

8 CREATIVE SOLUTIONS TO OVERCOME HIRING CHALLENGES



BY SHANI MAGOSKY
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“Recruiting and retaining the right candidate is not like baseball; nobody is satisfied with a batting average of .250!

Shani Magosky



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Introduction

Of no surprise to anyone with a pulse, the most common refrain I continue to hear from clients is some version of, "We continue to be very short staffed and it's nearly impossible to find good talent right now." From Fortune 500s to startups to hospitals to restaurants and cruise ships, the inability to fill open positions is nothing short of frustrating for HR and hiring managers. Not to mention the resultant burnout for staff at all levels.

Whenever we hire, it goes without saying that we want the best talent we can find. The typical process involves drafting job descriptions, iterating communication with HR, and announcing the open roles on websites, job boards, and social media. After screening and narrowing down resumes, we compare viable candidates against each other as if evaluating a horse race. Oftentimes, top contenders meet preconceived, cookie-cutter criteria and/or happen to be masterful at crafting resumes, cover letters, and glowing self-narratives but often turn out to be more show than go.

Of course, some of those people may work out well. But hiring based on these traditional and rigid parameters alone often means selecting from a small pool of candidates who may be overqualified for the job (and thus highly likely to leave for the next better opportunity) or prove to be disappointing when it comes to actual performance. **Recruiting and retaining the right talent is not like baseball; nobody is satisfied with a batting average of .250!** For non-sports fans, that is the average percentage of hits to at-bats in Major League Baseball, with the highest ever being .296 in 1930.

I spent many years in financial services before shifting my career to the broadcasting industry

“If you only hire people who have "done it before" then you'll miss out on every marginalized person who hasn't gotten promoted because their bosses couldn't "picture" them doing the job.

Catt Small, renowned product design leader

because a decision-maker decided I was "good clay," a phrase I coined years ago to describe high potential yet less obvious talent (I'll elaborate in a minute). I'm grateful he saw my potential, but many capable candidates today are still getting rejected due to "lack of relevant industry experience," unusual or no college degree, and/or not meeting virtually every single job criteria. The sad truth is that most people involved in hiring decisions want to cover their a\$\$ by selecting a "safe" candidate. Thus, many talented jobseekers are not even getting past the application process. In addition, the pendulum has swung too far in using AI to screen candidates. **Bots are rigid black boxes, and they certainly don't have vision and imagination.**

The way we hire for jobs today is broken. We've outsourced too much of our most important function - hiring the best talent - to machines. **So I'm calling on recruiters and hiring managers to trade some of that artificial intelligence for old-fashioned human intelligence and willingness to color outside the lines!**

"But Shani," you might ask, "how do I find new ways to source great talent with such headwinds in this historically tight labor market?"

I'll start you off with this – look for that “good clay” I alluded to above. These are people who have values aligned with those of your organization, grit, common sense, and passion for your products and services... someone who can be easily “shaped” to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in the role.


I mean, really, the “right” skills are fluid in this VUCA day and



age, changing all the time and necessitating constant updates. **A whopping eighty-five percent of the jobs that today's college students will do in 2030 don't exist yet, predicted [the Institute for the Future](#).**

To identify good clay, keep your antennas up for qualities such as:

- ✓ Personal values that sync with those of your team and organization
- ✓ High EQ
- ✓ Creativity and innovation throughout their lives and career
- ✓ Thirst for continuous learning and ability to gain wisdom through "failing forward"
- ✓ Sincere motivation for changing industry or role and eagerness to prove their worth after being given a chance
- ✓ Proven track records of success
- ✓ Diversity of expertise and unique perspective
- ✓ Positivity and growth mindset
- ✓ Reliable references

 The war for talent is not over, but it has changed. In today's market, companies need to be more strategic and creative in their hiring efforts.

Laszlo Bock, former Google CHRO

01



Identify transferable skills

Transferable skills are those that have value in almost any industry, functional area, or role. In addition to the myriad qualitative criteria outlined in the Introduction for recognizing good clay, look for skills such as:

- Presence and excellent written and oral communications skills
- Strong work ethic and grit
- Critical thinking and analytical capabilities
- Project management experience
- Teamwork and ability to work cross-functionally
- Flexibility and resilience in adapting to change
- Effective time management and prioritization skills
- Business acumen
- Relationship-building prowess and customer orientation
- Leadership potential

Ginny Clarke, former Director of Leadership Staffing and Diversity and Mobility Lead at Google;

former Partner at Spencer Stuart; currently CEO of advisory firm Ginny Clarke LLC

At the core of what I have always been espousing is competencies. Competencies, to me, are those things that are portable; they're those things that allowed me to transition across industries five different times, and across roles and functions six or seven different times. What I was able to do instinctively was to build a narrative for people and help them connect the dots to see, "Okay, I don't necessarily have experience doing this thing, but I do have a set of competencies that I have developed by virtue of some of the experiences, and some of which are innate for me."

