



Offense vs. Defense

A Recruiter's Playbook for
Turbulent Times

INTRODUCTION

Turbulent times often thrust recruitment efforts into a gridlock. Whether your team is in a hiring lull, or you're trying to actively hire without overstepping your limits, the question of what to do next is always top of mind.

The reality is that halting your efforts altogether will cause more problems down the line. **Taking control of your strategy and positioning yourself as a thought leader for your business will help you stay relevant during turbulent times.** Be agile and reevaluate your efforts within the context of a broader business impact. Regardless of whether you're actively hiring or not, the work you put in now will serve as a strong foundation for aggressive hiring goals when things return to normal.

You'll see the return on your investment in the form of a shorter time-to-fill and reduced cost-of-vacancy for high-impact roles. Stay the course, but be smart about how you do it. We've created this playbook to serve as a guide to recruiting during difficult times — no matter what situation you're facing.

Consider this a choose-your-own adventure book. If you're still hiring, continue reading to the next section for our step-by-step breakdown of playing offense through active recruitment. If you're not hiring, skip ahead to learn how to play defense. Or maybe you're transitioning from defense to offense and want to skip ahead to learn about how to do this successfully. No matter which section you choose, we've provided additional online resources to help you tackle each step.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION I: How to Play Offense as a Recruiter

- Step 1: Promote Your Hiring Efforts
- Step 2: Highlight Your Employee Value Proposition
- Step 3: Mission-Driven Content
- Step 4: Meet Candidates Where They Are
- Step 5: Tap Into Your Employee Referral Program
- Step 6: Leverage Your Leadership Team
- Step 7: Create a Best-In-Class Hiring Experience
- Step 8: Update and Promote Your Remote Onboarding

SECTION II: How to Play Defense as a Recruiter

- Step 1: Maintain Your Employer Brand
- Step 2: Boost Employee Retention
- Step 3: Partner With Your Marketing Team
- Step 4: Invest in Hiring Managers
- Step 5: Put Culture at the Forefront

SECTION III: The Transition From Defense to Offense

SECTION IV: How to Handle Candidate Interactions

SECTION I

How to Play Offense as a Recruiter

Economic turbulence often has an affect on the job market and creates new obstacles for recruiters. Talent acquisition teams that are still actively hiring may struggle to engage top candidates using their once tried-and-true recruitment strategies.

In order to maintain results, recruiters need to get savvy. That includes pulling back on some initiatives and doubling down on others, as well as becoming more targeted in your efforts and leveraging data to help you. Ultimately, you must think strategically about who you're trying to recruit and where they are to continue driving results.

In this section, we'll cover eight steps to playing offense and actively recruiting during turbulent times.

Step 1

Promote Your Hiring Efforts

When the economy is suffering or unemployment is high, candidates assume that no one is hiring. With so much negativity in the news, the general message is one of fear and uncertainty. However, as a thriving business, this is your opportunity to capture talent you may not have been able to in the past.

In order to get the attention of passive and active candidates, you need to make your voice heard and your job opportunities known. The reality is that in turbulent times the job market is undersaturated, meaning you'll have increased visibility and a larger presence if you leverage the opportunity.

Use this as a chance to create deep, meaningful relationships with prospective employees. Given the uncertainty of the situation, most candidates will be fearful of their prospects. Go out of your way to send a message of hope and prosperity; let them know you're still growing and eager to have them join your team.

SECTION I

The Game Plan

Create a “We’re Hiring” campaign to let job seekers know about your open roles. This is essential to the success of your recruitment efforts, so utilize all resources at your disposal and involve various members of your team to get it right.

Promote your open roles on social media, and encourage your employees to reshare your posts. Doing so will help you cast a wider net and attract a broader group of applicants — job posts shared by employees receive eight times more engagement than brand accounts.

As part of your campaign, create content that speaks to the current situation and your ability to continue growing while still supporting your employees. When times are tough many businesses are negatively impacted and job seekers will want to know what sets your company apart. Highlight that, despite obstacles, you’re excited to continue growing your team and giving back to the community.

Work with your marketing team and leverage their insights to ensure your content, messaging and strategy are effective. They have the knowledge to ensure you promote your brand story and open roles in a way that is both compelling and respectful.

8X

JOB POSTS SHARED BY EMPLOYEES RECEIVE EIGHT TIMES MORE ENGAGEMENT.

Step 2

Create Content to Highlight Your Employee Value Proposition

At a high level, your employee value proposition (EVP) answers two essential questions:

1. What can employees expect of your company?
2. What do you expect of your employees?

Whether you realize it or not, your company has an EVP and it plays a huge role in the success of your recruitment strategy.

Employees and job seekers are looking for more than a competitive salary, especially in turbulent times. For example, prior to the onset of COVID-19, unlimited PTO was the most sought-after perk by job seekers nationwide, according to data obtained through our online communities. In Q2 of 2020, however, remote work ranked number one, illustrating how people look to their employers for additional support and accommodations during tough times.

A thoughtful, well-constructed EVP helps sell candidates on your job opportunities; you're able to clearly articulate what your organization can offer beyond the usual salary and benefits. Promoting your EVP highlights your most desirable employee offerings and positions your company as an employer of choice.

SECTION I

The Game Plan

Create content around your employee value proposition by focusing on its central tenets, such as employee development, growth opportunities and company culture. Remember, your EVP is not a laundry list of your most beloved perks.

Rather, it's a summary of your employee experience — what do you, as an employer, offer your people in exchange for their commitment? Remember, your EVP is not only about the perks you provide, but the values you uphold and live by.

