



SCALE  
IDEAS &  
IMPACT

# Talent Leader Leverages Network for Hiring Burst to Hit Goal & Enable Growth

## CASE CONTEXT

A senior HR leader creates the context, shared effort and sense of purpose to drive a major effort to scale hiring—fast. Knowing the traditional process would not work, he turns to the network for ideas and execution, resulting in a surge of new hires in just six weeks.



MALE

Level: SENIOR LEADER

Industry: TECHNOLOGY

## 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.



As the head of HR for a division of a large technology company, Darren was front-and-center when a product launch was struggling. “We did not have a lot of the critical talent in the organization to actually get to the delivery date that we had committed to for our largest customers. And we quickly understood there was a very short window of time to solve the problem. If we didn’t, the business might not survive.” The imperative was clear: get the talent in place and do it fast to scale the work.

Darren and the leadership team assessed the volume of new hires. They mapped out where headcount was needed and the capabilities required. The need wasn’t evenly distributed. They couldn’t simply hold each manager accountable for hiring as they had done in the past. The traditional pace and process of recruiting, interviewing and hiring wasn’t going to work. “At some point, it’s not about throwing more of the same at a problem ... Innovation often happens under extreme pressure, when you are willing to let go of a traditional way of how something works.”

The leadership team had been open and transparent about the enormity of the challenge—and they decided to get more people involved in finding a way to solve it. They called an all-hands meeting: the executives, team directors, line managers, engineers, developers and staff from all teams. “We essentially said, *How can we think creatively about this? Because if we don’t figure it out, we’re screwed.*”

Ideas were tossed out. Conversation flowed to the challenges of scheduling and the problem of being interrupted or pulled away from other high-priority work to have meetings or do interviews. One first-line supervisor said he purposely grouped his interviews on a certain day each week. “That was the spark that changed everything. *What if we dedicate a day for interviews? What if we do it on Fridays, because people feel a little more relaxed than on Monday? What if we bring in pizza, have a little fun with it?*” After that session, the management team got together to play out the one-day-a-week scenario. It would work for everyone except for the one manager who had the bulk of the jobs to fill. Even with one day a week, it couldn’t get done. “That’s when the interdependency discussion started. The reality sunk in that if one of us fails, the rest of us fail.” The group started to show empathy for each other and the situation they were in.

They knew everyone personally had a lot at stake in getting this right: *I need to keep my job; I've got to put my kids through college, I worked too hard to see this tank.* “They had an ability to see what would happen if they did not collectively help each other—they could think downstream to the implications. That made them willing to say, *I'm in. I'm willing to give up my Friday to make this happen, too.*”

That ability to be empathetic and to understand and care about the system-level needs helped create full engagement in what turned into a whirlwind period of hiring. The details of the process were organized by a small group of managers and HR staff. “Every Friday, everyone stopped their work. We brought large groups of candidates in and everyone’s job was to help get great people hired—no matter if you were an administrative assistant or a senior leader.”

There was a steady drumbeat and enormous energy to the effort. It became a shared goal. “People wanted to know, *How are we doing?* We held lunch-break sessions to talk about how it was going and what we should do differently. We put up posters and signs across the organization, so everyone could see how many folks we needed with what skills, how many people were coming in, how many people are being called back or are getting an offer.”

The effort continued for six consecutive Fridays—then they hit the number. “We had a big celebration. People were excited. *I can't believe it! We did it!* It would never have happened with the usual system.”

With the right talent on board, the work scaled quickly and the company hit its deadlines. The memory of the innovation and shared effort to accomplish important work stayed with the teams. The experience also had long-lasting effects on the way people saw each other and the larger network of talent. “The process of hiring people actually created relationships and connections that did not exist before. People needed to learn something more about other groups to interview effectively. Those six weeks created cross-organizational knowledge that permanently changed how people felt connected to each other and how we handled talent sharing and job rotations.”

## Network Insights

- **Create a context for ideas to spark.** The beginnings of idea can come from anyone or at unexpected times. Be prepared to embrace the spark and fan it to get to a solution. Sustain effort to prevent formal systems from shutting it down before it has a chance to develop and evolve.
- **Encourage empathy.** Larger groups will mobilize collective effort to goal if: 1) they understand systemic needs and how failure at any point in the network hurts them as well; and 2) they develop empathy for others’ situation and context.
- **Communicate progress.** Give information to people in a voice or format that they appreciate (in Darren’s case, numbers and goals) and via multiple sources (lunch-hour meetings, posters, screens) to keep people updated and energy high.

## Leverage Networks & Context to Create Sense of Purpose in Workforce

Leaders in an organization can nurture greater effort by helping people gain a sense of purpose in their work. Darren’s experiences suggest these actions:

1. Engage diverse and highly skilled employees with a clear sense of purpose and line of sight for how they contribute to larger impact. Embed this in culture with one-on-ones and/or visioning sessions.
2. Manage communication and connectivity using the full network. Employ top-down, bottom-up and middle-out ways get engagement and clear sense of impact.
3. Ensure systems and processes do not run counter to the messages of purpose. “Does everything employees touch or experience reinforce it? Or when people try to do the work, is the organization telling them something different?”

“When organizations create the context in fullness and richness so people can see themselves and how they can play a role in that context, that’s when I see organizations really move.”

### 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).