



The competition for frontline workers

Insights from Deloitte

In the first months of 2020, a strong economic outlook and low unemployment rate had employers competing for high-quality frontline workers. But then came the pandemic, and hiring ground to a halt. Entire sectors responded by laying off or furloughing large numbers of frontline employees. [Unemployment for accommodation and food services workers](#) went from a pre-pandemic 6% to 37% in March 2020. The Transportation, Hospitality & Services (THS) sector, hit especially hard, would struggle through two more years of lockdown.

Meanwhile, frontline workers still on the job persevered, working for low wages while dealing with equally stressed and exhausted customers. Burnout, health concerns, and the pressures of childcare shortages led many to leave the workforce entirely.

According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, frontline workers in hospitality and food services have voluntary turnover rates that peaked in summer 2021 at 7% or nearly double that of the average private sector worker.

Emerging from pandemic-related shutdowns, businesses that had weathered the pandemic soon realized that talent was the next big challenge. Companies struggled to fill positions, posting help-wanted signs everywhere from shop windows to billboards to bathroom stalls. While wages were slow to rise, many offered signing bonuses or refer-a-friend programs. But industries that relied on hourly labor, including trucking, delivery, airlines, hospitality, car rentals, and restaurants, soon realized that their old tactics for finding, recruiting, and hiring workers were falling short.

It is clear that to win in today's talent ecosystem and attract crucial frontline workers, hospitality and transportation companies must take a fresh approach to recruiting and hiring, with tactics like these:

Fill skill gaps, not open positions

In industries that have traditionally focused on filling standardized job slots, some organizations are shifting to a skills-based talent strategy. **Traditional hiring practices** focus on defining roles, then filling them by posting job openings. Businesses source and evaluate talent based on minimum qualifications such as experience, education, and certification.

Skills-based hiring, by contrast, focuses on posting jobs to fill evolving skills gaps, and evaluating talent based on human-centered skills and behaviors.

So what does a skills-based approach look like in practice? First, you must identify and be able to evaluate the skills required in each role. For instance, to succeed in their jobs, front-desk agents need customer service and interpersonal skills; baggage handlers need the strength to repeatedly lift 50 pounds throughout the day. The focus when taking a skills-based hiring approach is less on experience and education and more on the technical or behavioral proficiency required for a given role.

By putting aside experience-and education-based requirements and focusing on what's needed to do the job, skills-based hiring can open up access to a larger, more diverse pool of previously overlooked talent.

Create an enticing brand for employees

Another way to attract frontline workers in a highly competitive job market is to make your organization their employer of choice. And to differentiate your company from the competition and attract interest from the best possible candidates, you need to put yourself in their shoes. Why should a candidate join your organization and not others? What inspires workers here to do well in their jobs? What makes your company unique? Spend time clearly defining the benefits of joining your organization—aka your employee value proposition (EVP).

EVP is more than pay scales, benefit packages, and vacation time. While all of these factors are very important to hourly workers, for many candidates [flexibility and control over their schedules](#)—when and where they work—is a top consideration. Other aspects of EVP that can help you attract candidates in a crowded marketplace include clear opportunities for career advancement, a physically and emotionally healthy work environment, and the unique aspects of your company culture.

A large hospitality company recently launched a campaign focused on elements of EVP including clear career paths, opportunities to build community, and the ability to find purpose in one's work. The campaign showed prospective employees what their life at the company could look like, present and future, and how dozens of their

Simplify (and accelerate) with tech-enabled hiring processes

Lengthy manual hiring processes frustrate applicants and increase your risk of losing talent to competitors. Today, a fast, smooth, and easy-to-apply recruiting experience is table stakes for attracting frontline hourly workers, used to always-on-technology, who expect near-real-time hiring decisions. To compete, you need a tech-enabled hiring process that's up to the task.

- **Automation.** Consider automating application submission and review, interview scheduling, and candidate follow-up, offers, and hiring. Fewer manual tasks mean faster overall time to offer, and more likelihood of hiring a great applicant before someone else does. What's your goal—hire in a day, an hour, a minute? Find out what will attract candidates, then identify the automation that can get you there.
- **Gamification.** Make the application process more engaging by providing a break from the monotony of job hunting. Gamified strategies let you engage candidates in a creative way, for example, creating a simulated work environment where candidates attempt the tasks they could do if hired. You can reach a younger demographic, build brand awareness, and foster relationships while providing insights into candidates' abilities.
- **Text to apply.** Place your keywords and phone numbers in job ads, then invite candidates to apply via the go-to communication platform of SMS. Quick, automated responses can kick off a streamlined, friendly experience for candidates while reducing time to hire.

global colleagues have built interesting and diverse careers. Other businesses are framing EVPs with a focus on charting career paths that make it possible for workers to move from operators to owners, or from the front line to management roles.

Addressing the current landscape of frontline workers

To keep your company ahead of the competition, hiring as usual is not an option. To win the competition for frontline workers, you need to shift your perspective and find ways to crack open and accelerate hiring. Need convincing? Consider a beauty retailer that decided to hire the first person who applies for any job in its distribution center—no interview, no background check, no drug test. When a job is available, candidates simply answer three yes-or-no questions on the company's website, and

they're hired. The results were striking: With other metrics holding steady, monthly turnover for distribution center jobs dropped by 60%.

Ready to reimagine recruiting? Give us a call to continue the conversation.

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