Call out ways in which you've supported your people during turbulent times — employer brands are defined in times of crisis.

Then, think about who you're trying to reach through the content, whether that's a broad demographic — experienced tech professionals — or your ideal candidate persona for a single role. If necessary, conduct additional candidate research. Creating personalized content is vital to capturing the attention of your target audience; 72 percent of consumers only interact with content that is personalized to their interests, and today's candidates tend to act like consumers.

72%

OF CONSUMERS ONLY INTERACT WITH CONTENT THAT IS PERSONALIZED TO THEIR INTERESTS.



SECTION I

Once you know who you're trying to reach, start writing and leverage your employees to help — who better to tell the story of your value as an employer than the people who experience it firsthand? How you define your EVP is one thing, what your employees have to say about it is far more meaningful in creating an authentic connection with candidates.

Create employee spotlights or roundup articles including the perspective of multiple team members. Including your people will help get eyes on your content — **messaging that is shared by employees receives 561 percent more impressions.**

Step 3

Highlight Your Contributions Through Mission-Driven Content

In times of trouble, people tend to rethink what matters most. The latest trend or product release no longer holds the weight it once did. Connecting with employees on a deeper level benefits your recruitment strategy in two ways.

Company Mission

67%

of employees want their employer to have a mission beyond profit margins more than they want a higher salary.

First, promoting your mission-driven values increases the likelihood of attracting job seekers with similar principles: 88 percent of millennials want to work for an employer with values that match their own.

Second, it bolsters your employer brand by establishing your reputation of having a mission beyond profit margins, which 67 percent of employees want from their employer. Highlight your company mission by telling your story not through your services, but how you serve.

Doing so will humanize your brand and better position you as a good corporate citizen. In turn, you'll have more success closing the deal with passive candidates.

The Game Plan

The key is swift action by telling your story, keeping your name out there and letting people know you are hiring. Team up with your marketing department to promote your efforts in the context of your company mission and core values. Your brand story is a shared interest; leveraging your values is essential to attracting great candidates, and your marketing team knows how to do that.

“Brand is the sum total of how someone perceives a particular organization.

Branding is about shaping that perception.”

-Ashley Friedlein

Be conscious of what’s happening both in and outside your company; your employees deserve your support. Showing that people are your priority provides candidates with a sense of security.

Demonstrating your appreciation for your employees through additional resources and accommodations during this time will improve retention rates as well as endear job seekers to your company. Plus, it positions you not only as an employer with corporate values that bind your brand and culture, but as an employer who values its people.

Step 4

Meet Candidates Where They Are

As the world shifts in times of uncertainty, so will people's behavior. The platforms you've been promoting your message on may no longer make an impact. You must adapt quickly to keep your brand and job opportunities in front of customers.

Understanding which platforms people flock to during difficult times will be influential in making sure your voice is heard.

Identify the platforms worthy of your continued investment and pull back on less impactful ones immediately. Then, begin seeking out the platforms you've yet to tap into that will be highly trafficked during this period.

Remain flexible; you'll need to start interacting with your audience in new ways. If there are certain parts of the country or world that impact your business the most, hone in on the platforms that will reach those candidates. Get creative. There are plenty of free platforms available to you if budgets are tight. Now more than ever, it's vital that you meet candidates where they are and promote your open roles in high-traffic locations.

Step 5

Tap Into Your Employee Referral Program

In today's current job market, don't underestimate the value of an employee referral. They're the top source for hires since your existing team members are able to vouch for candidates. Additionally, the hiring process is 55 percent faster when candidates are referred since these individuals are more familiar to your team when they start out.

The Game Plan

If you already have an employee referral program in place, tap into it to identify elite candidates who have a connection with your organization. Alternatively, reengage referred candidates who have gone through your hiring process but didn't receive an offer; they may still be interested in your organization and open to new opportunities.

Since you already have a relationship with them, you'll be able to continue the conversation further along in the process, which reduces your time-to-fill.

SECTION I

While budget and resources may be a limiting factor right now, offer your employees incentives for their candidate recommendations. Remember that a referral bonus doesn't have to be a monetary reward. Especially during this difficult time, employees may appreciate an extra day of PTO to spend time with their families, a gift card to a local restaurant in need of support or even a donation in their name to an organization they care about.

If you haven't yet implemented an employee referral program, set the wheels in motion now. Hiring is likely to pick up across the board shortly after things return to normal, meaning you'll be up against more competition. **Strike while the iron is hot and set the framework for a referral program now.** You'll be in a better position to recruit top candidates against aggressive competition if you're not starting from square one.

55%

**THE HIRING PROCESS IS 55 PERCENT
FASTER WITH REFERRED CANDIDATES.**

BONUS: Email Template

Use the following template to reach out to referred candidates.

Subject Line: [COMPANY NAME]: [JOB TITLE] Interview Opportunity

Hi [FIRST NAME],

I am [YOUR JOB TITLE] at [COMPANY NAME], and we're currently looking for a [OPEN JOB TITLE] to join our team. [CONTACT NAME] spoke very highly of your [SKILLS] and recommended you for the role.

I took a look at some of your work online, and given your experience, I think you'd be an excellent fit for the role. This is a great opportunity to learn more about [YOUR INDUSTRY] alongside an ambitious team.

I'd love to hear more about you and talk to you about the role. Are you available for a 15-minute phone call sometime tomorrow?

Let me know!

Best,
[YOUR NAME]
[YOUR EMAIL SIGNATURE]

Step 6

Leverage Your Leadership Team

Tough times are often measured by how leaders handle the situation. To stand out among the crowd, use this as an opportunity to leverage your leaders and highlight the ways in which they support their employees during difficult times.

