



Squad Goals: Assemble and Retain Your A-Team



TJ Bennett

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“

In the age of organizations wanting sustainability in productivity and profit, hiring is not about filling a vacancy, it's about **fulfilling a vision.**

Khalilah Olokunola

Senior Director

JFF Center for Justice and Economic Advancement

”

JFF is building a future that works – for everyone.

Our mission is to transform U.S. education and workforce systems to drive economic success for people, businesses and communities.

Our Vision and North Star

By 2033, **75 million Americans** facing barriers to economic advancement will **have quality jobs**.



Our impact

When we launched our ambitious mission in 2023, 30 million Americans in North Star populations were in quality jobs.

Today, that number has increased – but much work remains to be done.



The business case for building boldly

Before you build **revenue**,
you build **people**.

Before you build **systems**,
you build **teams**.



Agenda

Why Talent Is So Critical to Business Growth

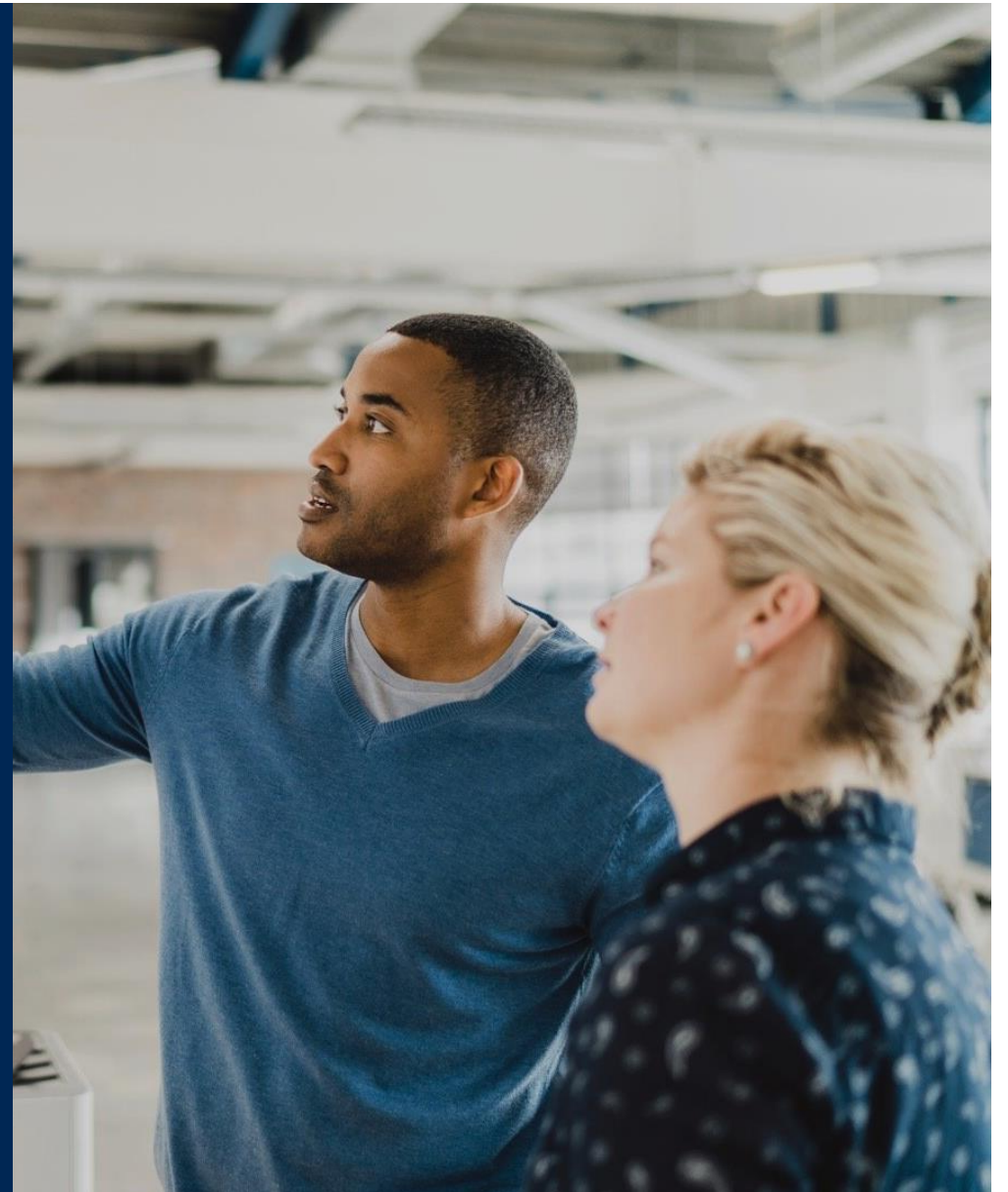
Advancing Your Talent Pipeline:
Tactics for Hiring Success

