

# How to Win the War For Talent

By Mike Myatt, Chief Strategy Officer, N2growth



The truth about what it takes to recruit,  
motivate, mentor & retain top talent.

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## How to Win the War for Talent

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While the struggle to acquire top talent is certainly not a new problem in business, the ever increasing competitive landscape combined with higher customer expectations is making the “talent factor” a clear defining point in a company’s ability to grow and distinguish itself from competitors.

I am frequently asked if I can identify the one attribute most responsible for a company’s success. One plausible answer might be the quality of a company’s leadership. Another likely answer would be the quality of a company’s product or service. However both of the aforementioned options (as well as just about any other answer you could come up with) would be a natural outcome of my real answer...Quite simply put, the quality of a company’s talent is the single biggest competitive value proposition a business possesses.

Quality human capital is a catalytic asset that can be effectively leveraged across the enterprise to generate creativity, momentum, velocity, client loyalty, a dynamic corporate culture and virtually every other positive influencing force in the corporate universe. It is quality talent that designs best practices, understands the value of innovation, overcomes obstacles, breaks down barriers, creates growth and builds a lasting brand.

Now that we have defined the value of talent, let’s delve into gaining an understanding of how to attract it, grow it and retain it. The answer rests in a settling for nothing less than a total and complete commitment to quality from the top down...No exceptions. There is truth in the old axiom that “quality begets quality.”

Winning the war for talent begins with a company’s commitment to quality leadership. Quality executive leadership will attract quality management, and quality management will in turn attract quality staff. Quality talent will produce quality process and work product which will in turn attract quality clients, investors, partners, vendors and suppliers. This quality driven value chain will produce a quality corporate culture and a lasting brand known for, you guessed it...its association to quality.

Quality is not a characteristic well served by fractionalized application. If you have a best in class compensation plan, but a low quality product offering you won’t attract quality clients or quality talent. Rather you’ll just attract mercenary employees looking to exploit a compensation plan and who will disappoint clients that will in turn seek solace from your competitors. The golden rule is never sacrifice quality, at any level or for any reason.

The bottom line is that a commitment to quality will position an organization such that they will have little trouble competing in the war for talent. If everything about your organization is built on the foundation of quality your culture will largely sell itself. My position is that someone should want to work for you more than you want them to. If you are spending too much time selling your company it means that you are either not speaking to the right individual, or the individual you’re speaking to doesn’t clearly understand the qualitative aspects of your organization. It is not uncommon for a company built on a foundation of quality to hear things like; “I didn’t think so-and-so was recruitable”, or “I didn’t think so-and-so would ever work for someone else again” or my personal favorite, “They must have paid a fortune to hire so-and-so”.

Unfortunately recruiting talent is only part of the equation. Once you recruit a talented individual you won’t keep them for long unless you properly train, motivate and mentor them. Proper assimilation of talent creates a bond of trust between the employee and the company creating a sense of loyalty that is not easily broken.





Assuming that you have created a company built on a foundation of quality that will attract top talent, adhering to the following 5 best practices will help you motivate and retain your talent:

1. **Recruiting:** Use best practices in your recruiting efforts. This doesn't just mean hire a top producer, but rather hire a quality individual that is a person of integrity and character. A new hire should be someone that has invested in themselves, made good career decisions, understands why they want to be a part of your organization, is an excellent communicator and a team player. Don't hire quickly based on gut feel, but rather take time in the interviewing process to let the prospective new hire get a feel for your culture and your company. Never oversell the company, in fact, disclose all the problems and weaknesses of the organization so that the new hire can make a good decision that won't be later unwound by inconsistent messaging or practices.
2. **Training:** Proper assimilation of a new employee during a transition to a new company is critical. In order to create a homogeneous culture and to have a continuity of messaging (both internally and externally) everyone, regardless of experience, needs to go through the same training process. Furthermore training and continuing education programs need to be available to encourage and stimulate professional growth and to keep an organization from falling prey to obsolescence. All new hires should have clearly defined career options and a career path with requirements and expectations being understood.
3. **Leadership:** It is important to mentor not manage, and to lead rather than govern. Everyone within an organization should be assigned a mentor who can coach, troubleshoot, inspire, motivate and lead an employee to achieve success. Clear lines of communication throughout the enterprise will prevent miscommunication from creating unnecessary problems. Poor performance is indicative of poor leadership. If you have continuous performance problems that cannot be corrected, then what you really have is a leadership problem.
4. **Support:** Retention is largely an issue of building a platform and culture that positions your employees for success. If your employees do not have the toolsets, administrative, marketing and leadership support necessary to successfully thrive in their individual role then you have set them up to fail and you won't be successful in your efforts to retain staff. A collaborative environment thrives on information sharing, business intelligence and knowledge management. If the platform isn't in place that supports these types of initiatives, then employees will look for companies that will.
5. **Recognition:** Recognition can and should come in many varieties. Everything from fixed and variable compensation, environment, advancement/promotion, perquisites, ownership/participation, internal and external awards and exposure to a simple thank you can be key elements in the retention of employees. If your culture doesn't reward your employees for their contributions they will seek an employer who will.

To identify, recruit, motivate, mentor and retain quality talent is not complex, but it is difficult in that it requires a significant commitment of time, money, energy and effort. It has been my experience that for many executives it is easier to complain about their current situation than to take the necessary steps to create the proper environment and culture. For those companies that are willing to make the commitment to quality you'll find no better return on investment than a thriving corporate culture comprised of talented, productive and loyal employees.

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