Not only will involving members of your leadership team in the broader conversation position your brand as a well-informed thought leader, it will also reinforce your reputation as an employer of choice. This, in turn, can help entice elite candidates to your job opportunities and fill open roles. **Employees want to work for an empathetic employer so much that 77 percent are willing to work longer hours** and 60 percent would take a pay cut.

The Game Plan

People want to hear from leaders of the brands they trust — 79 percent say CEO visibility is very important, and they want leaders to share the company's mission and vision. Send a note to your leadership team explaining that now is the time to go after talented candidates and how they can help you capitalize on the opportunity at hand. Encourage members of your C-suite to create thought-leadership content in which they lend their expertise on how businesses can adapt to uncertain times.



Additionally, send a message to your contact base through email and social media, letting your followers know how you're continuing to do business while prioritizing the health and safety of your people. Let's face it, an employee who is disheartened by their current company's efforts will be wary of working for another employer cut from the same cloth. Differentiate yourself by showcasing your employee-focused benefits, flexibility and compassion.

Remember to be authentic. If employees join your organization under the assumption that they'll be cared for and valued by your leadership team only to discover that's not the case, your new hires will be quick to pack their bags. A high turnover rate is bad for business and your employer brand, so ensure your leaders are genuine in their messaging.

Step 7

Create a Best-In-Class Hiring Experience

Every touchpoint — from job descriptions, to social media posts and your careers page — make up part of your candidate experience. A changing work environment shouldn't get in the way of creating a high-quality recruitment process.

A poor hiring experience is extremely costly — nearly half of candidates terminate their relationship with the company after having a negative candidate experience. Why? Because 66 percent of candidates believe that interacting with current employees is the best way to get a sense of a potential employer. If your recruitment process leaves a lot to be desired, job seekers will quickly move on.

46%

OF CANDIDATES END THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH AN EMPLOYER DUE TO A BAD CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE.

The Game Plan

Creating a best-in-class hiring experience starts with transparency. Communicate expectations and outline your interview process steps ahead of time. This is something job seekers regularly look for — 83 percent say a clear overview of the interview process would enhance the candidate experience — but especially during turbulent times.

Continuous Updates

81%

of candidates say continuous status updates would improve the hiring process.

Regular communication is the backbone of a strong hiring experience — 81 percent of candidates say that continuous status updates from employers would significantly improve the process. Leverage recruitment automation tools to ensure candidates don't slip through the cracks and aren't waiting on your team for next steps.

If additional resources are out of your budget right now, make use of email templates to streamline your communication. Just be sure to proofread each message carefully and personalize each email when possible. Lastly, be flexible. Everyone responds differently to stressful situations and job seekers will appreciate your understanding during this difficult time.

Step 8

Update and Promote Your Remote Onboarding Process

For today's workforce, remote is a way of life. Which means that remote interviewing and onboarding protocols are inescapable.

That being said, it's still not the easiest adjustment — especially for new hires. Employees will look to you for guidance, reassurance and support as they acclimate to the new role and company. Go out of your way to create a positive experience.

Once you finalize your new process, promote it. Showcasing your remote onboarding sequence shows candidates that you not only can make offers during this time, but they can join your company immediately and be a successful new employee.

New hires are twice as likely to look for new opportunities if they have a negative onboarding experience.

-Sapling

SECTION I

The Game Plan

Start by carefully evaluating your existing onboarding sequence and identifying the value of each component. Then, invest in the tools and software you need to make each training session virtual and impactful, and optimize your onboarding process for different learning styles.

Training for a new role and getting to know colleagues through a computer screen is sure to pose some challenges, so make sure your program will work for different individuals. Encourage managers to further customize each new hire's onboarding plan to their specific social and emotional needs, as well as their communication preferences.

In addition to preparing new hires to be successful in their role, you must make them feel like a part of the team.

Infuse elements of your culture into your remote onboarding sequence by utilizing video conferencing to help new hires put faces to names, as well as highlighting your unique committees and initiatives. The lack of human connection poses a big obstacle, so go out of your way to bring new hires into the fold.

Finally, develop a communication plan for your remote onboarding process to give new employees peace of mind. Include key tasks to be completed — such as filling out forms or participating in an informational session with the head of HR — and provide points of contact for each item.

SECTION I

Putting It Altogether

An unexpected event certainly throws a wrench in your recruitment plans, but it's not something you can't handle. **In order to continue recruiting at a fast clip, you need to be strategic about your efforts.**

Times will continue to change, and people will shift their priorities to adapt. As a result, your previously successful tactics and messaging will no longer land among your target audience.

Your Response Matters

Job seekers want to work for an employer that truly cares about its people and surrounding communities, and has a mission focused on supporting both. They'll take stock of how you respond to unexpected situations, both in terms of your business strategy and internal communications. Let them know that you're making your employees a priority, making adjustments to continue conversations with great candidates and, above all, making a difference.

Focus On Impact

If you run into roadblocks regarding access to resources or buy-in from senior leadership, remember to tie your efforts back to business impact. Remember, businesses that enacted a hiring freeze will ramp up their efforts as soon as things return to normal. That means you'll be up against fierce competition down the line, so use this opportunity to get ahead.



Keep people at the center of everything you do...

At every stage of the recruitment process — from reevaluating your employer brand to the later stages of candidate communication. Leverage your leaders, empower your employees and lend a hand to those around you.

SECTION II

How to Play Defense as a Recruiter

Turbulent times often force companies to make tough decisions like implementing a hiring freeze or undergoing layoffs. These scenarios leave recruiters wondering what their role will look like in the coming days and weeks, but don't let that distract you from what needs to be done.

