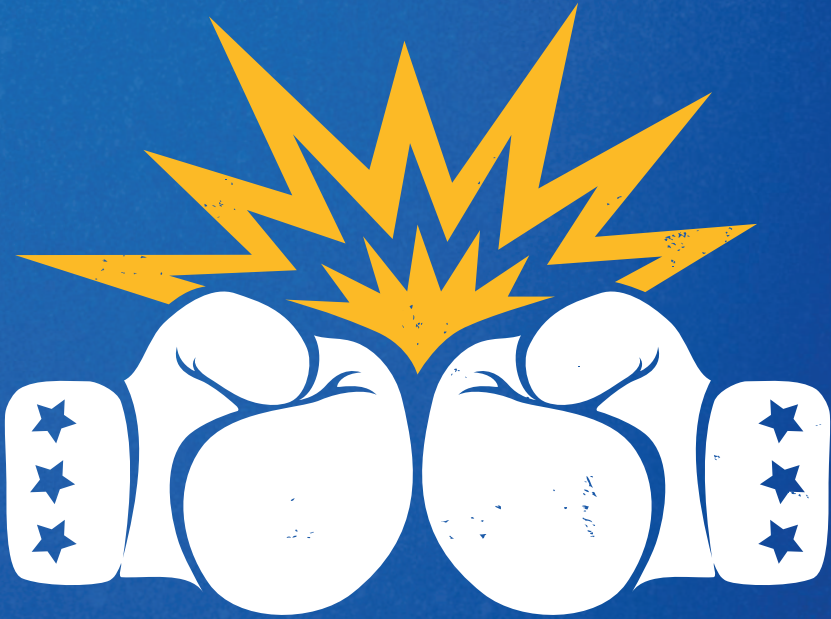


Richard Triggs

★ Author of *Uncover the Hidden Job Market* ★



WINNING

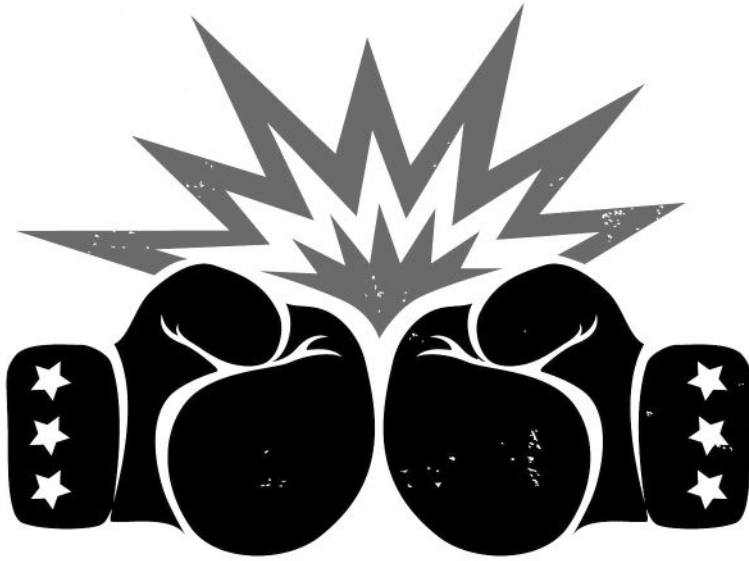
THE **WAR** FOR

TALENT

How to attract and retain top performers

Richard Triggs

★ Author of *Uncover the Hidden Job Market* ★



WINNING
THE WAR FOR
TALENT

How to attract and retain top performers

First published in 2024 by Richard Triggs

© Richard Triggs 2024

The moral rights of the author have been asserted

All rights reserved. Except as permitted under the *Australian Copyright Act 1968* (for example, a fair dealing for the purposes of study, research, criticism or review), no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, communicated or transmitted in any form or by any means without prior written permission.

All inquiries should be made to the author.

www.richardtriggs.com.au.

A catalogue entry for this book is available from the National Library of Australia.

ISBN: 978-1-923007-80-2

Printed in Australia by Pegasus

Book production and text design by Publish Central

Cover design by Julia Kuris

The paper this book is printed on is certified as environmentally friendly.

Disclaimer

The material in this publication is of the nature of general comment only, and does not represent professional advice. It is not intended to provide specific guidance for particular circumstances and it should not be relied on as the basis for any decision to take action or not take action on any matter which it covers. Readers should obtain professional advice where appropriate, before making any such decision. To the maximum extent permitted by law, the author and publisher disclaim all responsibility and liability to any person, arising directly or indirectly from any person taking or not taking action based on the information in this publication.

Contents

Firstly, a very big thank you to ...	vii
Introduction: Where Buddha meets Bill Gates	1
Welcome and congratulations	1
So who am I?	3
How to get the most out of this book	4
The war for talent, the great resignation and other myths	6
Part I: Attracting top performers	
Chapter 1: To be, or not to be (the recruiter of your vacancy)?	15
Using a recruitment agency	16
Using internal resources to recruit	20
How best to work with external recruiters	24
Chapter 2: ‘Would you like to dance?’: when should you start a recruitment process?	31
Always be recruiting	32
Chapter 3: Build it and they will come: positioning you and your business as an Employer of Choice	35
11 factors potential candidates will consider	36
Building your personal brand as a hiring manager of choice	37
Building the executive team’s (and board’s) brand	41
Building your vision and values to position you as an Employer of Choice	42

Chapter 4: Begin with the end in mind: briefing a role for success	47
A brief must be unique to your company and circumstances	48
A brief must involve key stakeholders	50
A brief must specify required experience and attributes	52
Why would this person choose to work for you?	53
Performance profiles	54
Chapter 5: Now comes the fun part: sourcing the best talent	67
Referrals	68
Advertising	68
LinkedIn	74
Headhunting	77
Hiring for true diversity rather than just ticking a box	81
Chapter 6: ‘It’s lovely to meet you’: engaging candidates into your process	91
Narrowing the field	92
Chapter 7: Oprah, eat your heart out: interviewing excellence	99
Subsequent interviews	107
Chapter 8: Buyer beware: psychometric assessments, references and other checks	113
Psychometric testing	114
Criminal and financial background checks	116
Formal qualifications and professional history checks	116
Reference checks	117
Chapter 9: Seal the deal: offer management, counteroffers and employment contracts	125
Salary negotiation	125
Counteroffers	128
Employment contracts	130

