

Attracting and retaining talented employees during turbulent times

Finding, recruiting and maximising the potential of new members of your business is time-consuming and expensive. Be the Business is here to help with small, but powerful, improvement suggestions.





The human resources part of your business is in a different place to where it was two years ago. The pandemic has affected where we work and turned the spotlight on the importance of employee wellbeing, meaning many companies have had to adapt recruitment processes.

Added to that is the pressure on employers to find the right talent. New Brexit rules mean that many workers have left the UK, creating recruitment gaps in some industries. The worst-hit sectors include hospitality, retail, farming, healthcare and construction.

So, what can you do to attract and retain a talented workforce?

This guide looks at simple, practical measures businesses can take to ease the stress of recruitment, such as:

- Honing your recruitment processes
- Improving your onboarding procedures
- Improving employee retention
- Making wellbeing a priority
- Looking towards future recruitment



What HR challenges are business leaders facing?



The data shows that it's currently a job seekers' market. Reports from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) show that job vacancies have reached a record high across the UK.

The UK's post-lockdown boom led to the biggest rise in hiring confidence in 20 years and employers are struggling to fill roles. According to the British Chamber of Commerce (BCC), 70 per cent of firms hoping to bring on new staff cited recruitment difficulties.

WorkLife's Small Business Monitor tells the same story. It revealed that 66 per cent of SMEs surveyed are concerned about how attractive the business appears to existing and potential talent compared with competitors.

And, while 25 per cent considered laying off staff to be one of the biggest challenges facing their business in March 2021, that figure has now fallen to 14 per cent. It's clear that businesses need strong hiring and onboarding practices to attract and retain talent that's moving around more than ever.



Chapter 1:

Building a robust recruitment process



Few businesses can afford to make mistakes when it comes to hiring. Whether it's recruiting the wrong person or failing to spend enough time onboarding them, these are costly errors that can be avoided.

It's essential to think about how – and where – you're finding candidates and what their first experiences of your business are.

Refine your job descriptions

Go back to basics and start by nailing your job descriptions. This is where you first catch an applicant's eye, so make it count.

There's a tendency to pack too much into job adverts because you'd like those skills at your disposal – not because they're relevant to the role. Adverts like this attract an almost impossibly broad pool of candidates and detract from the real skills you need.

Don't be tempted to recycle the advert you posted last time either – think about what someone should expect from the current role.

Spending more time on your ad will help you attract better qualified candidates. It will also make your onboarding process smoother, since your new employee will have a clearer idea of what to expect.

Checklist: What to include in a job description

- A specific, concise job title
- An attention-grabbing summary of the company and job expectations
- Location, hours, benefits
- Core responsibilities with specific details
- Details of day-to-day activities of the role
- A list of hard and soft skills required
- The specific qualifications and experience needed
- Salary range
- List of perks

How to hire with confidence

We asked recruitment consultant Matt Weston, UK MD of Robert Half, to share his advice on how to find and hire the right employees in today's market.

“It's a candidate's market, and employers should be prepared to fight for the best talent. Many candidates have multiple job offers on the table, so you should prepare to act quickly if you want to secure your top candidate – it won't take long for another company to snap them up,” said Matt.

It's as crucial for retention as attraction, he believes: “Employees can make the decision to jump ship very quickly, so address any dissatisfaction as soon as you notice the signs and reassure your people that you're on their side.”

During the pandemic, employees' priorities have shifted, he explained. Benefits and company culture have the potential to help you beat the competition, both when it comes to attracting staff and retaining your existing talent.

“It can feel difficult to compete with the ‘business behemoths’, but salaries aren't everything. Listen carefully to people's priorities and motivations and respond accordingly – it can really help to set you apart.”

Case study: “Diversity and inclusion isn't a box ticking exercise.” Peter Ryding, founder of VIC

With a global spotlight on diversity and inclusion, it's something you can't afford to ignore if you want your business to be attractive and relevant to employees. Peter Ryding embraces diversity and

inclusion in his own coaching business, VIC, and also advises other businesses on the subject.