If you're an impacted recruiter who's facing a hiring lull, don't be discouraged. There are many ways you can step up to the plate and start preparing for when your business returns to normal. It's time to be proactive instead of reactive.

SECTION II

Times of uncertainty can cause concern for recruiters, especially if your company is undergoing a hiring freeze or layoffs. It's important to remember you have a valuable skill set and business insights that can be used in many different ways. When you no longer have to spend your days sourcing and interviewing, you can shift your focus to making a bigger impact for when hiring gets back to normal. Doing so will help your business bounce back more quickly and hire the key employees needed to meet company goals.

Here are five steps you can take to keep your business on track and successfully play defense for your brand during a hiring lull.

Step 1

Maintain Your Employer Brand

Employer branding doesn't have an off switch; it's an always-on investment. You must put in the work to keep your brand top of mind with candidates even when you're not hiring. If you don't, you'll spend months catching up with your competitors to attract top talent when your hiring lull is over.

Almost all candidates (95 percent) heavily weigh a company's reputation when choosing their next job. And in turbulent times, it's even more important to nurture your employer brand.

More than half of job seekers (69 percent) are more likely to apply to a job if the company maintains its brand and digital presence. Even if you're not hiring right now, candidates will notice if your employer brand has been overlooked when it comes time to hire again.

SECTION II

However, we realize budgets and resources may be tight during this period of uncertainty so we came up with a few ways you can maintain your employer brand without breaking the bank.

The Game Plan

A great place to start is by tapping into what your competitors are doing. The best way to do this is to act as a job seeker for a specific position you will need to hire for in the future.

Search the platforms you think your ideal candidate spends their time and conduct a Google search for terms you think they'd be looking for. The results will give you direct insight into the topics, platforms and resources your competitors are offering to candidates in their job search.

When possible, identify the content with high engagement (likes, shares, saves, etc.) as well as where you notice repeat ideas. These are helpful indicators of strategies that are working even when you can't see clear metrics to gauge their success. Identify opportunities you may be missing out on to connect with your ideal candidates and take the time to fill these gaps for when hiring gets back to normal.

Use the insights you gather from your competitive research to build employer branding content.



SECTION II

It takes a lot of time to create content, which is why this is the time to do it. Start by identifying employees to highlight in your content. Then, take the time to interview them on topics candidates want to hear about most. Use these insights to build articles and videos that promote your company as a great employer. **Begin by creating articles designed to resonate with the talent you are most likely to hire for first when things get back to normal.** This will align your content strategy with the goals you'll need to achieve when your hiring lull is over.

Additionally, keep an eye on employer review sites as well as different best places to work rankings. These sites will give you insight into what current and former employees think about your company and employer brand. It will give you a list of areas for improvement that you can focus on during a hiring lull.

Step 2

Focus on Employee Retention

In turbulent times, recruiters must step up to help HR in retaining employees. It's estimated that the cost of turnover is one and a half to two times an employee's salary and can be upwards of 100 percent of a tech employee's salary. And U.S. companies on average experience a turnover rate of about 19 percent.

Don't stand back and watch your top employees get scooped up by competitors during a hiring lull. Keeping employees engaged and confident during this time isn't easy but we've found a few ways you can retain employees even when things are uncertain.

The Game Plan

In order to boost employee retention, you first need to understand what causes turnover within your organization. Survey your employees to hear how they talk about your company as an employer, what they dislike and if there is anything they would change.

SECTION II

Tap into the data you have from exit interviews and stay interviews to highlight areas of concern. The results will provide you with insight into what drives employees away and what current employees don't like about your company. Focusing on these areas will help mitigate losing more employees while hiring is paused.

Additionally, **review your turnover rate insights to determine if there are certain areas of your business that should be a cause for concern.** Turnover data can help identify whether a specific department is likely to experience employee separations, and you should focus your efforts on improving employee engagement with them first.

Employee Recognition

27%

of employees have left a job due to a lack of recognition.

Keeping employees around can be as easy as recognizing them for their accomplishments — 27% of employees report leaving their jobs due to lack of recognition in the office. Similarly, 79% of employees would be more loyal to their employer if they were regularly recognized for their work.

When hiring isn't the priority, create a platform for managers to recognize their direct reports and for employees to celebrate their peers. This can be done during an all-hands meeting or via a company-wide communication platform like Slack. It will not only make an impact in turbulent times but also when things return to normal.



79%

OF EMPLOYEES WOULD BE MORE
LOYAL TO THEIR EMPLOYER IF THEY
RECEIVED REGULAR RECOGNITION
FOR THEIR WORK.

SECTION II

Involving your employees in amplifying your company message can also boost retention. When people hear about a company pausing their hiring efforts, it's hard to get them thinking about your brand in a good light.

Empowering employees to speak positively about your company will help you get the right message in front of more people. Messaging that is shared by employees receives 561 percent more impressions than when a company sends it and content gets shared 24 times more when distributed by the employees of a company.

Empowering employees to speak positively about your company will help you get the right message in front of more people.

Train your employees on how to leverage your existing employer branding and marketing content to highlight how your company is adapting to this time. Host training sessions on the best practices for sharing stories on social platforms.

Streamline how you notify employees of new content to share and how best to position each story. Helping your employees become brand advocates will not only showcase your company in a good light while hiring is paused but also emphasize how engaged your workforce is.

Step 3

Partner With Your Marketing Team

As a recruiter, it's your responsibility to source, interview and hire candidates. However, when hiring is paused, you must refocus your efforts toward messaging and promotions in order to keep your brand top of mind among candidates. This is the cornerstone of recruitment marketing, and the best place to start is by teaming up with your marketing team.