Part II: Retaining top performers

Chapter 10: A brief segue to chat about consciousness	135
A false view of reality	135
The universe is reflective, reflexive and determined by intention	140
The three states of consciousness	141
The reticular activating system	145
Chapter 11: The fish rots from the head down: setting the tone from the top	149
The Four Cardinal Virtues	150
Chapter 12: The King and the Jester: a leadership parable	157
The King and the Jester	158
Chapter 13: Can you have your cake and eat it too? The fine balance between love and accountability	161
Chapter 14: Onboarding: the first 90 days	167
Getting off on the right foot	167
‘Hire well, and fire fast’	171
Chapter 15: Current reality versus preferred reality: a framework for ongoing performance management	175
Putting it into action	182
Chapter 16: Implementing a high-performance culture through love and accountability	189
‘What are the three reasons you love working here?’	190
Exploring a preferred reality	191
Current reality	193
How it plays out	197

Chapter 17: Performance managing teams, managing up, and managing external stakeholders	205
Managing teams	205
Managing up	207
Managing external stakeholders	209
Chapter 18: What is your preferred reality?	213
Your preferred reality	214
Chapter 19: ‘Bon voyage’: knowing how to say goodbye	221
‘Bon voyage’	221
Chapter 20: We have reached the end	225
Let’s do a quick recap	226

Firstly, a very big thank you to ...

Although I am the author of this book, so much of the information I have presented comes from the tremendous mentors, bosses and coaches I have been fortunate to have during my career. So in no particular order, with the absolute deepest gratitude, thank you to Colin Clerke, Rex Urwin and Andrew Griffiths for your fantastic support over the years. You are all amazing coaches and friends, and I have benefitted so much from working with you.

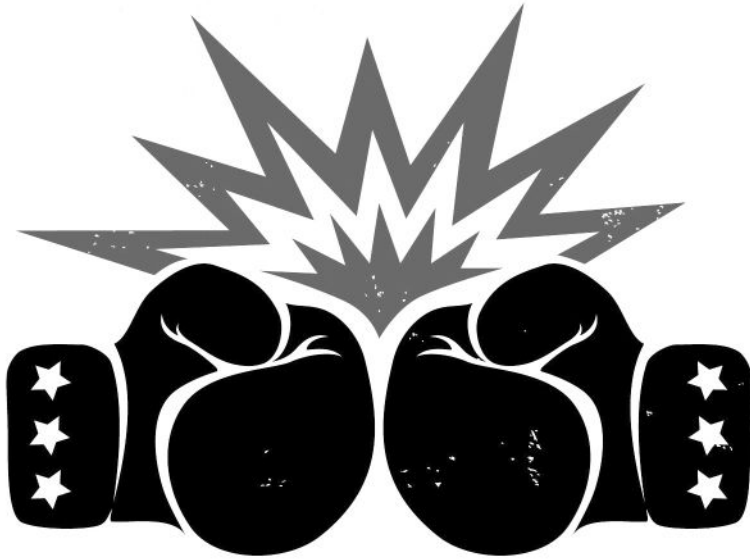
Thank you to Adrian Luus for coming into my life a few years ago, working with me as a psychotherapist and subsequently training me also. Adrian, his wife Bonita and son Shane, and the extended Sacred Healing community, have become so important to me, and I look forward to remaining great friends for the rest of our lives.

Thank you to two amazing bosses in particular that I learned so much from, Peter King and Bruce Davidson. What I learned from both of you in relation to leadership has served me so well in my career.

Thank you to Lou Adler, who I have referenced many times in this book for his recruitment genius. The training I received from you so many years ago in performance-based hiring remains my preferred methodology and the foundation of Arete Executive's success.

Thank you to my amazing team at Arete Executive. I am so proud to work with such skilled professionals on a daily basis, and of the fantastic work we do together, helping others and ourselves realise our full potential.

And of course, thank you finally to my beautiful children Archie and Tallulah, my mum Ruth, and also to Fiona for your love and support.



WINNING
THE WAR FOR
TALENT

Introduction

Where Buddha meets Bill Gates

Welcome and congratulations

Writing a book is like inviting someone to come and live inside your head for a little while. Putting deeply personal thoughts into the world for people to read is quite daunting. So let me start by saying welcome to my mind. I hope that for however long you choose to hang out here you find it interesting, thought-provoking and hopefully a bit of fun too. And secondly, congratulations on picking up this book and investing time to learn new skills to enhance your own businesses, careers and lives in general. I know your time is very valuable, and I greatly appreciate that you are spending some of it with yours truly.

Let's chat about Sally and Mike for a little bit.

Sally is the CEO of a large professional services company. She loves her job, and her board loves her. Yet she is constantly feeling frustrated and anxious about her ability to meet the outcomes required by her key stakeholders. She seems to be working longer and longer hours just trying to get everything done. She desperately needs to grow her team, yet her HR department is producing underwhelming shortlists of candidates for mission-critical roles. Their excuse is that there's 'a war for talent' and good people are simply too hard to find.



Mike is a successful business owner who has seen his entrepreneurial idea rapidly grow into an exciting and dynamic company. He has a clear vision for the future; however, he's concerned about staff turnover and the constant stop/start distraction of having to replace employees. When he meets with other business owners, talk often goes to the 'great resignation' and the fact that employees, especially those of the younger generation, have no loyalty anymore.

Recruitment does not have to be a burden

Organisations live or die based on the quality of their people. You can provide the highest quality, most innovative and exciting products or services, but if you can't attract and retain top performers, your business is never going to achieve its full potential. Fundamental to leading any kind of organisation is the recruitment, performance management and retention of employees. There's simply no way around it unless you want to be a sole trader.

So why are many business leaders terrible at this most fundamental task? How many times have you heard someone say, 'if it wasn't for staff, my job would be easy'? You may even have said this yourself.

Don't you think it's time to invest in educating yourself and the hiring managers in your business to develop these skills? Wouldn't it be fantastic to actually view recruiting as a fun and exciting part of your job, rather than a burden? Imagine each member of your team being fully engaged and performing to their highest potential, both individually and collectively. Imagine being able to say with complete honesty, 'my job is easy, because of my fantastic staff'.

