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# Building Recruiting Capability by Leveraging Employee Networks & Hiring for Collaboration & Cultural Fit

## CASE CONTEXT

An experienced recruiter works to strengthen her firm's hiring practices. Her team builds close connections within the company's business groups and with external groups. She has built up a strong employee referral program to draw on their personal networks to find needed talent.

Livvy's entire background has been in recruiting. She became an internal recruiter for a specialized professional

services company seven years ago. Now as director of recruiting, she is responsible for a team that brings best-in-class talent to the firm. Plus, she oversees the staffing of thousands of temporary, seasonal hires. As the company grows and shifts with new contracts or changes in the market, Livvy's group is increasingly valuable. Her recruiters have become strategic partners with business leaders to identify and hire top talent.

Livvy created a structure where recruiters have become specialists, working with a particular subject area and set of managers. The recruiters have built internal relationships and have business knowledge. For each position to be filled, the recruiter and hiring manager work closely to write up a recruiting agreement. "Even though the recruiters are experienced, even if they have dealt with that hiring manager before, they must sit down and talk about the area and the needs. And, how will this person need to interact with other team members?" With deep understanding of the role, the recruiter can prioritize competencies and determine the recruiting approach. Going through the detailed recruiting agreement with the hiring manager also is a first step to activate the employee network for referrals. "Recruiters ask the hiring managers: *Who in your department is well connected? Where are they connected? Could that be an area that I can tap into? ...* People love to help. But, you need to know how to ask."

Livvy's recruiters reach out to individual employees as well as to external networks. They have ties with relevant academic and professional groups; they use LinkedIn; they attend conventions. But, the employee referral program is one of the most effective recruiting tools. Livvy has created a system that encourages referrals and is easy to do. She periodically holds information sessions in the cafeteria, reminding employees about the program, letting them know about open positions and providing resources. "We've also created postcards. If you have friends who might be interested, you're at a conference, you're at an association meeting, here are cards you can hand out. They can mail them back with your name as the referral. We get people engaged in a conversation so they say, *Oh, this sounds really easy.*"

Looking at the candidate pool, the recruiters identify both capability and cultural fit. They pay attention to the resume, but the interview is most valuable. "Assessing talent as it relates to collaboration and your company's culture is critical. It's not always what is printed on a resume, but in the interaction that you have when you are interviewing, that reveals the fit."

FEMALE

Level: FIRST-LEVEL LEADER

Industry: PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

## HIGH-PERFORMING LEADERS LEVERAGE NETWORKS TO DO 5 THINGS

Based on 20 years of research in more than 300 organizations, we know that the quality of your professional relationship play a significant role in your success. We have extended this research to describe the way high-performing leaders leverage their networks to: Innovate, Execute, Scale, Thrive and Adapt.



Recruiters ask the usual questions—Why are you leaving a position? What are you looking for?—but more important are the collaborative fit questions. “It’s getting them to talk more about who they are as a person. *What is important to them? How do colleagues, your superiors view you? How do they work best? If you had a choice between a project where it was you alone or you and a team, which would you prefer and why?*” These are the kinds of questions that prompt conversations around how people work and how they collaborate—which makes for a better hire both for the immediate role and for long-term employment. “What is it that separates the top candidate from the other four you’re bringing in? It really is that culture fit.” The best way to do this is to make the interview less of an interview and more of a conversation. “If you are too formal in an interview, you don’t always see who a person is, what makes them tick. If you are more at ease, if people feel really comfortable, they will share a lot about themselves.”

Livvy insists that even the most experienced recruiters and hiring managers should go through all the steps, follow the basics and not short-circuit the process. “You can be fooled. As good as you think you are, it brings you back to reality when you find out oh, how wrong you were ... I guarantee you, if you go back and assess, there was something that you missed because it was so basic. Just skimming over a resume because you have so many jobs to fill, or you rush through the recruiting agreement with a hiring manager and miss a really big point, or you think you’re a pretty good judge of character so you don’t ask the level of probing questions ... You think, gosh, why didn’t I see that from the very beginning? And that’s a hard thing to really coach and train. *How do I see what I really don’t want to see?*”

To be effective, Livvy and her team have worked to create good systems and maintain rigor in execution. The outcomes are satisfying, with a below-average attrition rate and high success with internal promotions and transfers. She also uses data to continually develop her team and refine their approach. “We look at outcomes and then assess what that means for how we interview or who we go after and how we source talent.”

## Network Insights

Livvy’s team uses the network to recruit talent with the right skills, collaborative behaviors and cultural fit using these steps:

- **Proactively use leaders and well-connected employees.** People who are central in informational networks can help identify current employees likely to have relationships with potential candidates or resources.
- **Approach the connected employees in a transparent way.** Let them know you have heard they might know people in a given population or with a certain kind of expertise. Don’t ask them to be a sales person; just seek an introduction.
- **Assess candidates for collaborative fit.** Ask for stories that show accomplishments, how they like to work and how others view them. Look for evidence of collaborative activities and cultural fit in their examples.
- **Keep discussions informal.** The interviewee will mirror your behavior—if you are formal, you will not elicit collaborative and culture-fit stories.
- **Probe for evidence and behaviors.** Don’t over-value your ability to judge human behavior and skip over important questions. Be prepared to uncover and see what you might not want to see.

## 5 Practices to Leverage Employee Networks in Hiring Process

1. Create and use an applicant tracking system to know which referrals and networks enable best outcomes in terms of hiring, retention and productivity.
2. Cultivate a strong employee referral program that leverages incentives employees care about. Make it fun and easy to participate.
3. Find out who has strong external contacts in a domain where you need to build a network. These people may or may not be central within the internal network, so keep asking, *who else?*
4. Ask for help in a transparent way. Let people know you heard they were connected and might have an idea or two. Tell them about the referral program. Offer to contact people or suggest ways they might reach out. Once they see how they can contribute, they are usually happy to help.
5. Used LinkedIn to locate candidates. Discussion groups are useful for external awareness of company and hiring, and employee connections may identify needed talent.

### ABOUT THE RESEARCH & ROB CROSS

Building on 20 years of research with more than 300 organizations, the Network Leader Research Project seeks to understand the approach and strategies that enable certain leaders to consistently achieve peak performance. The research includes 160 in-depth interviews conducted by Rob Cross, a Professor of Management at University of Virginia’s McIntire School of Commerce. The Connected Commons is currently focusing its research on leadership effectiveness, talent optimization and organizational alignment and change—three areas where network insights can clearly drive performance. For more information visit [www.connectedcommons.com](http://www.connectedcommons.com) or email Rob at [rlcrossjr@gmail.com](mailto:rlcrossjr@gmail.com).