Marketers are skilled writers who create strategic messaging and promotional plans every day. Their backing gives your team the expertise needed to effectively disseminate your brand story to a wider talent base. Furthermore, pooling your resources in a time when budgets and bandwidths are severely limited doubles your efforts without adding to the stress of a hiring lull.

The Game Plan

Before asking your marketing team for help, think about what you're trying to communicate to candidates and brainstorm some messaging. Their department has likely also been hit by these uncertain times, and they may be short on resources. Putting in the effort upfront lightens the workload on the marketers' end, and you may find that your objectives align with the story marketing is trying to tell. Lean on their insights to refine and polish your messaging so it's as compelling as possible to prospective employees.

SECTION II

Once you've aligned on messaging, tap into your marketing team to create compelling assets. Develop content about how your organization is navigating these trying times and supporting your people. Include employee testimonials about what it's like to work for your company to better connect with potential candidates.

Your marketing team can then help package this content into visually-engaging promotional assets that can be shared on social media and through email campaigns. They're experts in content strategy, so lean on their own campaign tactics to inform where and how frequently you share your message.

“Recruitment IS marketing. If you’re a recruiter nowadays and you don’t see yourself as a marketer, you’re in the wrong profession.”

-Matthew Jeffrey

Finally, leverage your marketing team to determine which platforms to focus your promotional efforts on. They have a good pulse on where people are spending their time right now, which likely isn't where you've shared your message in the past. Digital traffic patterns have shifted with more people working remotely and spending time indoors; lean on their data to make informed decisions regarding where your team will have the most success.

Use their insight to determine which platforms to withdraw or continue investing in. Hone in on highly trafficked sites that sought-after candidates often use. Despite not actively hiring, your strategy should still be thoughtfully targeted toward your ideal prospects.

Step 4

Invest in Hiring Managers

If you haven't already, this is the time to start building relationships with your hiring managers. Research proves hiring managers are four times more influential than other recruiting performance factors and having a solid relationship with your hiring manager is the biggest driver of recruitment. You'll need their expertise when it comes time to craft candidate personas again for open roles, so use this time to establish a strong rapport.

Hiring managers are four times more influential than other recruiting performance factors.

If you've already invested in a collaborative relationship with hiring managers, don't lose momentum. It's important to make sure hiring is still top of mind for them so you can start where you left off when things go back to normal.

Build the right habits and keep them going, even during a hiring lull. **Here are a few topics you can coach hiring managers on so they're ready to make an impact when hiring gets back to normal.**

Having a solid
relationship with your
hiring managers is the
***biggest driver of
recruitment.***

The Game Plan

Finding potential candidates is no easy feat, even for the most seasoned recruiters. That's why you need to educate hiring managers on how they can be more impactful in sourcing new team members. Show hiring managers how to be thought leaders on the platforms your ideal candidates spend most of their time.

Share tips for how they can be authentic and personal when communicating with candidates. [Helping hiring managers learn to be the best recruiters they can be during a hiring lull will help you be even more successful when it's time to hire again.](#)

If your hiring managers are making hiring decisions based on a 'gut feeling,' they're likely hiring on the basis of unconscious bias. The best way to prevent your organization from succumbing to these unconscious biases is to become aware of them and take action to prevent them when recruiting, hiring and retaining employees.

Spend your time during a hiring lull instructing hiring managers on examples of unconscious bias that commonly affect candidates and employees in the workplace. Be sure to also share tips for how to avoid unconscious bias when hiring and retaining employees. Need some help with that? [We've got you covered in this article.](#) Teaching your hiring managers about unconscious bias will help your team build a more diverse and inclusive workplace in the future.



SECTION II

To help hiring managers reduce unconscious bias even further, create an interview scorecard for them to use when they're able to bring in new team members again. Interview scorecards are standardized evaluations by which interviewers assess and compare multiple candidates on an established rating system.

Scorecards are utilized by recruiters, HR professionals and hiring managers during an interview to ensure the conversation is guided and evaluated by previously agreed-upon criteria. If multiple interviews are held for an individual candidate, scorecards allow for different interviewers to extract similar information from candidates and compare their notes in a standardized process.

Step 5

Put Culture at the Forefront

When faced with challenges, people tend to focus on what matters most. Your company should embrace this same mindset during times of uncertainty because candidates will remember what you do now in six months.

Double down on what your company cares about. Focus on your mission, core values and company culture. The foundation of what makes your company enjoyable to employees is something that candidates will relate to; **66 percent of job seekers want to learn about your culture and values.**

Focus on how you can put your culture at the forefront during turbulent times to position your company as a top employer with your current workforce and potential candidates. It will also give you plenty of culture-driven stories to tell when your hiring lull is over.

The Game Plan

Employee satisfaction is greatly affected by the ability to trust senior management. Build trust with employees and cultivate a reputation as a trustworthy employer by increasing transparency across the company. Prioritize top-down communication by keeping employees informed about the business through company-wide emails and timely updates during town hall meetings.

SECTION II

Establish an open-door policy by making members of the C-suite more accessible through office hours and small group discussions. While too many meetings can be counterproductive, don't neglect the value of face-to-face interactions when turbulent times arise.

It's also important to remember that flex schedules and open vacation policies all contribute to a company culture that keeps employees engaged. Life happens, and knowing they can count on their employer to be understanding and accommodating makes employees feel valued. This leads to higher levels of employee engagement which positively impact productivity and profitability.