This book has been written with that exact outcome in mind. It provides a simple, practical methodology to hire and retain top performers. **This book is for busy leaders who don't have time for convoluted and academic theories and models, they just want results.**



A couple of elephants

Let's briefly address a couple of elephants in the room before we go any further.

Firstly, a lot of you will say, and believe, that because you have hired many people in your career (in some cases it could be hundreds), you know all there is to be learned about recruitment and retention through the 'school of hard knocks'. However, my favourite saying is 'the truth is the result'. If you still have hard-to-fill roles, or good people still leave your business, there is definitely more for you to learn and implement.

The second elephant in the room is that because you are so busy, and have far more urgent, mission-critical tasks to perform, you have delegated the role of recruitment to your HR team (or to third-party recruiters) and the role of retention to your line managers. After all, that's what they are paid for, right? Again, even if they have impeccable formal qualifications and extensive career experience, if you still have hard-to-fill roles, or good people still leave your business, as the ultimate leader (even if that is just for your division or department) it's your responsibility to get it right.

So who am I?

So who am I to write this book? Well, after a short-lived career following high school as an aspiring rock star (I toured Australia playing guitar in bands for four years), I went back to university and completed a Bachelor of Commerce degree, majoring in Marketing and Human Resources. I then worked in the building services industry in sales and then operational management roles. At 26, I took on my first leadership role with a team of approximately 100 staff, and by age 30 I was leading a team of over 750 people, dispersed all over Australia.

In 2002, while completing an Executive MBA, I decided I wanted a career change. I went to see a recruiter I had previously been a client of, who suggested I might actually enjoy a career in recruitment myself. The rest, as they say, is history. After working for the largest privately owned recruitment company in Queensland, including sitting on their board as an Executive Director, I started my own executive recruitment company, Arete Executive, in 2009. I would conservatively say we have placed over 2000 senior executives and board directors in roles throughout Australia.

I've also coached and mentored hundreds of CEOs and business owners in relation to their careers, recruitment and leadership through a variety of programmes, including my Sounding Board mastermind groups.

At the same time, I've always had a fascination with Eastern philosophy and personal and spiritual development. In my 30s I lived one weekend per month for four years in the largest community of Buddhist monks and nuns in the Southern Hemisphere, called the Chenrezig Institute. There I completed an extremely intense four-year course in Buddhism and actually at one stage considered becoming a monk. I've done many other retreats and courses over the years which I believe have given me some unique perspectives around business and leadership, which I'm going to share with you in this book. To steal a phrase from my very good friend and mentor Colin Clerke, it's like 'where Buddha meets Bill Gates'.

How to get the most out of this book

The purpose of this book is to educate you on how best to recruit for your business yourself. The book is divided into two parts. In the first part, focused on attracting top performers, you're going to learn how to:

- create and promote your personal brand and your organisation's brand as an Employer of Choice
- develop briefs to ensure you consistently recruit the right kind of people for your roles
- run a comprehensive campaign to source the very best performers, rather than just relying on responses to advertisements
- interview impeccably to ensure you are selecting the highest quality of talent
- best manage the offer process to secure new employees and avoid counteroffers.

In the second part, focused on retaining top performers, you're going to learn how to:

- understand the psychology of performance and what traits can both positively and negatively affect performance
- establish a culture of performance from the very top down
- onboard new employees into this culture from the very first day
- use a performance management framework, called the Preferred Reality model, to drive performance and accountability across individuals, teams, other stakeholders and yourself.

By the time you have finished reading, I guarantee that no matter your starting point, you will have significantly improved your game in relation to hiring and leading high-performance employees. You will be positively excited about your next hiring exercise. Through implementing the performance management tools you'll learn about in this book, your existing team will immediately become more motivated and results driven. Most importantly, you'll have extra time to invest in more strategic tasks and achieve the work/life balance you have always dreamed of.

The best way to maximise the effectiveness of this book is to read it from cover to cover the first time. The book follows a specific structure, and it will make the most sense if you do so, as each chapter builds on the previous ones. However, once you have done so, you can easily dip back into the book and read the relevant chapter for the task or challenge you are facing at that particular time, as each part is broken down into task-specific chapters that you can refresh yourself about as required. Also, make sure you have your management team read this book as well, so you have a common language to utilise to assist and support each other.

Let's have some fun and enjoy spending this time together. Time spent reading this book is time you could have spent on other work-related tasks, or with family and friends. So once again, I honour and respect my obligation to deliver great value, to stimulate and sometimes challenge your thinking, and to leave you feeling delighted you invested your valuable time in this book.

I can't wait to see you on the other side.

The war for talent, the great resignation and other myths

At the time of writing, the world is very much at the tail end of the Covid-19 pandemic. Business optimism is high (regardless of what you hear in the media), organisations are growing, and candidates are back to being active in the market and looking for new opportunities.

There has definitely been a cultural shift in the way people are looking at their careers and the way they wish to be engaged with their employers. Working from home, working part time, telecommuting and contracting versus permanent employment are not new phenomena. However, the zeitgeist has definitely changed as more and more people want these alternate

arrangements rather than the traditional Monday-to-Friday, nine-to-five employment model.

These trends were definitely happening pre-Covid, especially with improving internet speed and availability, virtual meetings over Zoom and Teams, and other technology. It's just that the pandemic and resulting lockdowns and travel restrictions greatly accelerated candidates' desire for change. However, the fundamental recruiting environment remains largely the same as it was 20 years ago when I first started my recruitment career, especially the excuses for poor hiring and retention, so let's dispel two of these right from the get-go.

Myth: the war for talent

When I first started working in the recruitment industry in 2002, I joined TMP Worldwide (now known as Hudson). At the time they were the biggest recruitment company in the world, and I was excited about joining such a prestigious brand. I clearly remember, in my very first days of induction, being introduced to this term of doom and gloom, 'the war for talent', designed to spread fear among employers and to lower their expectations regarding the quality of candidates they would see on a shortlist presented by us. It's not dissimilar to a real estate agent manipulating homeowners into accepting a lower price for their house, because 'it's a buyer's market out there' so the owner should be grateful to receive an offer at all.