Those are the things that I'm looking for in people, and those are the things that I talked about in [my book](#), relevant to an individual looking for a job and as they're managing their career. To me, that is the most integral ingredient for assessing talent. It's got to be that; it can't be just based on where you've worked and who you know, and what schools you went to. I've met some brilliant people who went to [a State School], and I've met some serious duds who went to Harvard, so we can't use that as a predictor of success.

Competencies are about behaviors. I'm looking for things that are less tangible so we can really think of them as deconstructed elements of things you have done. For example, one of the leadership competencies we talk about is operating in ambiguity, an aspect of problem-solving. We want to know how people think. "What would you do in this situation?" There are hypothetical scenarios that we would offer during an interview, or "Give me an example of a time when you had to confront X Y Z," not just, "Did you do it."

Consider an example from my own career:

When I left Wall Street and moved to Vail, Colorado, I sought management roles among the limited options in a resort ski town – hospitality, spas, slope side, and real estate. The standard response I got was, "You have an impressive resume, but you don't have any experience in our industry." I was so frustrated and disillusioned by the lack of creativity, and quite frankly, the laziness of such reactions. That is until I secured an interview for a position as the general manager of a local startup television station.

After speaking with me, the company's president concluded that it would be easier to teach me the television biz than to teach a traditional producer-type how to run a business, create and manage to a budget, do business development and community relations, set HR policies, and lead people. I had plenty of leadership cred from my Goldman Sachs days but no experience whatsoever in the television industry, save for the fifteen minutes of fame I had at the University of Miami as a contestant on a short-lived game show called College Madhouse (which incidentally gave actor Greg Kinnear his start!).

Alas, my first mountain job was actually a good fit for my transferable skills, and I had a blast navigating growing pains of a new business, creating content, producing a daily morning show, mentoring the younger staffers, and helping the station become a force in the Vail Valley community.

I'm grateful that the executive made the link between my background and how it could benefit his team. Connecting these dots is



My amazing Plum TV crew on the patio of our offices in West Vail.

the key to identifying hidden talents and unexpected value in job candidates. **Universally applicable skills, in most cases, trump textbook career paths as predictors of success.** Obvious exceptions exist for careers in which precise training is mandatory; for example, we wouldn't want a surgeon to operate on us or an engineer to design our bridges without highly specialized education and experience.

Is a college degree still crucial in today's corporate landscape?

According to TD Magazine, employers are finally recognizing the value of non-degree credentials.

Relying solely on a candidate's college education, or lack thereof, to assess their eligibility for a job is outdated. Additionally, much of what you learn at university becomes obsolete quickly due to rapid industry changes.

Candidates can masterfully write resumes, cover letters, and give glowing self-narratives. Unfortunately, these attributes do not necessarily translate into actual performance and effectiveness.

As we navigate the evolving corporate landscape, it is essential to recognize that a person's proficiency should be evaluated based on their comprehensive skill set and relevant experiences rather than relying solely on their educational background.

02



Challenge outdated assumptions

It has been a cruel market out there. People now expect more than amusing Silicon Valley-type perks and generous PTO. It's not enough to keep doing the same old things. We all know Einstein's definition of insanity: Doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. In order to become an employer of choice, it's time to challenge outdated assumptions about recruiting, hiring, training, and career development.

The most harmful assumptions are those that limit your options like:

- ✘ "A person with the textbook career path and (self-professed) skills is the best hire."
- ✘ "This role requires a college diploma, without exception."
- ✘ "Millennials and Gen Zs don't have a work ethic and aren't loyal."

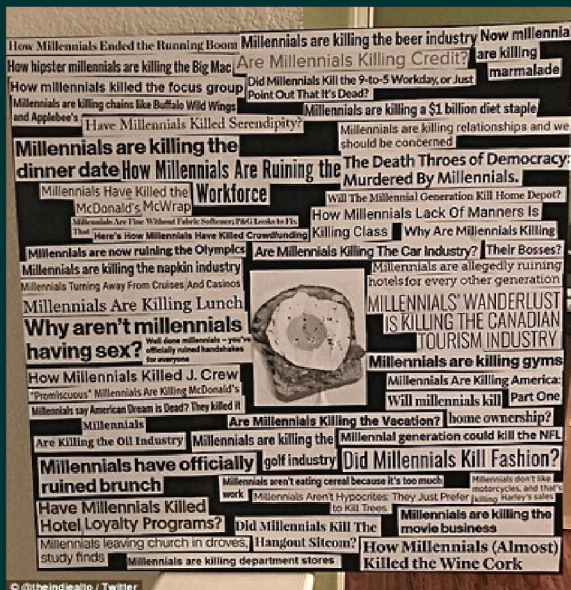
The first assumption was essentially busted in the Introduction and Chapter One, so let's shatter the second two myths now.

