



**Marion Gamel** is a C-level executive with over 20 years of experience. Having started her career as an entrepreneur, she then worked for Google and Eventbrite, and was Chief Marketing Officer of Betsson Group. Marion has been coaching entrepreneurs, founders and C-executives around the world since 2015. In this regular column, she provides advice to business leaders to empower them on issues ranging from improving efficiency to driving transformation and international growth within the company.

Dear Marion,

I am the founder of a small but modestly successful iGaming company, with ambitious plans to grow further and expand our reach and product offering. Everything seems to be going well, and my current employees are brilliant and driven, but there's just one problem - I'm not managing to attract the kind of additional talent that I need for the company to grow. Is it because the company is too 'unknown', or could it be that we're sending out the wrong signals to potential hires? I'm worried that if we don't find the personnel we need, we might end up stagnating - or even worse, having our best people poached by a bigger, stronger, rival. I could really use a few pointers on how to tackle this, especially considering how competitive the job market in Malta is.

Sincerely,

Talent-troubled CEO →

Dear CEO,

Most companies understand that their workforce is at the root of success and failure. Yet, all companies encounter 'talent issues'. And talent issues, just like a bad toothache, rarely go away by themselves.

There are a number of efficient ways to overcome talent challenges. The solution starts with a two-step approach. First – assess your company's real talent situation. Second – implement a sufficient level of agility to tackle talent issues. And remember, HR can't do it all on their own!



## ASSESSING YOUR TALENT SITUATION

Start by focusing your energy on assessing your company's real talent situation. It is, of course, a project that your Chief Talent Officer should lead, but can't fully own. Choose a handful of recent business disappointments, as well as some remarkable business successes, and find out how talent – skills, manpower, leadership, organisation – specifically contributed to how well (or how badly) the project went. The key here is to start with your business reality, to understand what talent learnings or blind spots could be lurking in the corner, and fuelling future success and failure.

Don't start your thinking process about talent by focusing on talent data, such as attrition for instance. Such data – although interesting – is not the end game. Your business achievements and misses are the end game. What did the company recently succeed and fail to achieve, and what is the talent situation fuelling these results?

## ONLY DEEP CHANGES BRING BIG CHANGES

Talent is often expected to be 'an HR thing' when in reality, talent is only as good as your leaders' focus on it. HR can help, but if your leaders are not ready to change the way they behave, your talent issues won't go away. So, before we dive into concrete actions that you can put in place, ask yourself this: am I willing to put in the effort to represent the company on social media? Are my leaders confident enough to put in place their own succession planning? Are we as an organisation agile enough to consider today things that were a no-go 10 years ago, such as flexible hours or remote working? If an organisation can't change its ways, its talent issues won't go away.

Let's look now at the main pillars of good talent management.

## IDENTIFY THE TALENT YOU WILL NEED

Recruitment is often an afterthought. A lack of manpower or skills is addressed when it has been creating problems for some time. But no problem seems to ever be solved that way because, in the meantime, more talent gaps become apparent in an endless circle. The solution is to start planning for talent needs, based on the long-term business objectives. If you know today that you need to double your revenue in the next three years, it is feasible for function leaders to plan the workforce as well as the skills that will be required in 12, 24 and 36 months. A function leader should know at any time what talent will need to be in the house, by when. Approximation is 10 times better than to try attracting talent in a reactive, panicky manner.

Planning for future talent needs, according to business objectives, is the only way to pre-empt the talent gap. And the C-suite needs to lead by example. Furthermore, planning ahead, your talent needs to empower your recruitment team to build a pipeline of candidates that are kept 'warm' until the time comes to hire. ➔

## ← ATTRACT THE TALENT YOU NEED

While identifying talent needs is a fairly straightforward planning exercise, attracting top talent is a challenge. Cutting corners is not an option: It is a false assumption that appointing a good head hunter at the last minute will result in glorious results. Head hunters are not magicians. If your company is not attractive, if your leaders are not appealing to candidates, you will not attract the best and you will need to inflate salaries indefinitely to attract the second best. So, what should you do? The answer is simple – adapt now to today's realities.

Employees are very vocal on social media and websites, so if your company culture or employees' satisfaction are not optimal, candidates will hear about it. Your employees influence your future workforce – put a plan in place to address this.

In addition to your company culture, your leaders are also in the limelight. Every company should today demand of its senior leaders that they are vocal on social media. Any candidate worth his salt will check what the leader of a department he's considering joining is tweeting or blogging about or presenting at conferences. Make it easy for candidates to answer the question "why do you want to join our company?" Today's talent checks out their potential employer as much as they are being scrutinised as candidates.



## HOW TO RETAIN TOP TALENT

**Keep them on their toes.** When people feel they are learning, they stick around for the next chapter. Ask random employees what they've learned in the last three months. If they can't think of anything, there's a problem. HR can help you explore tools such as rotation programmes. Offer lateral moves to employees so they can learn about various functions, and encourage geographical mobility.

**Make them part of a great story.** Everyone loves a story and aspires to be part of an adventure. So, tell them the story! Why do you do what you do? What is your long-term vision? How are you improving customers' life every day? What added value do you bring to society?

**Let them know they're contributing to a greater good.** From an early age, one of the greatest sources of fulfilment is to feel useful. Knowing that things would not be quite as good, had you not been around, is invaluable. So make your workforce feel valued by listing achievements and contributors. Congratulate people by name, be specific about what they did and how it impacted the result. Encourage employees to nominate super-contributors. Encourage leaders to send an email or walk to someone's desk. And always stay authentic, as nothing is more patronising than to congratulate people for something too small.

**Give them real opportunity for growth.** Internal promotions and succession planning are hindered by low self-esteem and the temptation to cut corners. Indeed, it takes confidence for a leader to say "In six months' time, employee X will be groomed and ready to take on my role". But a company that does not insist on impeccable succession planning is as irresponsible as a parent who thinks himself immortal. Lack of succession planning results in promoting employees who are not ready to take on a role. The result is an entire line of under-trained, under-prepared leaders.

The solution is a three-step approach. **First**, help leaders in your organisation gain confidence, make them feel valued and secure in their role. It's not because succession planning is in place that they are replaceable. On the contrary, failing to organise succession planning is a major mistake.

**Second**, demand that succession planning is in place by a set deadline and for at least the top three levels of seniority in your company.

**Third**, make the process of internal promotions as watertight as your recruitment process. Never promote someone prematurely just because you have an empty box in your organigram. An empty box is indeed a headache. But because it is on your mind, you will fix it. Whereas a badly-filled role will give you the illusion that all is well, when in reality, you've just introduced a weak link in the chain.

So, remember, dear CEO – assess the current talent situation that is fuelling your business achievements, and get ready for changes! Then make a commitment to your workforce that they'll keep on learning and contributing in a valuable manner to a great story, while being offered real opportunities for growth.

Good luck!  
Marion i6C

**Got a question for Marion? Email her at [marion.gamel@gmail.com](mailto:marion.gamel@gmail.com)**