It amazed me that recruiters basically sold a service by preemptively conditioning employers to be underwhelmed. More importantly, that's exactly the level of service they then delivered. On the other hand, I believed (and still do) that as recruitment professionals, we must be able to guarantee to deliver outstanding shortlists, which requires a headhunting approach. In fact, at the time of writing this book, at my firm Arete Executive, unless we deliver a shortlist within 20 working days that our client is delighted to

interview, we offer to refund our client their retainer. If we say we can deliver the result, we should hold the risk of non-performance.

It's 20 years later and I still hear about the 'war for talent' on an almost daily basis, from CEOs and business owners, HR managers and internal and external recruiters. Quite frankly, it's a load of BS and the fact that it is perpetuated is just an indication of how dumb and lazy most people charged with recruitment are. Rather than working harder and smarter to attract outstanding candidates, it's so much easier to just blame the market and accept mediocrity.

Let me give you a couple of examples. Earlier this year my recruitment company was engaged by one of the biggest mining companies in the world to recruit for them an HR manager in regional Australia (I won't tell you their name, however if you think about the top three Australian global mining companies, it's definitely one of them.)

Now this particular mining company had this role vacant for close to eight months, and the fact it remained vacant was causing a lot of distress to the line manager as it was significantly impacting their ability to do their job and deliver results well. Yet the head of internal recruitment, who was responsible for finding candidates and filling the role, had not delivered on what was a fairly simple brief, even after such a long period. The excuse – 'it's a war for talent' – was there were no suitable candidates in the region, or who wanted to move to the region. They had essentially given up, while still paying lip service to some continued sourcing activity taking place.

Eventually, the line manager was given permission to engage us to deliver a suitable shortlist, which we were able to do in less than two weeks, that resulted in a very fast and successful placement. Why were we able to get such an immediate and positive result? Because unlike the internal recruiter who simply placed a bland and uninspiring advertisement on Seek and sent a few lacklustre InMails on LinkedIn, we undertook a comprehensive sourcing strategy that left no stone unturned.

This is what I am going to teach you how to do in this book.

My second example. Recently I ran a ‘Lunch and Learn’ event on Zoom, talking to business owners and CEOs about how to recruit top talent. One particular CEO was unable to attend and asked if his Head of HR and Head of Recruitment could attend in his place. His business is a privately owned engineering company.

I started the session by asking each attendee to describe their current recruitment challenges; what was ‘the pebble in their shoe?’ or what was ‘keeping them awake at night?’ The two HR attendees from this engineering firm explained that they currently had over 40 vacancies, the quality of their advertisement response was underwhelming, plus most good applicants pulled out of the process before they even attended their first interview.

Through asking some probing questions it became obvious that they were not bothering to take quality briefs from the hiring manager, they were writing very boring job advertisements, they were not making themselves available to speak to potential applicants, and it was often over three weeks between someone making an application and an interview being arranged. Plus they were doing zero headhunting.

It’s no wonder their results were so poor. And yet here is a CEO who is probably paying combined salaries of over \$250k to employ these two HR ‘specialists’, he has over 40 current vacancies and no doubt he is extremely frustrated and concerned about his firm’s ability to deliver for their clients and other stakeholders. Interestingly, when I offered to speak further with these two HR staff and offer additional advice, neither of them returned my phone calls or emails (which is a pretty typical reaction).

In the immortal words of Jerry Ziesmer in *Apocalypse Now*, if I was their CEO I would immediately ‘terminate with extreme prejudice’ (what a great line from an awesome movie). There is absolutely no excuse for what was obviously lazy and inept performance from the

HR team. Yet they continue to remain employed and continue to offer the same BS excuse to their boss, ‘Sorry dude, it’s just that there’s a war for talent’. Give me a freaking break!

So let’s get one thing clear – there is no war for talent, there never has been and if you are being duped into believing this then do so at your own peril. There are simple, proven and consistently successful recruitment strategies that allow some companies to recruit easily; and on the other side of the coin, there are lazy and incompetent people who are wasting your time and money by being crap at their jobs.

The good news is I am going to teach you the right way to recruit in this book, so you will accept no further excuses in the future.

You are learning a new superpower!

Myth: the great resignation

How many times have you heard this phrase in the last couple of years, especially in our post-Covid world: ‘It’s not my fault we can’t retain people – it’s the great resignation’? It’s as if everyone drank the Kool-Aid while working from home, and woke up hating their boss, hating their employer, hating their profession, and all wanting to quit and join the circus.

‘Especially the younger generation, who want the world and show no loyalty to their current employer,’ complains the older senior executive while talking to me about looking for a new job and an extra \$100k. Ahhh, the joys of hypocrisy.

In 2010, a global poll conducted by Gallup uncovered that of the world’s one billion full-time workers, only 15 per cent of people were engaged at work. That means an astronomical 85 per cent of people were unhappy in their jobs.

The average professional job tenure in Australia from 2000 to 2022 has consistently sat at around 3.0 to 3.5 years. This means that people change employers roughly every three years. A recent PwC report on

the ‘great resignation’, ‘What Workers Want: How to win the war on talent’, found that 38 per cent of Australian workers intend to leave their current employer during the next 12 months. Which is, guess what? A tenure of about 3.0 to 3.5 years. So the more things change, the more they stay the same.

There is no great resignation, it’s just media doom and gloom being fed by consultants trying to sell more snake oil (anyone remember Y2K?).

My simple explanation is this. During Covid there were a lot of people who wanted to change jobs, however chose not to do so because they felt the risk of change at that time was too high. ‘What if I change jobs and then get Covid, but don’t have any accrued sick leave or annual leave?’ Or, ‘What if I change jobs and then my new employer is negatively impacted by Covid, and I end up being made redundant?’

So they stayed in jobs longer than they would have normally because it was a safe harbour in a storm. Now that Covid is largely behind us, these people are resigning for new opportunities. Covid was just a bottleneck and now the employment market has returned to normal. The statistics prove this.