Peter believes that recent Black Lives Matter campaigns have helped to elevate the importance of the topic. He passionately believes it is something boards of all business sizes should consciously address.

“Inclusivity involves questions like, ‘Do our corporate values have subtle discrimination embedded within them and unconscious bias – or are we overtly saying that we relish and embrace, racial, gender and every other type of diversity?’.”

He added: “It's not a tick-box exercise. That would be missing the point. As well as fundamentally being the right thing to do, there are core business benefits that come with embracing diversity. If your customers are diverse, it's essential that your workforce is diverse to reflect that.”

Chapter 2: Settling staff



The role of onboarding new staff is becoming a significant factor in the recruitment process. Research by recruitment company Robert Half found that 91 per cent of people consider leaving a job within their first month.

It also found that 36 per cent of new employees would leave a new job if there was a lack of proper onboarding, so it's vital to pay attention to how you settle employees into the business.

1. Set your structure

Taking an ad-hoc approach presents a number of problems. First, it's easy to forget important information or abandon the process entirely if you aren't following a set structure. Say a project kicks off which pulls your attention elsewhere – suddenly your employee's left to muddle their way through a new role alone.

Second, it's hard to measure the success of your onboarding process if it's slightly different every time. A structure helps to pinpoint areas you can improve.

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Our onboarding was quite ad-hoc and people weren't performing. They needed more direction and a framework. Now we assign checklists to line managers to make sure they do things like circulate a first-day agenda and book in a culture presentation.

Derry Holt
CEO, OneUp Sales.

2. Focus on company culture

In a competitive marketplace, having a strong sense of company culture will help you attract candidates that like your way of working.

This is especially important now that candidates have become used to remote working and expect certain modifications to be made to their working life.

Developing a hybrid working culture is an attractive proposition, but you'll need strong processes in place to settle new staff in from a remote location.

Be mindful of people's lives; they might have been furloughed for long periods of time or dealt with other uncertainties. Talk to them about their expectations during the onboarding period and see where you can accommodate their needs.

3. Establish a buddy system for onboarding

An onboarding buddy system is a great way to ensure your new employee has a positive experience in their first few weeks.

While regular one-to-ones with managers can provide direction and support, new employees often face dozens of small problems in the first few weeks, such as requiring log-in details or how to set up their email signature'.

A lot of new employees get anxious that they're asking too many questions or feel embarrassed about needing help with relatively simple tasks. Setting them up with a buddy provides another point of contact who can answer questions and shed light on company procedures and culture.

4. Spend time developing onboarding documents

Creating another raft of documentation might feel like a lot of work, but your new employees will thank you for it.

You don't need to start everything from scratch. Set up an onboarding folder in your shared drive and copy any important company documents, like your company mission and values and any relevant company strategies.

First week of work – onboarding checklist

- **Introduction:** Introduce colleagues within the same department and across other teams
- **Official welcome:** Book time in with the CEO or managing director so they can give an overview of the company's history, culture, goals and vision
- **Introduction to departments:** Have the various heads of departments share insights into their teams, roles and responsibilities
- **Formalities:** Give the new employee the access cards or keys they need and show them how they work
- **Company tour:** Walk them around your working environment. The tour should include information about where to find bathrooms, the kitchen, soft drinks and stationery
- **Team lunch:** Arrange a lunch with the entire team during their first week so you can get to know each other

Chapter 3:

Building staff loyalty and retention



How loyal are your staff? According to recruitment specialists MRL, a remarkable 42 per cent of UK workers say that, despite being in employment, they are currently looking for a new role.

It's an era that's being dubbed "the big quit" and it's being driven by a combination of general uncertainty about the future alongside a growth in job opportunities.

We all know that disengaged employees are bad news for business. Research by Perkbox shows that they cost the UK economy around £340bn every year in recruitment costs, sick days, lost training costs and lower productivity.

