SHRM Linkage

The War for Talent is Shifting

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Leaders are operating in a talent environment shaped by fragmentation.

Younger employees experience higher levels of loneliness, weaker connection to the workplace, and expect greater flexibility in how work fits into their lives. Despite progress, women remain underrepresented at higher levels of leadership. And differences in access to digital skills, particularly around AI, are creating a divergence in which senior leaders bring experience but lack the speed and efficiency of junior talent.

These trends require leaders to work at two levels at once: understanding people as individuals, then translating that understanding into how they choose and support talent at scale.

01 See

Address the individual

Eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds report the highest levels of loneliness and the greatest difficulty forming community. Many struggle to bring their whole selves to work.

Acknowledge mental health as a leadership constraint, not a personal issue. Loneliness, anxiety, and lack of community directly affect resilience, learning, and future leadership capacity. Ignoring these conditions weakens the leadership pipeline.

Get underneath who individuals are, what motivates them, and what barriers shape their choices.

> "Everyone wants you to know me, grow me, connect with me, see me."
>
> **Kelli Valade**

Identify potential early and act on it before career ambition is fully formed. Many high-potential individuals do not yet see a path for themselves until someone else makes it visible. Waiting for people to signal readiness delays development and narrows the pipeline.

> "I've had experience with leaders where I felt I was the only person in the room and it changed everything for me to feel seen and validated."
>
> **Kelli Valade**

CASE STUDY

Sponsor Potential

When Kelli Valade began her career in the restaurant industry, she did not have a defined path. Advancement was not something she had mapped out for herself.

A small group of managers and colleagues changed her trajectory when they noticed something in her before she did. They named strengths she had not articulated and encouraged her to consider possibilities she had not imagined.

To lead at scale, consider **Gallup's Five Elements of Well-Being** to translate individual needs into organizational design:

1. Career Wellbeing: Liking what you do daily and feeling engaged with your work.
2. Social Wellbeing: Having strong relationships, love, and support in your life.
3. Financial Wellbeing: Managing your economic life effectively to reduce stress.
4. Physical Wellbeing: Having good health and enough energy to get things done daily.
5. Community Wellbeing: Feeling safe, involved, and connected to your local area.

Balance care with performance discipline

Expectations of work have evolved across generations. Baby Boomers prioritized work above all else. Gen X sought balance. Millennials normalized it and pressured companies to have a purpose beyond profit.

Gen Z now looks to organizations for alignment on values: what the company stands for, how it contributes to society, and where it draws its lines. For senior leaders, this creates tension, particularly in public companies where taking a stance can be consequential.

Leaders are not expected to be therapists. The work must get done, and the organization needs to remain profitable. Seek opportunities to make space for creativity and purpose beyond day-to-day tasks. Provide structured ways for individuals to raise their hand for additional responsibility, learning, or stretch assignments.

When leaders hold both care and accountability clearly, people tend to respect the outcome, even when decisions are difficult.

CASE STUDY

Promote On-Site Wellbeing

Kelli Valade restructured leadership conferences around concrete dimensions of well-being. Each day focused on a specific element.

Physical well-being was addressed through on-site fitness options, including yoga, running, and spin sessions. Social well-being was built through deliberate team connection and shared activities. Financial well-being was treated as a practical leadership issue, with external experts brought in to help managers better understand personal finance and retirement planning.

02 Select

Choose people for how they operate

As pace accelerates and uncertainty increases, past titles and credentials are no longer reliable predictors of effectiveness. Leaders need people who can adapt in real time and navigate ambiguity. Selecting for these capabilities requires moving beyond résumé-based assessment.

In interviews, ask candidates to describe their strengths, what peers and managers would say about them, and what they need to work on. The ability to speak concretely about one's own gaps is a strong indicator of self-awareness.

The **Situation–Behavior–Outcome** framework provides a practical way to assess how candidates operate in complex conditions. Ask candidates to describe specific situations, the actions they took, and the outcomes achieved to reveal how they respond when information is incomplete and authority is unclear.

Listen for evidence of stepping outside formal scope, adapting under pressure, and learning through action rather than following prescribed paths. Even when experience is adjacent to the role available, behavior-based assessment allows you to identify situational leadership potential.

This approach requires discipline. Candidates rarely offer specificity without prompting. Slow the conversation, push for detail, and probe until the actual behavior is clear.

03 Support

Set an example for success

Many people are held back by belief systems about what success looks like and whether they can achieve it. This is especially true for women leaders, who are less likely to raise their hand for advancement, even when qualified.

> "What were the messages you heard growing up? Therefore, what's your belief system about what it looks like to be in the working world?"
>
> **Kelli Valade**

Train young leaders to tell their story in terms of strengths, opportunities, and the traits they bring to their roles. Help them to see stories and role models that make success imaginable.

Extend support beyond those experiencing barriers. Leaders with positional power need to understand the invisible constraints shaping others' choices and experiences. Without this shared understanding, the burden of change remains on individuals rather than the company.

Focus first on quick wins that reduce known barriers. For example, explicitly state in job postings that candidates should apply even if they do not meet every requirement. But isolated initiatives are insufficient. Support must be coherent through critical moments such as interviews, role transitions, and stretch assignments.

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