I can honestly say I have not had a single regrettable loss from my business in over five years. Likewise, I know countless CEOs and business owners who have been able to retain all their top performers both during and post Covid. They have invested time and money into building their brands as Employers of Choice, and in maintaining a performance-based culture that encourages and rewards exceptional individual and team performance.

Just like the war for talent, the great resignation is a crappy excuse for poor leadership. The great news is that you are going to learn how to build and maintain a culture to not only attract high performers to your businesses, but also to retain them for much longer than industry averages.

Other myths and clichés

There are so many other myths around recruitment, leadership and retention that I could write a whole book on this subject.

Then there are the clichés that seem to be repeated in every business book, such as, ‘strategy eats culture for breakfast’ (Peter Drucker), or ‘start with why’ (Simon Sinek), or even ‘courage over comfort’ (Brené Brown). In their time, these ideas were thought-provoking and challenged some old business paradigms, but they just seem a bit naff now through endless regurgitation (a bit like Rick Astley’s *Never Gonna Give You Up* – thank you *Ted Lasso* for being such an awesome TV show).

How about we just learn some simple tools and then go out and kick some butt?

Part I

Attracting top performers

As I mentioned at the beginning of this book, this first part will focus on hiring excellence (both being excellent at hiring and hiring excellent people – nice play on words, huh?). We will begin by addressing the question of whether you should do it yourself or engage a third-party recruitment company (spoiler alert: it depends) and also when you should start your hiring process.

Each stage will follow nicely from the one before, so you can just relax and ‘follow the bouncing ball’ (this saying apparently came from the original version of karaoke in movie theatres).

By the end of this part, you should be really clear on what a great recruitment process looks like. Whether you choose to do it yourself or delegate internally or externally, you will be far more confident that you will consistently end up with superior shortlists and hire fantastic people.





Chapter 1

To be, or not to be (the recruiter of your vacancy)?

Before I get into the pros and cons of using a recruitment agency versus managing your recruiting yourself, I thought I should clear the air about something that may be on your mind. Obviously, I own an executive recruitment agency and so (obviously) it's in my interest to be promoting the use of a recruitment company, and especially my company, all the time. However, I actually believe there are strong arguments for recruiting roles yourself, at least some of the time, and this book is written as a guide for how you (or your team) can recruit roles successfully rather than relying on external recruitment agencies.

So you can relax, no longer worrying about whether this book is just a really long sales brochure for Arete Executive.¹

1 That said, of course if we can be of assistance, I'd love to see how we can help you.

Using a recruitment agency

Let me be blunt: **I wouldn't trust most recruiters to collect my mail**, let alone recruit staff for my business. Believe it or not, there are actually recruitment companies that specialise in recruiting recruitment consultants for recruitment companies (that's a bit of a tongue twister, so you might have to reread that sentence a couple of times). We call these 'rec-to-recs'. When I first joined the recruitment industry, I thought that rec-to-recs would have to be the best of the best, however direct experience has taught me most are just as useless as most regular recruiters, with all the same issues and headaches you have no doubt faced on many occasions personally, both as an employer and as a candidate.

I've heard all the stories and every possible complaint from employers about dealing with recruitment consultants, literally hundreds of times. Nothing you could tell me about your poor experiences would shock me; in fact, I'm sure I could tell you many stories that sound so implausible you'd be certain I was making it up (I've included a few in this book). **For an industry that literally 'sells' people to other people, the general level of customer service and care is appalling.**

The potential pitfalls of recruitment agencies

Unlike almost every other type of professional services industry, the recruitment industry requires no professional qualifications, has no barriers to entry and there are virtually no regulations. Literally any idiot could print a business card saying they are a recruitment consultant, and away they go. Prior to the Global Financial Crisis in 2008–09, in Brisbane alone there were over 600 registered recruitment companies. Although that number contracted during the GFC, and no

doubt also during Covid, there are still new recruitment companies popping up on almost a weekly basis.

It is not uncommon for HR Managers to receive up to 40 cold calls per week from recruitment consultants asking to meet and/or pitch candidates. It's amazing how many of the recruitment consultants are mid-20s English backpackers who are now the new (pick the industry specialisation) expert at (pick the recruitment company – you know which ones I'm speaking about).

Believe it or not, **the recruitment industry generally has higher than 70 per cent annual staff turnover**. Approximately 90 per cent of people who join the recruitment industry leave within two years, never to return. Why is this, you ask? Because what generally happens is that a lawyer (for example – you can pick any profession here) becomes jaded with being a lawyer and is looking to try a new career. They go to see a recruitment company, who sells them on the amazing career they would have as a recruitment consultant (this is exactly what happened to me). Not only will they 'change people's lives by helping them achieve their dream jobs', companies also 'blue sky' them with how much money (commission) they will make.

So this lawyer becomes a recruitment consultant and quickly realises that mostly it's just a glorified sales job, with onerous KPIs and underwhelming leadership. After grinding out their 50 marketing calls a week for a few months (which is why the poor HR Manager is getting up to 40 unsolicited calls a week), they throw up their hands and typically return to the industry they had been desperate to leave not so long ago. Suddenly being a lawyer and charging in six-minute increments doesn't seem so bad after all (or an engineer, accountant, or whatever).

When I took my first job as a recruitment consultant, I was stunned that within the first 12 weeks, 14 of my colleagues resigned. Why did I stick it out? Because I love people and I love to sell. I had come from a strong KPI-driven sales environment, so this was nothing new

to me. Plus, because I had previously been a senior executive and had just completed an MBA, I found it easy to build rapport and trust with my clients.

The other thing I realised within 12 weeks was that **if I wanted to be better than 9 out of 10 recruiters, I only needed to do one thing – return people’s phone calls.** To this day, I am regularly told by people, including CEOs of some of the country’s largest companies, that they simply can’t get a call or email returned. (I had another one of these calls literally this morning.) It amazes me how many of my competitors pay lip service to ‘today’s candidate is tomorrow’s client’ yet can’t even do something as simple as return a phone call.

Note that I said I wouldn’t trust *most* recruiters to collect my mail, I didn’t say *all* recruiters. Like any profession, there are some great recruitment consultants out there who are professional, courteous and can legitimately act as a trusted advisor (I would hope most people consider me and my team in this light). While it can be frustrating dealing with the vast majority of recruiters, when you find a good one (or preferably a few good ones), they can make your life a lot easier.