There are still many organizations limiting their talent pools by requiring college diplomas and even master's degrees for most salaried white-collar employees. That is simply old school, pun intended. I see two common instances where relaxing this requirement is reasonable: (1) when someone has more than enough practical experience and wisdom to successfully perform the role, and (2) in fields where advances are happening so quickly that it's more important that a candidate has acquired relevant, up-to-date training.

Thus, in this day and age, it behooves recruiters and hiring managers to **appreciate the many different ways that people accumulate knowledge and hone skills**. It's easy, increasingly common, and often inexpensive for workers to shape their own futures by seeking training proactively via technical schools, apprenticeships, coding camps, experiences like Toastmasters, and reputable learning/training/certification programs. And then there are the MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) from top universities, industry experts, and other thought leaders. Take edX for example, a joint venture between Harvard and MIT. Students can access more than 2,500 courses from 140 higher education institutions on a wide range of subjects, from Python coding and cybersecurity to humanities and nutrition. Other popular online course providers include [Udemy](#), [Udacity](#), [Coursera](#), [Khan Academy](#), and [Masterclass](#). So as not to be ethnocentric, popular European MOOCs include [iversity](#) and [FutureLearn](#), and [China has more than 30 MOOC platforms](#) hosting 34,000 courses taken by *540 million* students.

Learners can then apply their newly acquired wisdom and talents in future roles, an entirely new career, and even in a different stage of life - but only if given a chance! So please be open to such alternative "stacks" of education.

And puh-lease, **drop the stereotypes about millennials and Gen Z!** Contrary to popular cynical belief, not every digital native puts their career eggs in the TikTok millionaire basket. It's time to stop judging younger generations and start working with them. Millennials are now the largest generational cohort in the U.S. at approximately 72 million. And [Bloomberg reports](#) that the number of Gen Z workers will triple by 2030 to about 51 million. Target millennials and Gen Z in recruitment efforts and support them once onboard... without preconceived notions.



It's time to drop outdated stereotypes about millennials and Gen Z!

Researchers at the Missouri School of Journalism's [Novak Leadership Institute](#) and Kansas State University [surveyed](#) workers aged 21-34 across 18 industries and found they place more value on respect, meaningful work, and feedback than on perks and happy hours. That means leaders must engage in frequent and respectful communication in the workplace – active listening, coaching more often than directing, providing both positive and constructive feedback, and having career development conversations, to name a few. If you want the respect of younger generations, it has to be earned, and, in turn, they'll stay more engaged, perform at their best, and stay longer.

This is not simply a U.S. phenomenon. Consider China's "lying flat" resistance movement, which calls on young and other chronically overworked people to reject the exploitive [996 work culture](#) (a societal norm that commonly dictates working from 9am to 9pm, six days a week) and, instead, prioritize psychological health over economic materialism.

[Insert shameless self-promotion here] You know who to call if you want to up your game here with 1-on-1 and/or team coaching to teach leaders about [effective communication, feedback, and creating psychologically safe workplaces!](#)

Speaking of preferred ways to work, you'd have to live in a cave to be unaware that flexible and remote work is the number one thing a majority of job seekers look for now. This isn't new, but Covid has served as truth serum in three important ways: (1) employees are now more emboldened to speak up and demand change, (2) people have had the chance to be more self-reflective and reevaluate their priorities, and (3) doubters finally see that it's possible to get sh*t done remotely and, in many cases, with improved productivity. Old theories about what a workplace looks like have been permanently altered.



In the [State of the Workplace survey](#) of U.S. workers by Grant Thornton, 79 percent said they wanted flexibility, 40 percent said they'd look for another job if forced to be in the office full-time, and 51 percent said they'd trade a 10-20 percent salary increase for the ability to work remotely. Notably, 33 percent of those surveyed said they are already actively seeking another job, and other surveys report even higher numbers.

In particular, don't let flexibility be just an ephemeral pandemic-era phenomena. We already know it's become table stakes in hiring and retention. **Even at companies beckoning employees back to a physical office, like the Big Banks, people still want less rigidity and more agency.** And of course, broadening the geographical reach of your talent search with remote work options is a no-brainer for roles not requiring on-site presence. Then, ensure those folks have proper ergonomic work setups and other physical and mental well-being support.

03



Dare to take risks

The natural next step after purging outdated and inflexible assumptions in favor of a growth mindset is changing your actions. One of my favorite Jim Rohn quotes is, "If you are not willing to risk the unusual, you will have to settle for the ordinary." That is true of many areas of life, not the least of which is recruiting!