Times of uncertainty can also mean more work, leaving a bigger potential for burnout and employee dissatisfaction. Remember to reinforce flexible work policies or put them in place if you haven't already. It will help boost your company culture and provide a value-add for candidates when hiring gets back to normal.

You should also be prioritizing communication efforts like providing employees with feedback during times of uncertainty. Employees crave feedback — both positive and constructive — and simply implementing annual reviews isn't making feedback a priority.



Life happens...

Knowing they can count on their employer to be understanding and accommodating makes employees feel valued. This leads to higher levels of employee engagement which positively impacts productivity and profitability.



SECTION II

In fact, most employees find them ineffective: one-third describe their performance reviews as unhelpful. Encourage managers to incorporate more regular feedback sessions into their team dynamic so feedback is timely and employees can act on it.

One-third of employees say their performance reviews are unhelpful.

Additionally, ask for feedback from employees more often, especially in times of turbulence. If you launch a new initiative or implement a new software, ask your team their thoughts shortly thereafter. Doing so will ensure that the decisions you make are benefitting your company culture and will make employees feel valued by their employer.

Putting It All Together

Though you're not currently hiring, now is the opportune time to gear up for the impending hiring frenzy. When things return to normal, employers will be clamoring to ramp up their recruitment efforts and lock down top talent. Laying the foundation for a strong, well-optimized talent acquisition strategy will set you up for success.

Look Internally

Use this downtime to reevaluate your existing efforts, looking for areas of improvement and gaps in the process. Remember that what goes on behind the scenes is just as influential as what happens in front of job seekers — your employer brand and employee retention strategies, as well as your internal relationship and culture, deserve your attention.

Planning Ahead

If you run into roadblocks regarding access to resources or buy-in from senior leadership, remember to tie your efforts back to business impact. The effort you invest now will pay off in the long run, helping you to minimize your time-to-fill for high-impact roles and effectively reducing your cost-of-vacancy. In short, leveraging a hiring lull as an opportunity to reevaluate your broader strategy is a long-term investment that's well worth the effort.

SECTION III

The Transition From Defense to Offense

A defensive recruitment strategy isn't a long-term game. At some point, the storm will pass and talent professionals will get back to what they know: hiring. While the news that your company can start hiring again is exciting, it also means another shift in your mindset and strategy, which isn't always easy.

During this transitional period you must find ways to slowly start hiring again while not breaking the bank; a difficult feat when needing to bring in top talent. You'll also need to fill roles quickly while simultaneously building a talent pipeline you can tap into in the future.

To make this transition a success, you must leverage the defensive strategies you embraced while not hiring to work toward the solutions you'll need to implement when hiring is back to normal. Keep reading to learn how to do just that.

Make Moves on Existing Candidates

Before the pandemic unemployment was at a record low and great candidates were hard to come by. As you start to hire again, you might expect a plethora of candidates to choose from, however, key roles are still hard-to-fill. That's why you must tap into the network of candidates you already have at your disposal.

Signaling to the candidates who were interested in your company before the pandemic with a "We're hiring!" campaign will be key. They were interested in working for you once before, and may still be.

To be prepared for this promotion, you'll need to start thinking about the content and materials you need to do it successfully. What roles will you be hiring for the most? Who are your biggest employee advocates in these departments? How can you empower your workforce to share this news when ready? Taking the time during this transition to be prepared for this campaign will put you ahead of the game when hiring gets back to normal.

Also, when hiring was on pause your focus was less on bringing in new candidates and more on the employees who already worked for you. You used your skill set to boost employee retention by putting culture at the forefront.

SECTION III

A lack of hiring can cause unnecessary stress with your existing workforce if you're not clearly communicating the state of your business. If done right, your employees will have a ton of great things to say to their networks about who you are as an employer.

As you start to hire again, you now have a supportive workforce to tap into for candidates through an employee referral program.

Empowering your workforce to reach out to their networks and share the news of your open positions will help you find the qualified candidates you need at little to no cost. It's an investment with big returns:

- Nearly one-third of employee referrals are hired.
- The cost of hiring a referred candidate is 40 percent less than job boards.
- Employee referrals produce about 25 percent more profit than those sourced from other channels.

If you don't already have an employee referral program in place, now is the time to start one. It's an always-on recruitment tactic that helps you meet your hiring goals and rewards your current employees. And getting your employee referral program up and running again is quick and easy.

SECTION III

Use the following checklist to re-start your employee referral program during your transition from defense to offense so that you can benefit from it for years to come.

Re-Start Checklist: Employee Referral Program



Assess your existing employee referral program and make any necessary changes. Or, if you don't already have an employee referral program, build one using these steps.



Notify your current workforce that your employee referral program is now active and inform them how much they can earn by referring employees to your newly opened positions.



Make it easy for employees to refer candidates by offering email and social sharing templates they can use to promote your open roles.

Employer Brands Boost Talent Pipelines

Even when you're not hiring, you need to at least maintain your employer brand. A strong employer brand takes time to ramp up and losing this momentum when you are not hiring will only hurt you when hiring gets back to normal. You have to continually invest in making the story of who you are as an employer known to potential candidates no matter if you have open roles or not.

However, when it comes time to start slowly hiring again, the strategy you used to maintain your employer brand will no longer work. To be successful when hiring returns to normal, your employer branding strategy needs to shift during this transitional period. No longer should you take a reactive approach to your employer brand; you must be proactive, especially that you now have a story to tell.

When hiring is full speed again, you'll also want to highlight your employee value proposition and company mission to draw in candidates. Given your company was likely affected by turbulent times you should take this opportunity to re-evaluate who you are and the impact you want to have on the world.

