



Championing Talent Hidden in Plain Sight

By Amelia Chan, CPHR

WITH LABOUR SHORTAGES AND POOLS OF TALENT dwindling, untapped talent is getting a lot of attention. That has led organizations of all sizes to take a closer look at talent, with smaller businesses, as ever, offering a wealth of wisdom worth considering.

Over the past number of years, I have had the opportunity to sit as a judge for the Small Business BC Awards, at first for the Best Workplace Award, and for the past few years in the Best Apprenticeship Training category. What each year has driven home are the big picture insights brought forward by passionate entrepreneurs and family businesses that have had to contend with the same pressing market forces around talent.

Where their talent management has been driven by the necessity of numbers or anchored by generations of authentic narrative, is where organizations of all sizes are learning to look first—chiefly, within. With fewer applicants available and retention challenging for all industries, the business world is starting to realize that everyone needs to explore more innovative ways to attract, retain and grow potential.

Championing Within Time and Again

As highlighted by Murphy Construction, one of the finalists at the 2019 Small Business BC Awards, we need to not only be looking within, but providing ongoing support to the talent in our midst—regardless of title or time. Murphy Construction illustrates a case in point of how missed opportunities can be reignited if the initiative and determination is there.

One of their employees, Shayne Peters, failed his level four interprovincial carpentry exam twice 17 years before. After the second attempt, he gave up. More recently, in a meeting where Murphy's executive engaged the team in discussion around apprenticeship programs, Peters shared his story and went on to experience a life-changing series of events. The leadership team championed his mission to try again.

Inspired by his willingness to pursue the level four exam once more, the company found a tutor, looked for financial resources and provided practical alternatives to support his study schedule. Peters dedicated his time and made the effort to travel from his home in Mount Currie to Kamloops to upgrade his knowledge

and ultimately passed the exam. More importantly, both he and Murphy Construction continue to celebrate his story as both an example of persistence and the employer's willingness to go the extra distance.

Today, Peters is training to be a site supervisor for the business. The added bonus in this story is that his story laid additional groundwork for the Lil'Wat Nation's partnership with Murphy Construction to further develop an apprenticeship culture.

An Illustration of Exponential Potential

In addition to an inspiring outcome, Peters' journey also highlights some important points about humanity "at work." The opportunity to communicate and the willingness of the parties to share their struggles, resulted in both the individual and the organization taking purposeful action—re-igniting a spark thought abandoned, generating results and kindling greater talent opportunities than previously imagined.

It also provides a great illustration of how a shared effort to support the goals of one can open greater futures for an entire company. By empowering Peters, their collective level of commitment has pointed the way to an inspiring future for the company and the community of which it is a part.

Turning Tech Towards People

Empowering talent to reach out and upwards is perhaps the greatest and most immediate driver of untapped talent within any organization. How an executive team communicates and puts their vision into practice really makes a difference because it sets the tone for organizational goals and work culture. It also belies the intrinsic involvement of HR in bringing that culture to life, modelling its potential and encouraging the development of others with the best tools at hand.

These days those tools are increasingly digital, but learning how to use them to their full potential often hinges on the quality of the human inputs a.k.a. the employee/employer relationship. As illustrated by another recent Small Business BC Awards finalist, RDC Fine Homes, the key to introducing new software is to have a hard understanding of what it is you are looking to accomplish.

RDC, like many other employers these days, uses modern

technology in conjunction with their employee career development conversations to ensure the qualitative and the quantitative information alike are captured. In addition to distributing the obligatory safety and workplace practice information, their entire team uses the online survey system, as well as the data management HR and strategic planning tools, to operate daily. This has provided them with invaluable insight into individual motivations and future talent potentials.

As a result, RDC is successfully growing their own talent by cultivating a philosophy of education through their career development technology tools. Other initiatives include matching work experience with in-class training, tuition reimbursement and creative use of real-time data sharing.

Small Touches to Big Business

As the challenge of sourcing untapped talent is only likely to grow without a fundamental shift in thinking, the success stories as championed at the BC Small Business Awards shine as potential templates for any sized business to explore.

And as the technology continues to change, it is more important than ever that businesses begin to look at their own people potential in a fresh light. Leaders need to embody and managers need to lead the way in taking on a teaching role to foster greater engagement (for existing work projects and opportunities) that can then lead to possibilities and potential.

If the opportunities within the workplace are presented as more than transactional, there is a far greater likelihood of

untapped talent revealing itself as employer and employee alike invest more time and effort into making the experience transformational.

Key to all of the above for leaders at all levels is to ask more questions. It opens up the opportunity for conversation to shine light on hidden aptitudes and budding talents. It also reveals us as creatures of curiosity and by creating a culture where curiosity is embraced, we encourage lifelong learning and innovation.

The Challenge Remains Open

Our abilities are unlimited and capacity for development endless. The role of senior leadership and HR professionals is to view the organization with a more deliberate eye for previously untapped potential. It is often the unexpected detours along the way which leads to gold.

To quote the author of *Ask More*, Frank Sesno: “Unplanned detours can lead to serendipity...When we ask more, we open our minds and challenge others to open theirs.”

Let’s tap into the talent hidden in plain sight. Let’s explore our existing teams and applicant pools in ever greater detail through more meaningful conversations—and help shape greater futures, big and small, as a result. 📌

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