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You develop loyalty with things such as transparency and treating each other with dignity and respect, and reminding each other that we're experts in what we do.

Simon Roderick

Framsearch recruitment consultancy

Top tips on building staff loyalty

1. Remember that people are not resources. Treat them as individuals, not with a one-size-fits-all policy

2. Nurture ambitions and interests. Find out where they want to grow professionally and support them with training opportunities

3. Lay out a clear passage upwards. This is crucial for people who want to see career progression

4. Celebrate achievements big and small. Recognising when the little things are done well has a huge impact on staff morale and shows that you're not just focused on the big wins

5. Take an active interest in their life outside work. How can you support this? For example, flexible hours to allow them to pursue other interests

6. Build a competitive pay scheme. It's essential that you understand the typical salaries for each role in your industry. Use these as a benchmark to create a competitive pay bracket for each individual role and provide regular opportunities to review staff pay

7. Learn from your mistakes. This means really listening to people's reasons for leaving and addressing the issues they raise

8. Learn from your successes. Talk to your longer-serving employees to find out what they love about their job and why they work for you over a competitor



Chapter 4:

HR in a post-pandemic world



The coronavirus crisis forced many business leaders to rethink their workplaces. Companies have had to adapt to meet government guidelines, enable staff to work from home and look after people's mental health.

Businesses need to remain flexible and adaptable as the pandemic continues to unfold. New working patterns that were suitable six months ago might no longer be relevant and it can be hard for employers to keep up in such fast-moving times.

Setting up a smart working policy is a proactive solution to the problem. It allows you to set out what your company can offer in terms of flexible working arrangements.

This approach ensures that every employee is treated equally but also offers each individual some flexibility to work in a way that suits them.

Think about:

- 1. Working from home.** How much remote working can you offer and during what days and times?
- 2. Core hours.** Are there core hours each day that you require all staff to work?
- 3. Meetings.** Are staff required to attend certain meetings each week? Can you accommodate remote workers?
- 4. Operations.** Which tasks can easily be done from home and what is essential to the workplace?

Case study: “We set up a buddy system to improve remote working.” – Paul Bulpitt, Co-founder, The Wow Company

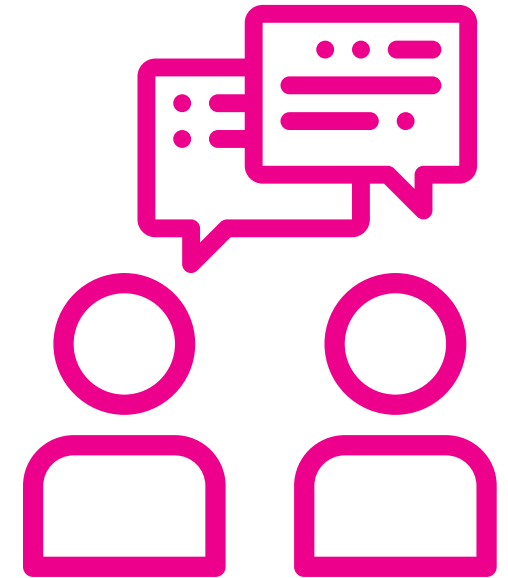
“This is a human crisis. The bit that no app can fix is the human aspect. We’ve got a bunch of humans working from home, often dealing with childcare and health concerns.

“As an organisation, we asked ourselves: ‘how can we best support those people?’ We instituted a buddy system, pairing people up to make sure everyone has some human contact at the start of the day.”