Real World Advice from an Expert

Jacqueline Jenna, Principal Talent Advisor at Oracle for 23 years

First, some backstory – we had a model for building the salesforce for a new business in which we had to make vs buy. The market I led the search on was Minneapolis, where there was a lot of raw talent but not many candidates had the tech skills we needed. As an example of how creative we got, one of our hires was an Avon representative in her early 20s. If you had just looked at her resume and concluded “she’s just an Avon lady,” you’d never hire her. But we gave her an interview, and the minute she entered the building, her powerful presence was palpable.

Skepticism fell away as we learned that she had 30 women working under her, ran a lucrative sales business, possessed demonstrable leadership skills, and successfully developed talent underneath her. She chose to be an Avon rep because she wanted the flexibility as mother to four children. She killed it in her Oracle job. I have lots of stories like that.

It’s worth noting that the same type of salesforce was being built in Silicon Valley. And guess what? The Minneapolis team knocked them out of the water. The folks in Minny were not using Oracle as a steppingstone to another tech job, so they were more committed, had less turnover, and were the more successful sales team in general. Outcomes are not always obvious.

In addition to the examples discussed in Chapter Two, other perceived "riskier" hires include:

- ✓ Parents and others returning to the workforce after taking time off
- ✓ Newly graduated students
- ✓ Workers with no experience in your industry
- ✓ People moving from other functional areas or roles
- ✓ Candidates from “non-brand-name” organizations
- ✓ Individuals deemed older by society standards (what happened to 50 is the new 30?!)

These "risky" individuals may not seem like the traditional fit for the role, but that doesn't mean that they can't be trained to adapt and do the job just as well as someone who seems like a perfect fit. For example, I know plenty of engineers who excel in sales, junior folks who stepped up when challenged with enormous stretch assignments, and people with gray hair who knocked it out of the park in technology startups. To be clear, this is **NOT about lowering your standards; it's about broadening and thus raising them.** Dare to take the road less traveled by recruiting, interviewing, advocating for, and hiring unconventional candidates. You will expand your candidate pool and undoubtedly find a great match.

If I had a dollar for every time I heard some version of “I can't risk the backlash if this

atypical candidate doesn't work out. If I make the safe bet to back a textbook candidate, nobody will blame me." When it comes to vetting options, don't stick to the same old tactics. If you ask the right questions to the right people, risks are minimized. We'll take a closer look at this in the next chapter.



Jeff Bezos started as a McDonalds cook.
Elon Musk started as a video game coder.
Stephen King started as a janitor.
Oprah started as a grocery store clerk.
Jack Ma started as an English teacher.

It's not where you start. It's where you end up.

Don't judge someone based on their first crappy job, or their prior work history.

Evaluate a person based on where they want to go and their mindset.

And never forget who someone is on the way to becoming.

Tim Denning, personal development writer

04



Examine your own house

Not enough organizations consider their existing in-house talent. Yet, research shows that promoting from within preserves valuable institutional knowledge, engenders loyalty, substantiates to other employees that there are viable career paths, and saves money.

In fact, the cost of turnover is much higher than leaders realize. In a 2017 [study by Employee Benefit News](#), **direct costs average of 33 percent of a worker's annual salary** to replace that employee. Turnover costs include things like advertising for an open job position, the time it takes by all involved to recruit, interview, and sell candidates, the fees related to background checks and other pre-employment processes, direct as well as opportunity costs of HR, managers and coworkers to train new people, and lower profitability.



Sometimes when you're looking for an answer, you search everywhere else before you take a look at what's right in front of you.

Dean Hughes, Author



Then there are the indirect costs of turnover that are harder to quantify but no less debilitating. Just to name a handful, consider:

- Lost productivity while a replacement is being recruited and hired
- Negative effects on culture and morale as valuable people leave
- Potentially impaired team and/or company reputation
- Interruptions to customer service
- Damage to client relationships maintained by staff who leave
- Burden on the remaining team to cover the roles of the departing person, which might necessitate overtime pay and could lead to long-term burnout
- Domino effects of the person resigning (i.e. following a trusted colleague to their new organization or inspiring others to seek new jobs as well)
- Sunk training and development costs that are not maximized because high potential talent leaves
- The productivity imbalance of having low or poorly trained performers stay by default as high performers get attracted to better roles (hence the well-known Henry Ford truism, “The only thing worse than training your employees and having them leave is not training them and having them stay.”)