Does what you've shared in the past still hold true? Is there a better way to describe the value of your company as an employer today?



SECTION III

In 2020 alone, a lot changed. You need to make sure your mission, values and employer branding content reflect how your company has responded to these tough times.

Addressing these topics and getting buy-in from your entire company on any changes during this transition will help you be successful when it comes time to share your employee value proposition and mission with the world again.

As you think about ways to ease back into hiring, focusing on your employer branding is key. Despite its longer ramp up time, an employer brand can heavily influence a company's candidate pipeline and recruiting metrics:

- 95 percent of candidates identify a company's reputation as a key consideration when exploring new career opportunities.
- Companies with a poor employer brand must offer a minimum of a 10 percent pay increase to lure top talent.
- As much as 23 percent of the 18-34 year-old workforce would accept a pay cut for an opportunity to join a company with a good employer brand.

SECTION III

The sooner you start re-investing in your employer brand, the sooner you'll have candidate's knocking on your door. Use the following checklist to re-start your investment in employer branding so that you can save time and money when hiring gets back to normal.

Re-Start Checklist: Employer Branding



Assess your existing employer brand and identify any points of concern or items that need to be updated accurately.



Brainstorm content topics that relate to the roles you'll be immediately hiring for and those that highlight who you are as an employer.



Create and promote these content pieces so candidates will find them and join your talent pipeline.

Cross-Departmental Collaboration Means Success

Hiring affects every person in an organization, no matter what department they are in. **The more that a talent team taps into their peers cross-departmentally, the more success they will find in their roles.**

Depending on what side of the recruiting playing field you are on, this can look a little different. When on defense, focus on investing in hiring managers and partnering with marketing. Great relationships with these two departments will help you have a smoother hiring process and a better brand when it's time to hire normally again.

As you begin to hire again, now is the time to have your hiring managers practice what they learned when hiring was on pause. It allows you to test any new processes or procedures you put into place on a small scale; that way, when hiring is back to normal all of the kinks have been worked out. It sets up a better hiring experience for candidates — from interviewing to onboarding — which will benefit your company for years to come.



SECTION III

The work you put into building a relationship with your marketing team will also bode well for your company long-term. Marketers are branding experts, and having access to their knowledge both when hiring is on pause and when it returns to normal will help your employer brand be better. Tap into your marketing team to help you ease back into promoting your employer brand again. The transition will be a lot easier with the marketing team on your side.

As more roles open up, you'll benefit from collaborating with other teams internally, like your leadership team. They will be highly influential in attracting candidates and painting the picture of what it's like to work for your company. Take the time to start building a relationship with your leadership team now and finding ways to position them externally as thought leaders. Doing so will help you build a strong talent pipeline for future hiring needs.

SECTION III

Use the following checklist to maintain your cross-departmental relationships and restart collaboration with other departments so you can be successful when hiring ramps up again.

Re-Start Checklist: *Cross-Departmental Collaboration*



Put your hiring manager training to the test by leveraging the new process with the first few roles you hire for.



Work with your marketing team to strategize how to pivot your employer brand and amplify it with candidates again.



Begin establishing a better relationship with your leadership team so you can tap into them for additional hiring promotions down the road.

The transition from defense to offense is not going to look the same for every organization, however the foundational elements of this period remain true. **Start small, test everything and reiterate as needed.** Embracing this mindset will help you be successful when hiring gets back to normal.

SECTION IV

How to Handle Candidate Interactions

When hiring goes on pause, recruiters face a lot of questions. The good news is you don't have to completely overhaul your candidate interactions. Little tweaks to your current workflow can make a big difference.

To help you navigate these uncertain times, we've laid out best practices for updating existing job descriptions and communicating with candidates already in your recruitment funnel. We also include templates for each to help you get started.

Updating Existing Job Descriptions

Pausing hiring efforts or postponing job offers doesn't mean your job descriptions must come down. If these scenarios are temporary, like most are, it is worthwhile to keep them visible to the world even if you're not ready to move forward. To keep hiring momentum going for a paused role, here are a few ways to update your visible job descriptions. Making these changes will allow you to continue promoting them on existing platforms.

Modify Your Job Title

Job titles are seen by candidates before they even get to your full job post, making it an ideal place for highlighting when the role will actually be filled. Adding these details sets the proper expectations for candidates up front and helps them not waste time on a position that doesn't align with what they need. Here's a simple way to make this change:

Actively Hiring Job Title: Public Relations Manager

On Pause Job Title: Public Relations Manager - Hiring in Q3

This small addition will help weed out the candidates who are looking for a job right now and be appreciated by the ones who can afford to wait for when the position will actually be available.

Make Your Company Description Relevant

Once you have the right candidate viewing your job post, you'll want to make sure your company description aligns with what's happening in the world. When a majority of people are impacted by uncertain times, a completely self-serving company description doesn't come off well.

Instead, focus on how your company is supporting its employees and making a difference during this period of turbulence. Making this change should be relatively easy given you or your marketing team should already be telling this story.

Update Your Call to Action

If you've done everything right, one of the main elements of your job description a candidate will see is the "Apply Now" button. This is a crucial spot to reiterate that the role is not being hired for right now. Some candidates will only skim a job post and miss the other call outs about the position being on pause. Adding a quick note will act as a final reminder before they work on the application. Here's how yours might look:

Actively Hiring Call to Action: [Apply Now Button]

On Pause Call to Action: **Please note: This position will not be offered until Q3.* [Apply Now Button]



SECTION IV

Remember, be as transparent and clear as possible when discussing role availability within your job descriptions. Candidates who reach this point are highly interested in your role so it's important to be up-front with them. Don't try to hide the information; this will only frustrate candidates and cause them to think poorly of your brand.