What’s another reason you *wouldn’t* use a recruitment agency? Using recruitment consultants is not dissimilar to paying for parking. When you are driving into the city for an important meeting, often you need to pay a hefty fee to use a centrally located parking facility. Nobody excitedly says, ‘Wow, I just paid \$80 to park my car for two hours, what an awesome investment!’ Parking is a regrettable spend. You’re in a hurry, and you appreciate the convenience of being able to park close to your appointment, but you certainly aren’t excited about the fee.

Likewise paying for a third-party recruitment consultant to present candidates for your vacancy. Let’s assume a mining company wants to hire a new CFO, and the salary is \$300,000 per annum. A tier-one global search company could charge between 30 and 40 per cent of the salary for managing this assignment. For the sake of this illustration,

let's say they use a local provider who offers to do the work for 20 per cent of the package, or \$60,000 (20 per cent of \$300k).

Now \$60k in anyone's language is a lot of money. No employer is excited about paying this (it's a regrettable spend), however in the past they were obliged to because the recruitment consultant who specialises in identifying and placing CFOs has the database of candidates, and the employer wants access to these candidates. Your typical employer does not perceive that the recruitment consultant adds much, if any, value to the process. In fact, many employers regard recruitment consultants in the same light as used car salespeople – simply 'body shoppers'.

The situation now is very different. Probably 95 per cent of white-collar professionals have a LinkedIn profile, including CFOs. So the mining company says to their \$80k per annum internal recruitment resource (often an early-career HR graduate or an external recruiter who has gone in-house to avoid the pressures of sales targets), 'Mary, we want you to find the details of every CFO at every ASX-listed mining company based in Brisbane. Preferably CPA qualified, preferably 15-plus years' experience, preferably having worked for one of the major coal mining companies'.

In an ideal world, Mary jumps onto LinkedIn using her Recruiter license, and using a few keyword searches she can easily and very quickly compile the list. She then shows the profiles to her boss, they agree on which individuals to target, and the recruitment process begins. So instead of the mining company paying \$60k for one placement, they can employ Mary for almost an entire year and get much greater bang for their buck.

So the poor old traditional recruiter is, in my opinion, dying a certain and unavoidable death, never to be resuscitated. Their entire value proposition has been eroded, because for the first time ever, through using LinkedIn, employers have direct access to their prospective candidate pool, easily and cheaply.

Just like MYOB and Xero had a profound impact on the accounting profession, LinkedIn has become a catalyst for change within the recruitment industry. Plus of course we are yet to see the impact that artificial intelligence will have on future recruitment processes.

However, as the old saying goes, ‘all that glitters is not gold’.

Using internal resources to recruit

If you are planning on managing your recruiting internally, you usually have three options as to who you delegate this task to:

- the hiring manager (which may be you)
- your HR Manager
- your internal recruiter (if you have one).

Let’s address a generic issue and then we’ll look at each of the three options individually.

Active versus passive candidates

In recruitment land, we talk about ‘active’ candidates and ‘passive’ candidates. If you are going to manage your recruitment internally, you must first understand this distinction.

Active candidates are those people who are actively looking for a new role (makes sense, right?). They may be unemployed or simply keen for a change. These people are regularly checking job boards like Seek and LinkedIn and responding to advertisements. And while there are definitely some good active candidates from time to time, they are often not the ‘cream of the crop’. Plus, when you advertise, you end up receiving lots and lots of applications from people who have no relevant experience (with a CEO role I am currently recruiting, 86 per cent of applicants have no relevant experience). Why on Earth

these people apply for jobs they are clearly not suited for and will never be considered for is beyond me, however it happens all the time.

Good people generally aren't actively looking for a new job. They are happily employed, have a good relationship with their boss, and are delivering good results. These people may move for a compelling reason, but they aren't proactively seeking a change. They are what we call *passive candidates*.

To attract passive candidates, you have to headhunt because they are not looking at or applying via advertisements. But it's very difficult to do the headhunting yourself because you can't maintain the confidentiality of who is hiring. Whether it is you personally or a member of your team reaching out to a passive candidate, of course they will immediately know who the employer is.

There are two problems with this.

Firstly, it's generally not a good look to be directly approaching your competitors' staff and trying to poach them. The breakdown of any kind of positive relationship, plus them reciprocating by directly approaching your staff, is almost certain. It also sends an immediate signal to your competitors about what is happening in your business. For example, when I was headhunted by other recruitment companies back when I was an employee, I would often meet with them just to gain competitive intelligence that I would immediately take back to my boss (see, I was both sneaky and loyal).

Secondly, passive candidates may have a preconceived idea of your company's culture, track record or other elements that would affect their perception of you as an Employer of Choice. Their next-door neighbour may have worked for your company 10 years ago, had – in their mind – a less-than-ideal experience, and this could dissuade your ideal passive candidate from wanting to apply for a role with you.

When you use a third-party recruiter, they can keep your company name completely confidential, both when advertising your role and when headhunting passive candidates. Good headhunters know how

to appeal to a candidate's sense of curiosity, using the right bait to get them on the hook before telling them who the employer is. You simply can't do this yourself, and it can often mean the difference between an excellent shortlist and an underwhelming one.

The potential pitfalls of DIY

Let's assume however you do decide to manage the recruitment process yourself, rather than using an external agency. While recruitment is not rocket science (although by the end of this book I am sure you will agree it's not as simple as you thought), it is time consuming, especially if you want to do it well. So if you delegate recruitment to the line manager (which may be you), understand that it is definitely going to distract them from their normal operational duties. There can be a significant hidden (or not so hidden) cost to this. Can you actually afford to neglect all the other mission-critical tasks this line manager needs to do? Plus, recruitment is definitely a skill in its own right, and if the line manager is not skilled in hiring, or just doesn't enjoy doing it, you will probably end up with a suboptimal result.

Generally your HR Manager will be more skilled at recruitment, given it would fall under their mandate. And while most good HR Managers can manage the back end of a recruitment process well (interviews, reference checks, offer management and so on), they are generally far too busy with all their other tasks to do headhunting. As a result, you will generally be limited to only seeing active candidates who have applied to job advertisements, which as previously stated is not ideal.