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Ayana Jordan, Executive and Leadership Coach at Ayana Coaches LLC;

veteran HR, L&D, and Recruiting professional from several companies, including Lockheed Martin and Kaiser Permanente

The biggest lesson I'll share is for organizations to be thoughtful about what is needed in every role and identify who they are willing to invest in and train. Some companies have been doing this well for a long time. Lockheed Martin Corporation (LMC) was my first employer out of college, and they're the best I've seen in the ten companies for which I have worked. They invest heavily in people through purposeful development, the result of which is very few people leave. At 21 years old, I was placed into a Leadership Development Program, and its rotational design gave me a leg up through experiencing many different functions within two years. I really didn't appreciate it until many years later.

[SHANI'S NOTE: I have seen evidence of Ayana's testimony about LMC, a company with which I worked a few years back facilitating leader-as-coach training. I have kept in touch with one of the key sponsors of that effort within the Missiles and Fire Control (MFC) division, Kurt Jetsel. He is a 40-year LMC veteran who has held innumerable roles in different locations and is currently a Director of Program Management. Despite his high profile and intensely mission-critical position, Kurt makes time to contribute meaningfully to staff and leader development efforts, formally and informally. I've always admired the internal newsletter he creates known fondly as WGLLLs, short for *What Good Leadership Looks Like*. In his [podcast episode](#) with me, he shared the impetus for it. "We had gotten some survey results back, and our leadership scores from the previous survey were in decline, so the leader pulled the staff together and said, what can we do to improve?" In addition to formal L&D efforts, Kurt took it upon himself to launch WGLLLs, which became beloved even by his most left-brained colleagues.]

If companies find themselves lacking in viable internal talent, they need to look in the mirror. Step one (as always) is acknowledging there's a problem, digging deep for the root causes, and then taking strategic steps to fix them. Having worked with hundreds of companies, I can credibly give those orgs some not so subtle hints: reexamine and be brutally honest about the efficacy of your rewards and recognition structures, professional development efforts, leadership behaviors, and career pathing.

According to [Gartner Inc.](#), only 25 percent of employees say their organization makes it easy for them to find internal job opportunities, and only 37 percent of bosses encourage their people to pursue other internal roles. This applies to all workers - managers and front-line individual contributors, white and blue collar. Why wouldn't we want to cross-pollinate talent to other areas rather than lose them completely?!

As former Oracle recruiter Jacqueline Jenna offered, "This disruption is a great invitation for leaders to do some deep listening, tear down old structures, and innovate. Ask yourselves questions like, "If we were to start from scratch, what would it look like? What could we do differently?" Take cues from companies that are already doing it well. Jenna adds, "I promise the ones who aren't experiencing the same magnitude of hiring challenges have policies, commitments, and mindsets that keep employees engaged and loyal."

Lastly, I'm loving this [brief quiz](#) created by [McKinsey](#): "How can you turn attrition into attraction?" It literally takes 30 seconds, so I encourage you to do it.



Talented employees are “force multipliers,” raising the performance bar for their colleagues, and particularly for their direct reports. By word and deed, they model and teach winning behaviors that shape high-performing cultures. Simply adding a [star performer](#) to a team boosts the effectiveness of other team members by 5-15%.

Harvard Business Review, "What Science Says About Identifying High Potential Employees"

05



Offer "Returnships"

An obvious play on internships, "Returnships" are formal programs to recruit people who are interested in re-entering the workforce. They could hit the ground running if you decide to hire them full-time after three to six months of paid upskilling bootcamp. Alumni of your own company are particularly appealing for obvious reasons.

Commonly sought-after candidates for such programs include:

- Parents who left the workforce to stay home with children or a sick relative
- People who took time away from working for extended travel, advanced degrees, or some sort of sabbatical to recover from burnout
- Those forced to retire during the pandemic
- Folks who served in the military or humanitarian efforts
- Military spouses who had to relocate
- People who have recovered after lengthy medical leaves
- Those who left the workforce because they weren't previously allowed to work remotely, but that's changed in the new world of work

Hundreds of organizations offer formalized returnships. For example, Deloitte offers the [Encore Program](#), Medtronic calls theirs [Careers 2.0](#), NBC Universal has [Act Two](#), and Amazon's operation in India humorously dubbed theirs "[Re-kindle](#)."

In addition, tap back into retired workers. [Analysis by The Conference Board](#) shows that most labor force exits in the last couple of years were older workers who retired earlier than they may have wanted to, about 3.6 million as of October 2021. **The newly returned and un-retired promise to contribute a wealth of knowledge, professionalism, gratitude, loyalty, and wisdom** that only comes from experience. And please stay in integrity when conditions shift back to a buyer's market for talent, i.e.: be careful not to betray their trust by firing them on a last in first out basis, condoning age discrimination, patronizing, or any form of kicking them to the curb.



Returners bring a mature perspective to the workplace, oftentimes with accelerated levels of energy and enthusiasm. We've learned from our returners that there is a feeling that while their time away was purposeful and filled with meaning, there is still more to be done in their careers.