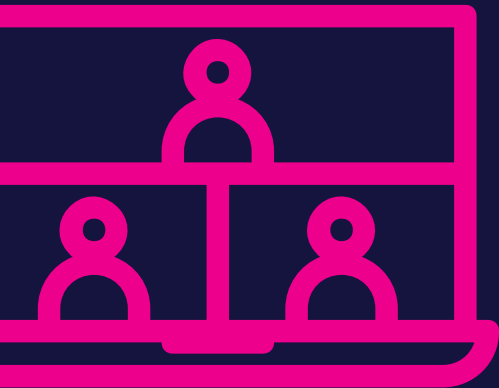
As part of the system, people check in with their buddy for half an hour every morning. The conversations aren’t usually work related, but Paul thinks it gives staff a positive start to the day. It helps to mimic the natural conversations people have when they arrive at the office and keeps them feeling connected.

Checklist: Maintaining wellbeing and team spirit in a hybrid workplace

- Create opportunities to socialise online and in person – focus on having fun away from work
- Find ways to move previous traditions, like weekly updates, online to keep remote workers in the loop
- Use WhatsApp groups or chat to stimulate conversation between home and office workers
- Consider a hotdesk system to encourage more interaction between different departments
- Set up lunch and learn sessions with guest speakers that people can attend in person and online
- Encourage staff to create individual wellness plans and talk these through with each person to see what you can offer them
- Lead by example – take regular lunch breaks, get fresh air and eat away from your desk – and encourage staff to do the same



Chapter 5: Recruiting for the future



As we look forwards, employees are facing a future where they need to keep an open mind and stay proactive. It's crucial that recruiters think in terms of how the workplace has changed, and look for the opportunities that the new working environment can bring.

The way you access skills will change as you become more open to the possibilities of remote working.

Where a company's location once limited its pool of candidates, they can now be recruited from all over the world. This boosts your chances of finding the best talent and also enables you to create a diverse workforce that brings a range of backgrounds and experiences into your business.

As employees inevitably move on, use it as an opportunity to rethink your company structure; how many people sit in each department and what does this mean for the future of the business?

Consider alternative hiring strategies that support your business needs. For example,

if your USP is customer service, keep this in-house and look at outsourcing other areas of the business that are harder to recruit for, like development.

The future of work in numbers

1. The impact of digitisation

One in two CIOs believe digitisation will have the biggest impact on the future of their organisations

2. Focus on flexibility

Flexible working could increase by 50 per cent, creating 51,200 jobs and generating £55bn for UK economy

3. The rise of robotics

In a global survey of 800 senior executives, two-thirds said they were stepping up investment in automation and artificial intelligence



Five key takeaways

So what are your next steps? Here are five key takeaways from this guide.

- 1 Refine your job descriptions**
Be specific and think about what someone should expect from the current role.
- 2 Don't dismiss diversity and inclusion**
Embed good practice right across the organisation, from the boardroom to onboarding new staff.
- 3 Take a consistent approach to onboarding**
Spend time on documentation and face-to-face time with new employees.
- 4 Build loyalty by treating staff as individuals**
Remember that transparency, nurturing ambition and celebrating achievements builds respect.
- 5 Set up a smart working policy**
This ensures that every employee is treated equally and has some work/life flexibility.





About us

Be the Business is an independent, not-for-profit organisation, with a single goal: to help business owners and leaders improve the performance of their business.

When you register with us, we can offer you free online support through our website, with business stories, action plans, tools and templates and guides like the ones you just read at your fingertips.

For more personalised support, look to our flagship programmes.

Ways we can help

Through **Be the Business Boards**, you'll receive non-executive director style support from a group of experienced businesspeople and professionals from leading firms. Over the course of 12 months, you and your business will benefit from their guidance on finance, marketing, operations, HR or other specialist areas.

Be the Business Mentoring matches leaders from small and medium-sized businesses with executives from some of the UK's leading companies including Accenture, Amazon, John Lewis, Lloyds and Siemens. You will be matched with an experienced mentor who will give you one-to-one business support and help you work through business challenges by acting as an impartial sounding board.

Find out more

Be the Business was established in 2017. Today, we are funded and supported by the UK government and a prestigious selection of Britain's leading companies, including GSK, Siemens, Amazon, BAE Systems, McKinsey & Co and Accenture.