Your final option is to employ and utilise an internal recruiter, most often someone who has an agency background however has decided to go in-house. And I'm now going to make one of my most contentious statements, which will no doubt anger some readers of this book.

Speaking generally, internal recruitment is where most failed external recruiters end up if they stay in the profession. There are definitely some exceptions, but they are few and far between. (Note that I am only referring to external recruiters who then go in-house, not to in-house recruiters who are developed internally.)

The number of managers, including CEOs, who tell me they are completely underwhelmed by the work done by internal recruiters is mind-boggling. Complaints about both the quality and quantity of shortlisted candidates, massive delays in the hiring process, simple mistakes made which result in good candidates withdrawing pre- and post-offer, and the list goes on and on.

Think about it this way. A good external recruitment consultant can easily earn well over \$200k per year. When I was employed as a recruitment consultant before starting my business, I and members of my team regularly earned more than the C-suite executives we were recruiting. Not only did we earn more, but we also generally worked a pretty typical Monday-to-Friday job, as compared to when I was a COO in the building services industry, where I was on call 24/7 and would work massive hours, and on weekends, regularly.

Good recruiters can earn as much if not more than successful real estate agents, without any evening or weekend work doing open homes. **Being a good recruitment consultant is a very well paid and great job.** So why would a good recruitment consultant go in-house, to earn a fraction of what they earn as a third-party recruiter? The short answer is that they wouldn't. As another old saying goes, 'if you pay peanuts, you get monkeys'.

This is not to say that internal recruiters are bad people or are intentionally performing poorly. In the main, they are under-trained and under-managed. Added to this, they may be looking after large volumes of vacancies, from receptionists to senior managers and everything in between. Plus line managers often treat them with a

lack of respect, especially if the recruitment team is not run as its own cost centre and charging the line manager for their time, much like an external recruiter would.

Many internal recruiters want to do a great job, and if you invest in proper training and performance management they can be great additions to your business. Reading this book and implementing all the strategies I recommend will definitely assist you in getting far better outcomes from your internal recruitment team, so don't lose heart just yet.

How best to work with external recruiters

To reiterate, the purpose of this book is to educate you on how best to recruit for your business yourself. However, there may be times when it makes more sense to use an external recruitment firm. I would definitely recommend using an external firm if you are recruiting at the executive leadership or board level. Likewise, if you need to confidentially headhunt a replacement for someone you want to terminate, an external firm is the way to go.

Everything I am going to teach you about recruitment in this book applies equally when utilising an external firm. You will be outsourcing certain aspects of the process, and you should hold them to the same high standards you would expect if doing it yourself, if not higher. So rather than running through the complete recruitment process with an external recruiter lens here, I'll touch on the various differences and nuances of internal versus external as we work through each specific chapter.

However, there is one critical element of working with an external firm that I want to highlight here, which I believe is crucial to achieving the best possible result for filling your vacancy.

Contingent recruiters versus retained recruiters

Recruiters typically are engaged in one of two ways:

- The first are contingent recruiters, who are paid only on successful placement. They are usually not working on the role exclusively and can be competing against multiple other external recruiters, and even internal recruitment, to place their candidate and get paid. If they are unsuccessful, they have potentially invested a lot of time and resources for free. Seems pretty dumb to me, however most of the market works this way.
- The other type of recruiters work on an exclusive, retained basis only. The most common fee schedule is that they get paid a third of their fee on commencement of the assignment, the second third on delivery of the shortlist, and then the balance of their fee on successful placement.

There are other fee structures out there (we for instance offer three different levels of engagement), but the general rule is the recruiter is paid for the time and resources they commit to filling your role.

I only work on a retained basis. **I think contingent recruitment is a mug's game and any recruiter who offers to do this should have their head examined.** If you ask virtually any other professional services firm to complete a project for you (lawyer, architect, engineer, you name it), they will quite rightly expect to enter into a contractual agreement with you and be paid along the way for the work they do. Seems totally fair, doesn't it?

Occasionally law firms will ask me to recruit mission-critical roles for them. Often these roles have been vacant for months, if not years. Law firms rely on their lawyers to bill, to make their revenue targets and grow profit for the firm's partners. No lawyers means no income, and the partners have expensive golf club memberships and private school fees to pay. It's a tough life at the top.

Yet when I tell these lawyers they need to pay me a retainer, their common reaction is to balk and tell me that they never pay retainers to recruitment companies. I actually love it when they do this, because it allows me to tell a very funny story (at least, I think it is hilarious, although they probably don't). This is how it goes:

Richard: 'Well, that's interesting because I'd actually like to engage you to do some work for me. I just murdered my next-door neighbour (too much Rick Astley blasting at all hours of the night) and I'd like you to defend me. What I want to do is engage five different law firms to represent me, and whoever gets me the lowest jail sentence I will pay. The rest of your work for free.

'So, would you like the work?'

Lawyer (going bright red in the face and clenching their fists as if ready for fisticuffs): 'Absolutely not. How dare you insult my profession and my tremendously important ego by even suggesting such poppycock!!!!'

Richard (said with a straight face although smirking inside): 'Well then why on Earth would you expect me to?'

But, I hear you shout to the heavens, contingent recruitment is *awesome*. We can get lots of recruiters looking for us rather than just one, and we only pay when the role gets filled. That's an *awesome* arrangement.

Well, it can *seem* that way, but consider this for a second ...

Contingent recruiters typically work on a very high volume of assignments at any one time, in most instances at least 20-plus roles. Why? Because they know that they will be lucky to be paid for one in five. They'll promise you the world and then go back to their office,

throw a quick advertisement up on the internet, and do a cursory search on their database. They might call a couple of contacts and ask for some referrals.

Three days later, if they haven't found anyone suitable, they just move on. They stop returning your calls and replying to your emails. Or, even worse, they throw some irrelevant CVs at you, praying that, just like mud sticks to a wall, someone will stick and be hired. Often, they won't even interview the candidate first and you'll be left dumbfounded as to how they so misunderstood the brief and delivered you a big pile of rubbish.