Tiffany Kilgore, global talent acquisition director at Merck

06

Chapter Six: Conduct behavioral-based interviews to ascertain patterns

When you do have promising candidates to interview, separate the wheat from the chaff by using behavioral-based questions and assessments. Hearing stories from real life experiences is FAR MORE useful than checking boxes.

Assess a candidate using substantive criteria as:

- ✓ How they work on teams
- ✓ How they deal with change
- ✓ How they react in a crisis
- ✓ How they process failure
- ✓ How they communicate in 360 directions
- ✓ How they give and receive feedback
- ✓ How they've risen to challenges
- ✓ What roles they tend to play on a team
- ✓ Learning style
- ✓ Creativity, resilience, adaptability

Actions speak louder than words. Actually, they shout! As such, emphasis should be placed on asking **powerful, open-ended questions that elicit behavior-based answers** so you can get a more accurate sense of who a person really is. Understanding how a candidate thinks, works, and interacts with others is a crucial component in the interview process. It allows a hiring manager to assess not just what a person may have done in the past, but how they did it. The latter is more predictive of how they'll handle future situations. Behavioral interview questions prompt candidates to explain through stories, rather than superficialities, their work style, ability to reason, decision-making process, adaptability, willingness to collaborate, and in what ways they would be additive to your culture.

Below are representative samples questions I've found effective.

What's the most interesting thing about you that's not on your resume?

Provides insight into the human behind the candidate. Any person who works with or for you will bring their whole selves (or at least part of it, depending on the degree of psychological safety that exists). An important work of caution on this one though: **don't judge or make assumptions about what they share even if it's outside your personal beliefs or comfort zone.** The new world of work values open-mindedness, so if you're resisting this shift, please get with the program!

Donna Gaines, Founder and Managing Partner of Gaines International,

a Chicago-based executive search firm focusing on architecture, engineering, design, real estate, and construction

I've been at this for 40 years and have seen four recessions, three wars, and 9/11.

We have developed some very effective tools that I'm happy to share.

- The Four Cs - Culture, Contribution, Commitment, Character. We give this questionnaire to all candidates to take a deep dive behind their eyes. Through their responses, we can ascertain whether they are self-aware and reflective, the quality of their writing skills, the real reasons for wanting to make a move above and beyond money and title, and how they grew passionate about their profession.
- Communications IQ - Based on a [book](#) by Anna Kendall, we use this assessment in the vetting process to identify three communication intelligence categories: kinetic/action, emotive/feeling, and cognitive/thinking along with the seven Life Languages: Mover, Doer, Influencer, Responder, Shaper, Producer, and Contemplator. It's all about communication, and this gives us a good idea of how they relate to others when they communicate.
- A few more behavioral interview questions I'd add to Shani's list are:
 - Describe a situation in which you delivered an impactful presentation to a group. How did you prepare and what was the outcome?
 - Describe a situation when your commitment to integrity made you uncomfortable. How did you handle it?
 - How do you exceed your customers' needs?

It our belief that you need to dig deep and give everyone the benefit of the doubt to determine if they will be successful in the role.

Tell me about one of your best experiences working with a team and the contributions you made.

Being a consistent team player really matters... and not just on one's functional team, but also on cross-functional teams, temporary project teams, task forces and committees, or even holiday party planning. Working across multiple teams simultaneously can only be successful if members are clear, transparent, accountable, and supportive in their behaviors, so an assessment of team-orientation is critically important.

Tell me about a time when you adjusted to a manager or colleague's working style that is very different than your own to drive your success.

This helps identify the ability to work with different behavior/style/types. May also show whether someone plays the victim or makes choices that are within their control (the latter of which is obviously way more attractive).

Tell me about the last time something significant didn't go according to plan at work. What was your role? What was the outcome? What did you learn on the journey?

Clues here include the ability to "fail forward," self-reflect, and take ownership of their performance.



What are some actions you've taken during your career to voluntarily enhance your skills?

"Good clay" people are continuous learners. Candidates that are proactive in the search for new knowledge are gems.

How and how often do you give feedback? How and how often do you receive or proactively solicit feedback?

Shows openness to uncovering blind spots, commitment to continuous improvement, willingness to have potentially uncomfortable conversations, and degree of ego. A [culture of feedback](#) is a huge and largely untapped competitive advantage.

Really thoughtful candidates will recognize the importance of positive feedback as well. In general, positively reinforcing feedback tends to be non-existent, inadequate, and/or devoid of helpful details. You know what I'm taking about - the tepid "great job" or time-honored "way to go!" Add the more recent but just as ubiquitous fist bump to the list of shallow ways to positively validate. Substance matters.

What energizes you the most about your work?

Sheds light on whether their strengths and passions are a good match for the role and culture. Try to pick up on whether the answer is sincere or full of platitudes.

