leaders are leading from the front, demonstrating a focus on what they do control with encouragement and direction to their organizations. The common themes we've captured include focus on variables such as cash flow management; care and attention for the welfare and safety of employees, candidates, vendors, and customers; and an attitude of responsible confidence versus crippling doom and gloom. A clear focus on variables within their control guides leaders and individuals to remain calm and encouraging, while at the same time pragmatic and focused on the well-being of staff, suppliers, and clients as they develop new ways to service customers and constituents – from students to consumers to business professionals. The temptation to lose focus on what we can effectively influence is not lost on the best. They are prudently determined to acknowledge what they do not control while directing their energy towards the things they can responsibly affect.

#3 Keep The End Game In Focus



Even in the midst of the uncertainty that requires daily adjustments, progressive and forward-looking clients have already started to project their vision of the opportunities that will follow this period of turmoil. Some have established nimble working teams to plan for a fast “re-start” once it is appropriate.

These organizations are looking at all aspects of their business models, including staffing, supply chain, and go-to-market and future business continuity plans. In particular, we have been tracking their emphasis on preserving momentum in developing a pipeline of exceptional talent to support their anticipated growth and expansion post-pandemic. Both public companies and privately backed clients we work with have set specific targets to preserve their pipeline of qualified and desired candidates with renewed emphasis on an exceptional candidate experience. They are stepping up their commitment to exercise a clear and consistent communication protocol for both internal and external constituents. It is easy to fall into the trap of becoming consumed with daily and tactical adjustments and failing to plan for the future state. The best in their fields are managing both with equal attention.

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#4 Carpe Diem



Discerning executives, hiring managers, and recruiting professionals are quick to point out that many desirable target candidates are now more accessible given the restrictions on travel and onsite working models. The opportunities to schedule discreet video-based interviews are more abundant than prior to the pandemic protocols. The current environment is favorable to engage highly desired candidates who are more likely to have the time and the ability to consider new opportunities. Recruiters as well as candidates are literally seizing this moment to engage and to leverage the privacy of their home offices to discuss new opportunities without the hassle of reserving a conference room (as is the case in many open-floor-plan work environments), or stepping outside or into their cars to field a call from a recruiter. The gap created by social distancing is being bridged by the use of technology in order to take advantage of access to prospects and candidates who find themselves with more flexible working hours and the opportunity for discretion when working remotely.

#5 Pivot Your Message To Include Future Requirements



Much the way the most successful real estate agents are often privy to early insights on property availability, there is a chance for progressive leaders to preview opportunities planned within their organization post-pandemic. It is true that the current operating environment for many companies creates a challenge to start or onboard new employees, particularly those who operate onsite. However, the current and anticipated needs are still very real, and for some firms, remain urgent. Many leaders and recruiters are taking the opportunity to reach out to target candidates to advise them of projected requirements and planned positions to be filled with the full disclosure that the actual start dates may not be defined. The distinction being made by forward-looking operators is that they are actively curating talent **now**, giving candidates insights into what is going to be available post-pandemic protocol rather than waiting to advertise the opportunities once the hiring pause has been lifted. They realize all too well that when everyone returns to the business of aggressive recruiting, it may be too late to access the best candidates because they will already be closed.

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#6 Practice ABC + ABQ



In a nod to the mantra made famous in Glengarry Glenn Ross, the show that premiered in London in 1983 and won a Pulitzer Prize in 1984, **“Always Be Closing”** is complemented with **“Always Be Qualifying.”** This describes the best practice that many leaders, HR executives, and diligent recruiters are applying under the current conditions. Curating and developing a pipeline of prospective candidates, especially a short list for critical jobs – from executive roles to engineers to manufacturing leads – is essential for companies that do not want to fall behind in the war for talent once the wheels of the global economy starting turning with real torque.

The recruiting partnership between the business, recruiters, and the supporting stakeholders, including HR and Marketing, must remain focused on creating space between their position and their competitors relating to identifying and closing the best talent for any given role. Some organizations are making the sophomoric mistake to err on the side of inaction – to link the freeze on further hiring with a pause on constructive qualifying and recruiting – waiting for the turnaround to begin. These “followers” are putting their organizations at a further disadvantage with each passing day. When they ultimately get the signal from above to move forward, they will be permanently behind their competitors, suffering a hurdle they will not soon overcome. The leaders of industry, business, education,

and government are responsibly but deliberately making daily advances in qualifying and pre-closing the most desirable candidates.

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Furthermore, the most admired companies in the world have already established a “culture of recruiting,” realizing that the imperative and opportunity to attract and retain the very best talent is not limited to the function of HR or Recruiting. The most admired CEOs, discerning investors, and respected recruiters make it clear that **everyone is in Recruiting**, and all employees have an opportunity and

obligation to be continuously qualifying prospective talent to join their organizations. The leaders and organizations who live this commitment now, while the majority are distracted, will reap the benefits.