Over-communicate when the position will actually be available so only the candidates who are willing to wait will apply. Doing so positions you as a transparent and honest employer before they even interact with you.

Communication Plans for Active Candidates

You likely had many roles open and posted when your organization put a pause on hiring. This means candidates are already in your recruiting funnel and you must find a way to tell them the bad news while also keeping them interested in your opportunities. It's not impossible, but it is difficult.

The key to successfully communicating with active candidates during times of uncertainty is to be transparent, empathetic and helpful. Clearly detailing why you've been forced to put the role on pause and when you can realistically expect it to be available again will be appreciated. Expect to lose out on some candidates but know that others will be willing to wait.

The key to successfully communicating with active candidates during times of uncertainty is to be transparent, empathetic and helpful.

We laid out a few different scenarios for how to communicate with active candidates at different stages of your hiring funnel including recent applicants, your top candidates and the people you've already interviewed for the position. Follow our best practices when telling candidates your role is now on hold and use our email templates in each scenario.



SECTION IV

Application Confirmation Email

An excellent candidate experience requires regularly updating candidates about the status of their application, and that starts with an application confirmation email. This email is sent to candidates immediately or shortly after they've submitted an application. It confirms you have received it, details next steps and informs candidates what they can do while they wait.

Given your hiring is now on pause, it's more important than ever to send an application confirmation email. Candidates will be even more uncertain of what to expect from you after submitting an application. Now's the time to detail when and what they can expect to hear about this paused role. It will set clear expectations for your candidate communication timeline during your hiring lull. Use your applicant tracking system (ATS) to help automate this email send.

Email Template

Use the following template to reach out to candidates and confirm receipt of their application.

Subject Line: [COMPANY NAME] – We Received Your Application

Hi [FIRST NAME],

Thank you for your interest in [COMPANY NAME]. We have received your application for the open [JOB TITLE] position. **Please note** we will not be actively interviewing for this role until [INSERT DATE]. When that time comes, someone from our team will be in touch to update you on the status of your application.

In the meantime, please visit [LINK TO RELEVANT WEB PAGE] to learn more about our company.

Best,

[COMPANY NAME] Recruiting Team
[COMPANY LOGO]



SECTION IV

Top Candidate Follow-Up Email

When your role is not on pause, you'd typically begin reviewing applications and setting up phone interviews with promising candidates at this stage. While you shouldn't begin interviewing candidates for a role until you are closer to the actual hire date, sort through the applications to identify top candidates.

After you've selected your top applicants, proactively and personally reach out to them indicating your excitement about their experience for the role. This creates a direct line of communication to uncover whether or not the candidate is willing to wait on your position. It also allows you to begin slowly nurturing the candidates through your recruitment funnel.

Email Template

Use the following template to reach out to candidates and confirm receipt of their application.

Subject Line: [COMPANY NAME] – We Received Your Application

Hi [FIRST NAME],

Thank you for your interest in [COMPANY NAME]. We have received your application for the open [JOB TITLE] position. **Please note** we will not be actively interviewing for this role until [INSERT DATE]. When that time comes, someone from our team will be in touch to update you on the status of your application.

In the meantime, please visit [LINK TO RELEVANT WEB PAGE] to learn more about our company.

Best,

[COMPANY NAME] Recruiting Team
[COMPANY LOGO]

Interview Follow-Up Email

Traditionally, interview follow-up emails are used to pass along good news to really great candidates after they've interviewed with your company. However, during a hiring freeze, you must instead inform them of a change in plans.

While some elements are still important to include – what impressed you and why they are a good fit for the role – you must emphasize that the role has been put on pause. Candidates will likely be disappointed, but if you are transparent about why the role is on hold, set realistic expectations for when it will be active again and provide valuable insights they can use to make the most of this waiting period, they will likely stay in your recruitment funnel.

Be transparent, set realistic expectations and provide valuable insights.

The key here is personalized outreach and constant communication. You don't want to leave great candidates waiting for long periods of time without any information; even if you send a note to say nothing's changed, it will show candidates you are still actively interested in hiring them when you can. It will keep your company top of mind and help you gauge if the candidate is still interested in the role.

Email Template

Use the following template to follow up with candidates after an interview.

Subject Line: [COMPANY NAME] Interview Follow-Up

Hi [FIRST NAME],

Thank you for taking the time to speak with our team about the [JOB TITLE] role.

[INTERVIEWER] was very impressed by your [EXPERIENCE/EXPERTISE]. We believe you will be a good fit for the role and a strong addition to our growing [DEPARTMENT TEAM] at [COMPANY NAME].

Unfortunately, we have had to hit pause on this role due to [INSERT REASON]. We expect to start interviewing for this role again around [INSERT DATE]. While we'd love to continue the interview process at a later date, I understand if this time frame does not work for you.

Please let me know if you are still interested in the role and if you would like to hear updates about its availability.

Thank you again for your time. I hope to hear from you soon.

Best,

[YOUR NAME]

[YOUR EMAIL SIGNATURE]



Putting It All Together

After telling candidates your roles are on pause, you must stay top of mind, and candidate nurturing helps you do just that. Find ways to help them during this period of uncertainty – share tips to improve their resume and offer insight into your hiring process for when things get back to normal.

Providing value to candidates during this time and showcasing how your company is making a difference will help you be remembered when hiring is a priority. It will position your company as a sought-after employer because of how you responded to challenges. Remember to take care of your candidates just like you support your employees.

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