What's your process for prioritizing and delegating?

If an employee knows how to prioritize, focus their time, and delegate when appropriate, they're less likely to drop the ball or burn themselves out. Ensure they know how to get things done in the "Low Urgent/High Important" quadrant on the Eisenhower Matrix instead of lingering in the minutiae of email and other low ROI tendencies. As I like to ask clients, "What gets you a promotion, raise, bonus, and frequent accolades - achieving audacious goals or answering emails in 30 seconds or less after they land in your inbox?" Yeah, exactly.

What do you find appealing about working for us?

Ensures they've done background research. Keep your antenna up for authenticity and passion.

Of course, "tell me more" is always an appropriate volley when you want an interviewee to go deeper. Lastly, listen to the quality of the questions they ask you.

If you want better answers, you have to ask better questions.

Related to Donna's suggestions, we are helping more and more clients administer behavioral assessments to uncover the primary styles and strengths of existing team members. In addition to helping teams communicate more effectively, this information reveals what style gaps may need to be filled by new hires. And of course, we have also employed them as part of the new hire vetting process on behalf of clients. Tools I commonly use are [DISC](#), Strengthsfinder, values surveys, and [Leadership Circle Profile](#); ping me for more information.

P.S. Are you a fan of other behavioral-based interview questions? If so, please send them my way at shani@theleadershiftproject.



Ensure a diverse slate of interviewers

We have a tendency to hire people who look, sound, and think like us, have homogenous experiences, and make meaning in similar ways. Obviously, these are not reliable indicators of how candidates will perform once they have been hired. Furthermore, it certainly doesn't nurture diversity of thought as a competitive advantage. The key is to hire individuals who have the right skills and temperaments for their jobs, not the same skills and temperaments as current staff. Rather than "cultural fit," alternate concepts I've seen used include "cultural complement," "cultural add," "cultural contribution," and "values fit." I'm big on vivid analogies, so I personally refer to it a "weaving a cultural tapestry."

One effective antidote to such homogeneity is to ensure a diverse slate of interviewers, as people with wider-ranging filters will pick up on different strengths and concerns. Diversity of evaluators can of course be sourced by role, seniority, and functional area, and equally important is ensuring representation from different genders, cultural backgrounds, style/behavior types, and other unique lenses.

Teeing up a diverse slate of interviewers is a quadruple win!

- 1) Diversification of those conducting interviews opens up **more candidate options** in the current very tight labor market (the whole intent behind this e-book!) and ultimately helps organizations identify and hire more diverse team members.
- 2) Attracting more diversity of experience/race/culture/gender/etc. seeds all-important diversity of thought, which leads to [better business results and greater innovation](#).

There is endless research quantifying that diversity is a sound investment. **Not the check the box kind of diversity that is mere optics, but real diversity and deliberate INCLUSION of thinking styles**, also referred to as cognitive diversity. Teams and organizations are far more likely to generate creative solutions to problems when they bring together people who think in different ways.

- 3) A varied slate of interviewers also bolsters hiring of more **adaptable talent**, which is 100% needed in this **VUCAD world** (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous, disruptive).

In a recent [article](#), management consultancy E&Y explains that “the need for adaptability in the workplace — to learn and unlearn — is critical to navigating new and novel situations.” They articulate the following summary findings from their research:

- Adaptability skills helps people manage unusual situations without explicit instruction.
- 150 C-suite leaders found that adaptability was one of the top five skills they felt they needed to succeed in the future.
- Adaptability skills can be developed in several ways including increasing self-awareness and deliberate practice.



Different perspectives represent diverse ways of thinking that bring creativity, originality, and new ideas to the table. People who see things differently look at problems in unique ways. This broadens the scope of their thinking process, which is why it isn't enough to simply hire talented people. Target employees with unique skillsets and varied experiences.

Marissa Mayer, *former Yahoo President and CEO*

- 4) You'll provide **untraditional candidates** a fair shot and wider choice in jobs - and they'll likely be **more loyal**, thus reducing turnover. Specific tactics for targeting such candidates are covered in previous chapters.

Former in-house Oracle recruiter Jacqueline Jenna emphasizes that creating a positive candidate experience shouldn't end with interviewing. The process is very systematic - as soon as the last interview takes place, an all-hands debrief is held in which the hiring manager is the last to speak, and then a decision is made then and there. "We don't leave candidates hanging," Jenna explains. This process serves two important purposes: (1) people share their honest opinions without being influenced by the hiring manager's perspective, and (2) the hiring manager gets the benefit of hearing all voices before making a final decision.

One final thought on this topic: if open-minded criteria are not included in job descriptions on the front end of the recruiting process, then many qualified candidates will never have the chance to be vetted by diverse interviewers.