Taking the Lead: Become an Employer of Choice

Fireside Chat:
How I Built My A-Team with T.J. Bennett

Workshop: Building Your A-Team Action Plan

Final Q&A and Close



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Why talent is so critical to business growth

POLL

Are you planning to hire this year?

1. Open the event app
2. Click **Agenda**
3. Click **My Schedule** and then click the **current session name**, or add the current session to your schedule
4. Access the polls tab at the bottom of the page, click **Polls**
5. Select your answer, then click **Submit Response**

If you answered 'yes,' you're in good company

SMB hiring accounts for the majority of U.S. job creation

99.9%

SMBs make up 99.9%
of all U.S. firms

43%

SMBs make up 43% of
private sector employment

1 : 2

By 2030, over half the U.S.
workforce will be "CEOs"

Sources: Copy this box and use for footnotes or sources. Align to bottommost guide.

1. Small Business Administration

2. Note Example. Use a regular size number. Avenir Next Pro, 6 pt., Gray Accent 4.

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Hiring is your BIGGEST investment

As a small business, labor is likely the biggest line item in your budget

Each new hire requires resourcing, and creates an outsized impact on your organization



People decisions account for 70% of business costs.



The “true” cost of an employee is 1.25 to 1.4 times their base salary.



A single individual at an SMB has a magnified impact on the entire team’s success and morale.

Here's what's at stake



Risks of a Bad hire

- **Financial Drain:** Replacing a mis-hire can be extremely expensive, from 20% of a mid-level salary to over 200% for a CXO
- **Cultural Collision:** One misaligned team member can disrupt morale, momentum and your company culture
- **Time Trap:** Leaders spend countless hours managing issues that should have been avoided with better alignment
- **Customer Impact:** A poor hire in a customer-facing role can damage your brand faster than a bad review



Rewards of a Great hire

- **Time and Cost Savings:** High performers can be 400x more productive than peers (800% in complex roles)
- **Accelerated Growth:** The top 1% of employees produce 10% of outcomes for an organization, the top 5% create 26%
- **Inspiration by Proxy:** Employees that motivate others help unlock as much as two-thirds of colleagues' potential at work
- **Brand Halo:** Hiring top talent can also improve a company's image, reinforce its desired brand and attract talent

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Advancing your talent pipeline

Tactics for hiring success

Five workforce trends that businesses Can't ignore



Skilled worker shortages

Labor is tight, especially in skilled, hourly and loyal talent



Shifting skills

Degrees are decreasing in value; capability matters more



Spending (on turnover)

Replacing 1 worker = \$4K - \$10K



Second-chance talent

A loyal, overlooked goldmine



Storytelling culture

People don't join paychecks; they join purpose

Untapped sources of talent

Finding talent in today's labor market is like looking for a needle in a haystack ...

Small businesses can gain a competitive advantage by sourcing talent creatively from 'hidden' talent pools that others overlook.

- Secondary Labor Markets
- STARs Talent
- Frontline Workforce
- Non-Technical Incumbents
- Management Consultants and Systems Integrators
- Industry SMEs
- Educators/Teachers/Health Care Workers
- Apprenticeships and Co-Ops
- Community Colleges and Bootcamps
- Newcomer Populations
- Justice-Involved Populations

Fair chance and non-traditional pipelines

Fair Chance Hiring

- *Definition:* Giving individuals with arrest or conviction records a fair opportunity to work
- *Why it works:*
 - Reduces turnover (avg. tenure often longer)
 - Builds community goodwill
 - Access to untapped, motivated talent
 - Some states offer tax incentives and bonding programs

Skills-Based Hiring

- Focus on what someone *can do*, not just where they've *been*
- Tools like assessments, work samples, or internships can replace degree requirements