#7 Commit To An Exceptional Candidate Experience



Great candidates are often passive candidates. By definition, they are employed in challenging positions that leverage their strengths and provide them the best opportunity for growth and to make an impact. These candidates always have options, and this may be the very best time to reach them. The goal for discerning suitors is to ensure that all candidates have an exceptional experience in the two-way discernment process. From initial outreach to the final interview with the hiring managers, CEO, or board member, every detail of the candidate experience should reflect the culture, style, values, and norms of the soliciting organization. Our most successful clients consistently strive to ensure that their firm is the “company of choice” for discerning candidates. Whether an offer is extended, accepted, or declined, they hold sacred that the experience may influence every candidate as a prospective employee, customer, investor, or referral source to other professionals. An exceptional candidate experience is part of every great company culture and just because the rules of engagement are modified during pandemic conditions, there should be no compromise towards this priority.

#8 Commandeer Access To Leadership and Cross-Functional Stakeholders



We’ve all been faced with the challenge of confirming time on a busy executive’s schedule or expanding the interview and selection committee to include additional valued stakeholders. Perhaps we hesitate to confirm the best selection committee given business priorities and travel schedules.

The current restrictions on travel and the forced quarantine, isolation, or shelter-in-place directives present a prime and limited window of opportunity to access time on the schedules of executives and target stakeholders. We have seen C-suite executives across all functions prioritizing time to meet clients using Zoom, FaceTime, and Skype as platforms to engage with target candidates. In many cases, clients have reported an improvement in target stakeholder participation, including more in-depth sessions with candidates as a result of leveraging technology and the availability of staff working from their homes. Both suitors and candidates are shared beneficiaries in this opportunistic approach.

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#9 Play To Win



Attitude. Positive or negative, the attitude of clients, hiring managers, and candidates is equally contagious, and those clients who are resolute in their desire to thrive – not simply survive – understand the importance of articulating their belief and commitment to growth even in the face of the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. **No great results are achieved without great enthusiasm**, and deliberately targeting high-potential candidates during this period of uncertainty is a constructive way to work through the crisis. Hiring managers and recruiters who continue to pursue a better understanding of a candidate’s personal situation, their professional motivation, and the potential intersection of their goals with business requirements can frame a compelling opportunity for candidates to consider now.


#10 Renew Your Commitment



At this point, the distinction between hiring and recruiting – setting a delayed start date to hire and continuing the work of qualifying and curating candidates – should be clear. Once you’ve made the decision to seize this moment and keep your recruiting efforts focused on the volume and velocity of quality candidates, it is imperative to perform a talent health check for your existing team and resources. The pursuit of upgrading talent or planning to fill open positions can overshadow the responsibility to care, coach, and demonstrate your gratitude for the existing team that is in place serving your chosen constituents and clients. *No amount of focus on recruiting or advantage created over your competitors can offset unwanted attrition...*

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As the importance of the Candidate Experience was highlighted earlier, so too, the Employee Experience is one that often receives focus and investment in the best of times, but may be neglected when the going gets tough. More than ever, the same principles that apply to successfully attracting talent must be applied to encouraging and supporting current team members: clear communication, empathy, respect for the individual’s situation and motivation, a vision for the future that makes clear how their role contributes, and how they

may continue to grow. It will come as no surprise that when talented individuals take a step back from their normal routine, they often make time to reflect on what matters most. This includes their current level of commitment to what they do and whom they choose to work with. It has been suggested that more people are taking time to contemplate their “why” (*with reference to Simon Sinek’s work on the same topic*) in this concentrated period of self-quarantine. If professionals are taking time to calibrate their enthusiasm and commitment to current work and employers, then no leader and no team can neglect their responsibility to maintain and develop the trust and loyalty of their existing associates. The conditions are right on both sides of employment discernment to evaluate, explore the possibilities, and commit to the future – whether that be a renewal of current commitments or to plan the start of a new adventure. 

■ About Corsica Partners

Corsica Partners is a global executive search, recruitment process outsourcing (RPO) and growth advisory firm, founded in 2006 on the premise that there is no substitute for actual operating experience to effectively serve clients. We serve some of the most respected Fortune 500 public brands and privately backed technology companies across the globe. Our partners are all former technology executives who spent decades building, growing and leading businesses, uniquely positioning us to combine practical insights, perspectives and functional expertise with an unparalleled background in search and executive coaching. This is why discerning Customers and Investors trust Corsica Partners to build their leadership teams and scale their organizations. Who are you trusting to build your team?

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