In contrast, **a retained recruiter is committed to delivering you an excellent result** (at least they *should* be). They will only be working on a very small number of roles (in my business, typically less than four at any one time). They know they are working exclusively, and they are going to get paid, so they can commit their all to delighting you, leaving no stone unturned and delivering you an outstanding result.

Of course, if you are paying a retainer, you have every right to demand and expect exceptional service. Great, frequent, proactive communication and a commitment to delivering you a result.

If you are ever in a bar and you happen to be eavesdropping on two contingent recruiters chatting over a drink, the conversation will most likely go like this: 'Bloody employers, treating us like white-shoe used-car salespeople. Why don't they respect me and the work I do? Why won't they return my phone calls, agree to meet me, and shower me with affection and rich rewards for the amazing professional I am? Why is life so unfair?'

To which I would answer, 'Because you work for free, dimwit! What would you expect? You make promises you don't keep, and 90 per cent of you won't even be in the industry within two years. All because you don't charge what you are worth. Geez!'

Always retain your external recruiter exclusively to handle your assignments. You'll get a much better result, plus it's just good manners.



In this chapter, you have learned:

- ★ You can choose to hire a recruitment agency to fill your vacancies, or manage the process internally.
- ★ Organisations can save significant amounts of money by recruiting at least some of their roles themselves.
- ★ If a role requires headhunting due to confidentiality or for a rare skillset, using an external specialist headhunter is the right decision.
- ★ If working with external recruiters, *always* retain versus using contingency agencies.



Chapter 2

'Would you like to dance?': when should you start a recruitment process?

Many employers have a very reactive approach to recruitment. A couple of reasonable examples would be an unexpected resignation, or winning a major new project that requires quickly hiring some new staff to complete the work. In both of these scenarios, you can understand why the recruitment process is 'just in time' and needs a speedy outcome.

Yet I would say that in at least nine out of ten cases, when we are briefed on a role and I ask the employer ideally when they want the new employee to start, they say, 'yesterday'. **Why is it that recruitment always seems to be urgent?** Especially when you consider it could take a month to get to shortlist, another month to finalise an offer and do the deal, and then from one month up to in some instances six months for the new employee to fulfil their notice period with their current employer (especially if they are a senior executive)?

Consistently recruiting reactively is a poor business strategy. It typically ends up costing you more money, and is a huge distraction from other critical tasks you may be doing at the time. Sitting there in an anxious headspace desperately needing to fill a role is not great for your mental health either.

Always be recruiting

So when should you start? The short answer is that **you should be recruiting all the time.** You should be proactively allocating time every week to focus on your future human capital (workforce) requirements and undertaking specific tasks to ensure that you are never left in a desperate situation.

This could be as simple as committing to having at least one introductory coffee meeting with an up-and-comer in your industry each week. It might be attending an industry event or speaking at a conference once a month, and scouting out promising talent that you want to get to know. It might be talking to one recruiter in your industry a fortnight, getting the lay of the land and ‘gossip’ about who might be on the market and why.

Even in the reactive scenarios above, resignations rarely come completely out of the blue. Generally you’ll have a sense of when people are disgruntled or getting itchy feet. Likewise, winning a major new project is not something that happens overnight. You should be planning for either of these, or other similar eventualities, and deciding on an appropriate course of action.

Another great saying: ‘Those who fail to plan, plan to fail.’ The last thing you need is to be caught out and needing to make an urgent hire. This will probably result in a suboptimal result, even potentially a poor hire that will see you having to replace the role again in a few months. And who’s got time for that?

Ideally, you should allow yourself a minimum of three months to fill an executive role. Operational or lower-level roles can often be filled more quickly as generally these candidates have shorter resignation periods. However, if for example you are regularly recruiting forklift drivers, it would make sense to have some kind of recruitment campaign happening at all times, because these employees are equally likely to leave with minimal notice. If you have an internal recruiter, or are using external recruiters, this is called a ‘watching brief’. Essentially you are instructing them to keep a constant eye on the market and to proactively bring suitable people to your attention. Once again, you will need to put an external recruiter on a monthly retainer if you want them to prioritise this for you.

But before you even start any kind of recruitment process, you need to ask yourself a pretty fundamental question: ‘Why would someone leave their current employment to work for my firm, and me in particular? How can I position us as an Employer of Choice, so we are the logical first option for top-tier employees when they are ready to make a career change?’ And guess what – this is not a job that you can simply outsource to HR, as you’ll see in the next chapter.






In this chapter, you have learned:

- ★ The more proactive you are in your hiring practices, the more assured you will be of getting a good result.
- ★ Prioritise recruitment by factoring in certain activities like attending events, having coffee meetings or speaking to your preferred recruiters.

Organisations live or die based on the quality of their people. If you can't attract and retain top performers, your business will never achieve its full potential no matter how good your products or services are.

Why is it so vitally important for every organisation on the planet to be proactive in the war for talent? And why are so many businesses terrible at this critical task?

The purpose of *Winning the War for Talent* is to show you how to take control of building your dream team. In Richard's entertaining and no-nonsense style, you will learn how to:

-  Promote your organisation's brand as an Employer of Choice.
-  Run a comprehensive campaign to source the very best performers, rather than just relying on responses to advertisements.
-  Interview impeccably to ensure you are selecting the highest quality of talent.
-  Establish a culture of performance from the top down, and onboard new employees into this culture from day one.
-  Use a performance management framework to drive performance and accountability across individuals, teams, other stakeholders and yourself.

Through implementing the recruitment and performance management tools you'll learn about in this book, your existing recruitment team will immediately become more motivated and results driven. Your business will feel empowered to take control of recruitment, with a clear strategy for finding those people who will become instrumental in the future of your organisation.

If you're serious about *Winning the War for Talent*, this is the book you have to read now.



Richard Triggs is the Founder and CEO of Arete Executive, an executive search and recruitment company. Richard began his own executive career in the property industry, changing to focus exclusively on executive recruitment in 2003. During this time Richard has developed personal connections with executives in ASX-listed and privately-owned corporations and has placed many thousands of executives in senior roles and board positions. Richard's first book *Uncover the Hidden Job Market* is considered the go-to resource for those prepared to take their career path into their own hands. www.richardtriggs.com.au



Business / Recruitment