Non-Traditional Pipelines

- Community orgs, training programs and second-chance reentry groups
- Employee referrals from trusted hires
- Online talent platforms serving specific populations (justice-impacted, neurodivergent, returnships, missions men & women)

Why fair chance matters now

(And why it's a smart, strategic move in today's workforce)

Beyond backgrounds

- One in three Americans has a record, yet millions are locked out of employment due to outdated filters
- A person's potential should not be permanently defined by their past

Unlocking untapped talent

- Fair chance hiring opens access to a skilled, loyal, and often overlooked workforce
- Employers who look beyond the record gain access to high-retention, mission-aligned talent

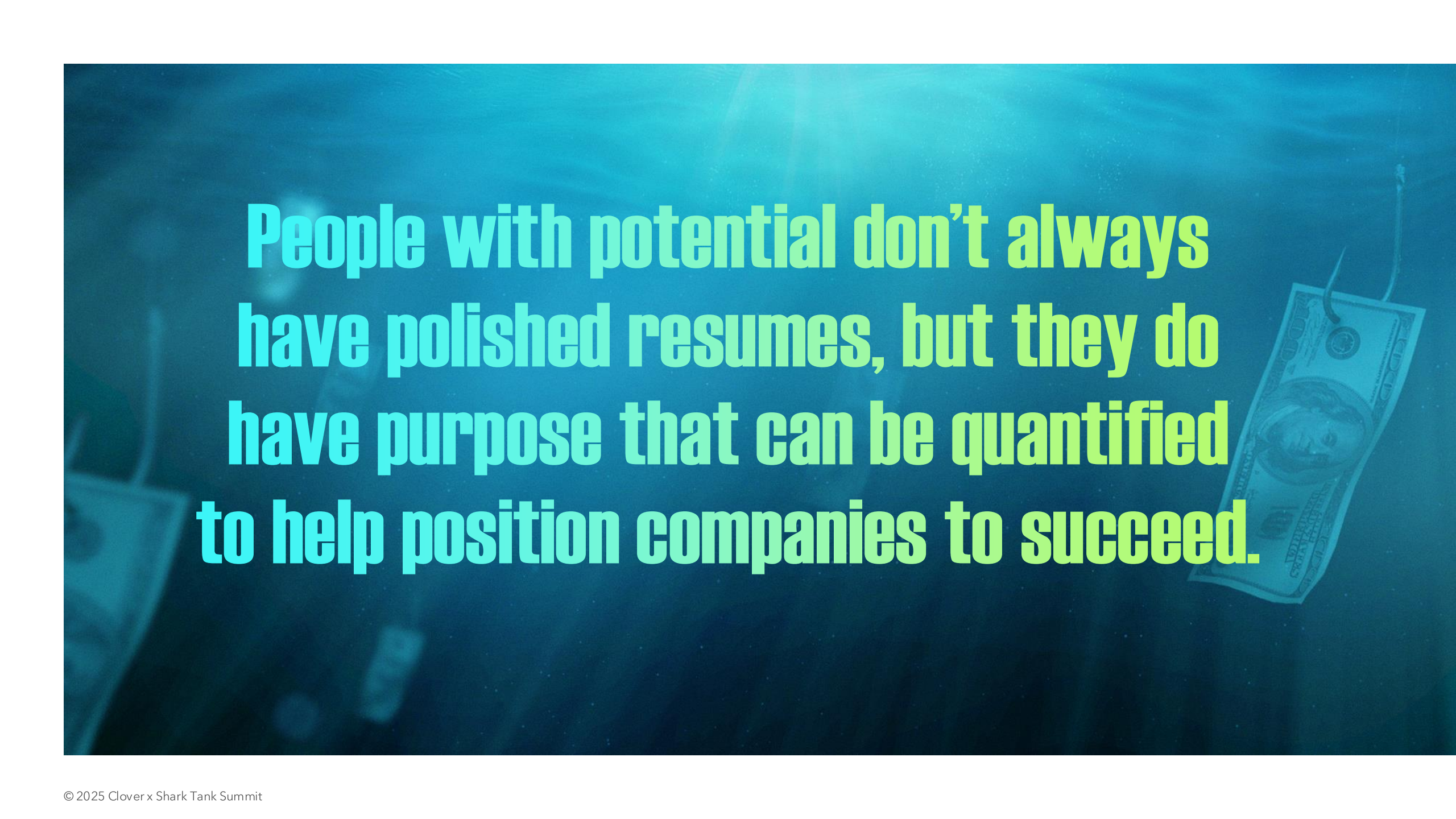
Inclusion = innovation

- Inclusive hiring isn't just the right thing, it's a competitive edge
- Companies that embrace second-chance talent experience culture gains, community trust and performance lift

Don't take our word for it...

Talent is everywhere.
Opportunity isn't.
That's the gap leaders
are called to close
and we call that gap
Fair Chance.



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People with potential don't always have polished resumes, but they do have purpose that can be quantified to help position companies to succeed.

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Taking the lead

Become an employer of choice

Five talent tactics that businesses can tap into

Redesign roles around skills, not just titles

Shift from static job descriptions to opportunity blueprints. This allows for more agile hiring, internal mobility and cross-functional team building, critical in lean environments.

Operationalize inclusive sourcing

Your hiring funnel needs to reflect modern talent realities. Tapping into fair chance, pre-apprenticeship, and community pipelines creates resilience and innovation.

Codify career pathways to drive retention

Employees leave when they can't see a future. Clear growth maps tied to performance and learning reduce turnover and increase engagement.

Invest in frontline leadership development

Middle managers are the culture carriers and the highest point of turnover influence. Equipping them to lead across difference and drive performance is non-negotiable.

Predict workforce risk with real-time metrics

Stop waiting for exit interviews. Use engagement data, stay interviews and absenteeism trends to detect dissatisfaction before it becomes departure.

Become an employer of choice from day one

Adopting Quality Jobs principles helps attract and retain top talent, yielding a competitive advantage for little to no additional cost.

Even with resource constraints, small businesses can:



Lead with purpose



Share growth opportunities




Create belonging through culture



Offer flexibility or trust-driven scheduling



Celebrate contributions publicly



**You've heard the trends
and ways to take the lead.
Now let's hear the truth.**

What does this look like in the real world?

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The listening session

Fireside chat with T.J. Bennett

How I built my A-team

“Behind every business breakthrough is a people breakthrough.”



Khalilah Olokunola

Sr. Director, JFF



TJ Bennett

CEO, Sole Play

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Building your A-team

The action plan

When should You hire up?

Determining the right time to hire a new employee can be tricky.

Wait too long to start hiring, and you risk stalling business growth ...

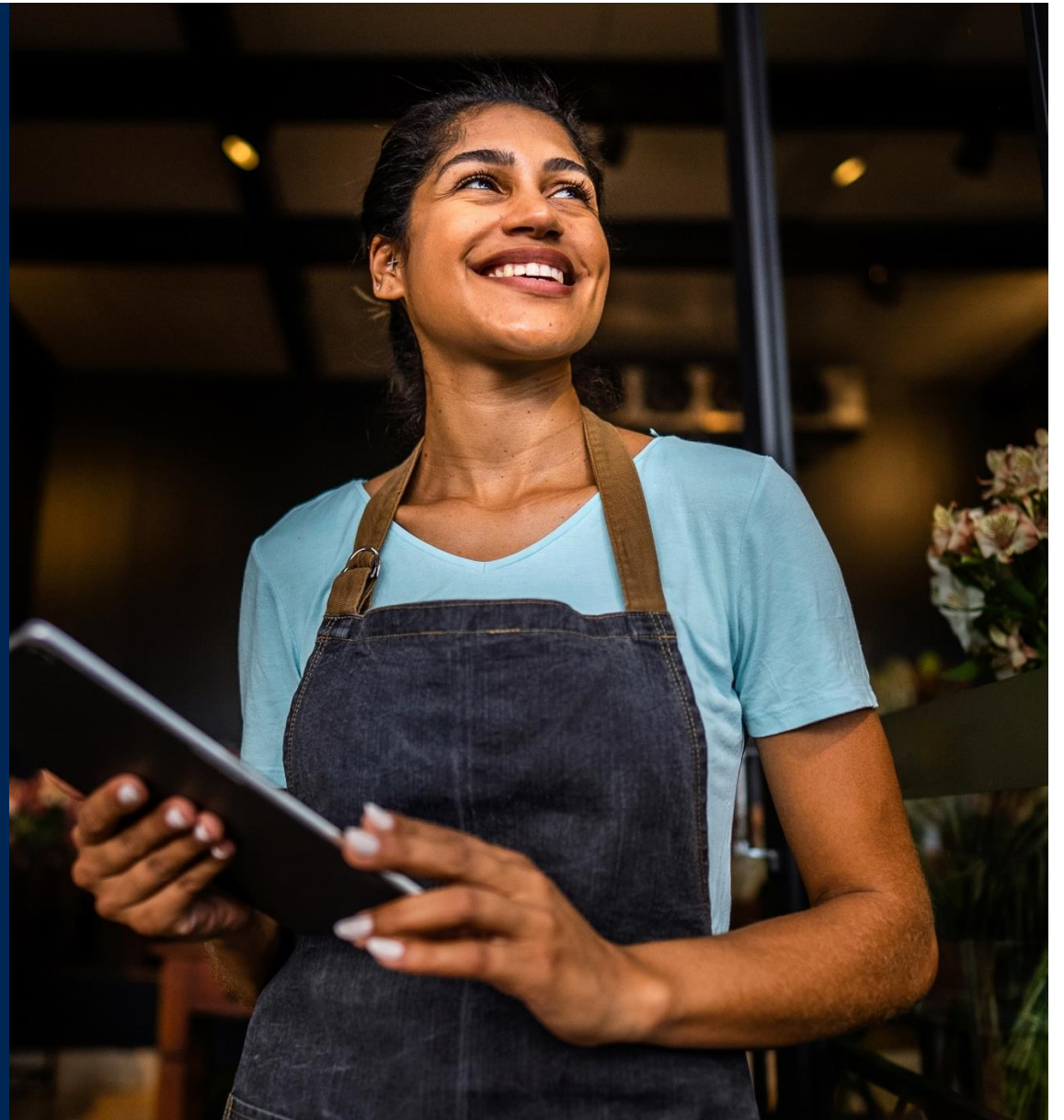
... hire too soon, and you may take a hit to your bottom line.

Given the significant investment to bring on staff, a critical question to ask is both **should** you hire, as well as **when**.

To optimize a hiring decision, ask yourself the following questions:

- Are there core capabilities at risk?
- Are you and your employees experiencing burnout?
- How much support do you need?
- Can AI do it?
- Is fractional or student labor an option?
- Do you have the cash flow?

**Identify the ROI
of hiring the
right person at
the right time**



Productivity that Pays

The right hires reach full performance 50% faster, reducing ramp-up time and increasing output per hour.

ROI: Faster ROI on onboarding investment, less downtime, more uptime.



Culture that Compounds

Right-fit hires don't just work,
they work well with others.

**ROI: Up to 33% higher
retention and a 21% boost
in team performance.**



Missteps to avoid muting momentum (in any stage)



Hiring without intent

No vision = no value



The "Perfect" candidate

Gold-plating job descriptions



Proxies over potential

Over-indexing on social signifiers of ability



Hiring for fit over force

Choosing comfort over capacity



Taking too long

Complicated recruitment processes



The 5-Point Checklist

- Assign a mentor
- Establish clear goals
- Welcome employees
- Remove roadblocks
- Encourages open dialogue



Belonging and culture immersion

- Welcome Experience
- Personalized Onboarding Journeys By Role
- Focus on Storytelling
- The Nuances of Names – The Airbnb Citizenship

NETFLIX

Freedom and Responsibility
Approach

- Culture Deck Introduction
- Empowerment from Day One
- Transparent Communication

Key takeaways



Google focuses on clarity, support and guidance with a simple checklist.



Airbnb emphasizes culture immersion and emotional connection.



Netflix promotes empowerment and transparency.

Key takeaways

Now that we've unpacked the key takeaways ...

Let's take a few minutes to build your Key Chain – the intentional links you'll use to unlock potential in your team.

Ask yourself

- What will I focus on first to move the needle?
- What values and practices will I emphasize in how I hire and lead?
- What strengths or wins can I promote internally to build culture and momentum?

Jot down 1-2 “keys” you’re committing to carry forward and why they matter right now.

We'll use these as part of your final A-Team Action Plan.

An underwater scene with a blue-green tint. Sunlight rays filter down from the top. Several US dollar bills are floating in the water, appearing out of focus. On the right side, a US hundred dollar bill is more clearly visible, showing the portrait of Benjamin Franklin.

**From return on investment
to return on intention**

Change the narrative

The Plan

The Platform and Program

The Candidate Persona

Opportunities

- Identify Internal SWOTs
- Identify Areas of Impact
- Identify Areas of Improvement
- Identify Blind Spots

Opportunity blueprint

Growth



Benefits



Mission | Vision | Values

**Professional
development**



Location



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Opportunity blueprint formula

Mission + Milestones + Mindset + Must-haves =
The right hire

Value mapping



Core Organizational Values



Desired Candidate Traits



Behavioral Indicators



Skills and Competencies

“

Set your sights on candidates
who don't just meet standards but
also mirror your mission.

Khalilah Olokunola

Senior Director

JFF Center for Justice and Economic Advancement

”

Candidate persona

About

We are currently seeking a digital marketing specialist with both problem-solving and analytical skills who has the ability to adapt in situations that may periodically occur in the workplace

Candidate Persona

This persona encapsulates a candidate who is not only skilled in digital marketing tactics and strategy but also prepared to handle the instability and challenges described in the job context

Location

Anywhere

Job Title

Digital Marketing

Personality

Analytical



Adaptable



Problem-solving



Communication



Skills

Public Speaking



Leadership experience



Goals

- To stabilize and grow the digital marketing presence of a company experiencing significant transitional challenges
- To innovate and lead digital strategies that align with the overarching goals of the company, ensuring a cohesive brand message
- To harness data-driven insights to optimize campaigns and maximize ROI

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Sharing and reflection

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**From intention to assembly –
Who's on your A-team?**

Every business needs its own A-team



Hannibal

(The Leader Strategist)

- **In the show:**
The mastermind who always had a plan and kept the team focused
- **For your team:**
This is you (the founder/CEO). The visionary who sets direction, solves problems under pressure and rallies the crew with a clear strategy

Face

(The Charmer/Sales Pro)

- **In the show:**
Persuasive, always closing the deal
- **For your team:**
Your business development and sales leader, the one who lands clients, partnerships or investors with charm and credibility

B.A. Baracus

(The Builder/Operations Muscle)

- **In the show:**
The tough, no-nonsense mechanic who could build anything
- **For your team:**
This is your operations lead or product/service delivery manager, the one who makes things work (literally and figuratively)

Murdock

(The Creative Problem Solver)

- **In the show:**
Wild, unpredictable and brilliant with unconventional solutions
- **For your team:**
Think marketing or creative lead, the person who can think differently, create bold campaigns and innovate under constraints

Amy

(The Connector/Media Voice)

- **In the show:**
The journalist who helped with publicity and intel
- **For your team:**
Your brand and communications champion, ensuring your story is told and your reputation grows

Three tiers of the A-team framework

Let's help participants categorize their A-team thinking.

Foundational roles

(Ops, Admin, Virtual Assistant, Bookkeeping) -
Keep the lights on

Customer-facing roles

(Sales, Support, Service) - Shape experience

Culture carriers and growth anchors

(People Ops, Marketing, Project Mgmt) -
Shape identity and scale

Quick self-check

Are you hiring to fill a gap, or to fuel growth?

Is your next hire someone who supports you, scales you, or sustains the team?

Business stage	Your mission	Most common first hires	What to look for
Start-up (0-2 yrs)	Build the foundation and protect your time	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Virtual Assistant• Admin Assistant• Bookkeeper• Social Media• Customer Support	Reliability, versatility, values-fit (can wear multiple hats)
Growth (2-5 yrs)	Scale operations and strengthen your culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Operations Manager• Marketing Lead-sales• BD Rep	People who brings systems, strategy and support the vision
Expansion (5+ yrs)	Multiply what's working and sustain momentum	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• HR or People Ops• Finance Lead• Department Heads	Team builders who can grow others and align with long-term goals

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Let's go on a hiring adventure

The scenario: Urgent hire

You run a fast-growing bakery. Your head baker quits two days before your biggest catering event. You need to hire fast, but don't want to hire wrong.

Question

Where do you post the role first?

Options

- A. National job board like Indeed
- B. Instagram or TikTok (your biz social)
- C. A local nonprofit supporting returning citizens
- D. Ask your current team for referrals

The scenario: Urgent hire

You run a fast-growing bakery. Your head baker quits two days before your biggest catering event. You need to hire fast, but don't want to hire wrong.

Question

Where do you post the role first?

Results

- A. National job board like Indeed
 - **73 applicants. Takes you 6 hours to screen. No-show for the interview**
- B. Instagram or TikTok (your biz social)
 - **You get 3 DMs, one is a past customer who bakes part-time**
- C. A local nonprofit supporting returning citizens
 - **The nonprofit sends 2 pre-vetted, ServSafe-certified candidates**
- D. Ask your current team for referrals
 - **You get 1 solid referral, but they're only available weekends**

The scenario: Urgent hire

You run a fast-growing bakery. Your head baker quits two days before your biggest catering event. You need to hire fast, but don't want to hire wrong.

Lesson

Where you look shapes who you find.
If your hiring is urgent, your sourcing can't be lazy.

Tool Tie-in: Hiring Readiness Form

The scenario: The resume red flag

You're hiring a front desk lead. A strong candidate aces the interview but they have a criminal record from 7 years ago. It's unrelated to the role.

Question

What do you do?

Options

- A. Disqualify them immediately
- B. Ask about it during the second interview
- C. Ignore it, it's irrelevant to job function
- D. Conduct a formal individualized assessment

The scenario: The resume red flag

Question

What do you do?

Results

- A. Disqualify them immediately
 - **You lose out on someone who had 5 years of glowing customer service experience**
- B. Ask about it during the second interview
 - **You ask respectfully, and they're transparent. You hire them, and they thrive**
- C. Ignore it, it's irrelevant to job function
 - **You skip the conversation, which creates trust issues later**
- D. Conduct a formal individualized assessment
 - **You follow a process, document it, and hire confidently**

The scenario: The resume red flag

Lesson

Being values-led doesn't mean being vague.
It means being consistent, compliant and clear.

Tool Tie-in: Fair Chance Hiring Matrix

The scenario: The ghosted offer

You finally found your perfect hire.
You send the offer. They accept...
then never show up.

Question

What do you do differently next time?

Options

- A. Increase the pay or benefits
- B. Shorten the hiring process
- C. Improve communication between offer + onboarding
- D. Ask your current team what made them stay

The scenario: The ghosted offer

Question

What do you do differently next time?

Results

- A. Increase the pay or benefits
 - **You up the offer next time, but still get ghosted, money didn't fix it**
- B. Shorten the hiring process
 - **You speed things up, but rush into another poor match**
- C. Improve communication between offer + onboarding
 - **You stay connected with post-offer text updates, meet-the-team call; they show up**
- D. Ask your current team what made them stay
 - **You learn that culture, not compensation, kept people loyal**

The scenario: The ghosted offer

Lesson

Retention doesn't start on Day 1. It starts the moment they say yes.

Tool Tie-in: Hiring Readiness Checklist + Onboarding Sheet

The scenario: The culture clash

You hire a super-skilled operations manager. But within three weeks, your team morale drops. People are tense. The vibe has changed.

Question

What's your move?

Options

- A. Fire them and start over
- B. Give them feedback and coaching
- C. Talk to your team to understand the issue
- D. Reflect on your own onboarding and expectations

The scenario: The culture clash

Question

What's your move?

Results

- A. Fire them and start over
 - **You lose the hire and start from scratch, but culture stabilizes**
- B. Give them feedback and coaching
 - **They adjust but only after realizing what wasn't working**
- C. Talk to your team to understand the issue
 - **Your team shares what shifted and gives you ideas to support better integration**
- D. Reflect on your own onboarding and expectations
 - **You realize you never explained the "how" behind your company values**

The scenario: The culture clash

Lesson

Culture isn't created; it's curated. You have to protect what you've built

Tool Tie-in

- Skills and Values-based Interview Questions
- Employee Persona/Opportunity Blueprint
- Hiring Readiness Checklist

Building your A-team action plan

People

- Who's on your team now?
- Who's missing?
- What skills, culture adds or roles are essential this quarter or year?

Pipeline

- Where are you looking, and who are you leaving out?
- How will you develop and deepen your pipeline?

Practice

- What's one hiring or retention habit you can improve or replace to better support your values and vision?

Take five minutes to create your own A-team Action Plan!



“

I pity the fool who makes
talent an afterthought.

Mr. T (probably)

”

Thank You!

REVIEW US



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in the Clover x
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Summit app

Tap "start survey"



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