Alternative sources of diverse talent:

- ✓ Professional groups from your industry
- ✓ People you meet in continuing education courses
- ✓ Mom groups on LinkedIn, Facebook, or other social media
- ✓ Retirees who might want to come back to work part time or full time
- ✓ Veterans groups
- ✓ College and university career centers
- ✓ Military spouses, including [Squared Away](#)
- ✓ [fiverr.com](#)
- ✓ [Frontier-Careers.com](#)
- ✓ [onlinejobs.ph](#)
- ✓ [Upwork.com](#)
- ✓ [Wyzehire.com](#)



Focus on your brand and value proposition to be a desirable employer

A common refrain in marketing circles is, “Culture is brand, brand is culture,” reminding us that corporate culture and product and service reputation are inextricably linked. And it also rings true as far as reputation as an employer to prospective and existing employees. In both cases, **brand is not what you present to the world; it’s what people perceive and say.** One merely needs to consult Reddit, Twitter, and Glassdoor to appreciate just how true that is.

Real World Advice from an Expert

Jae Wu, Co-founder of Los Angeles based Heyler Realty

My business partner, Sean McMillan, and I bought and relaunched [Heyler Realty](#) in west Los Angeles in 2011. We grew the company from just the two of us to a full staff of talented agents, support staff, and marketers. In the 10 years since then, we have doubled revenue every year. We did not take the quick and easy route to hiring people and creating the culture; we built things the right way over time. For us, it's about what's right not who's right.

As the saying goes, fish stinks from the head down. Sean and I lead with the core belief that relationship capital comes first, and financial capital naturally follows. We are invested in our people and often serve as mom and dad figures, which takes time and patience. Our talent is home grown, and we attract people who have a passion for the community and view serving clients as a labor of love. We don't want the stereotypical slick agents. It's not sexy to stand for caring about customers, but the reputation we've built results in loyalty that generates repeat business and enthusiastic referrals.

As such, let me emphasize that an exemplary and integrous corporate culture is a prerequisite for earning an attractive employer brand. Let's broadly define culture as what leaders tolerate of themselves and others. Put another way, your employer brand cannot be positive if your corporate culture is toxic and leaders aren't keeping their fingers on the operational and cultural pulse at all times. There is no other way to ascertain what is really going on within all parts of the business. In 2021, I hosted consultant and author [Ron Carucci](#) on my podcast, [The LeaderShifter Show](#), and one of his humorous statements sums this up well: "If you don't have somebody coming in your office at least twice a week saying something that makes you uncomfortable to hear, you can be very confident your leadership sucks."

Moving on. Challenging times can tempt companies to put more emphasis on short-term goals and cost savings than they would in more prosperous times. Big mistake. In a difficult job market, companies must be more responsive and proactive to attract candidates for open positions. As discussed in the previous paragraph, you may need to invest big time to reshape your culture and update your employer brand to validate a compelling value proposition based in reality. Shorthand for this approach is **B2E - Business to Employee**.

[The World's Most Attractive Employers](#) are particularly attuned to the role of employer branding in their recruiting and retention efforts. In that cohort, 71 percent view it as one of the top priorities.

[Glassdoor's article](#) about employer brands outlines the 15 stunning statistics that may lead organizations to rethink their recruiting, hiring, retention, and more. You should definitely check it out for yourself, but here



are a few highlights:

- 86% of HR professionals surveyed indicated recruitment is becoming more like marketing
- 86% of employees and job seekers research company reviews and ratings to decide on where to apply for a job
- 75% of active job seekers are likely to apply to a job if the employer actively manages its employer brand
- 50% of candidates say they wouldn't work for a company with a bad reputation, even for a pay increase
- A strong employer brand can reduce the cost per hire by as much as 50%
- A negative reputation can cost a company as much as 10% more per hire
- 7 out of 10 people surveyed indicated they had changed their opinion about a brand after seeing the company reply to a review
- Companies actively investing in employer brand can reduce turnover by as much as 28%

Great examples of companies I've lauded in the past that execute employer brand management well include [Patagonia](#), [Aruba Networks](#) (now part of Hewlett Packard Enterprises), [Salesforce](#), and [SAS Institute](#) (a privately-owned analytics SaaS company in North Carolina). It's less about Silicon Valley-esque perks and more about providing services that employees actually need. For example, why not provide childcare to attract back parents who had no choice but to stay home during the pandemic? Or give realistic subsidies to those who have family care responsibilities? Or offer more job-sharing arrangements?

A recent [Harvard Business Review article](#) highlighted exemplary actions taken by [Microsoft](#). After employees went virtual during the Covid-19 pandemic, company

As you compete for talent, be clear on your company's "why" and effectively communicate this to potential employees to gauge alignment. Leading attributes job seekers find most attractive in a potential employer include:

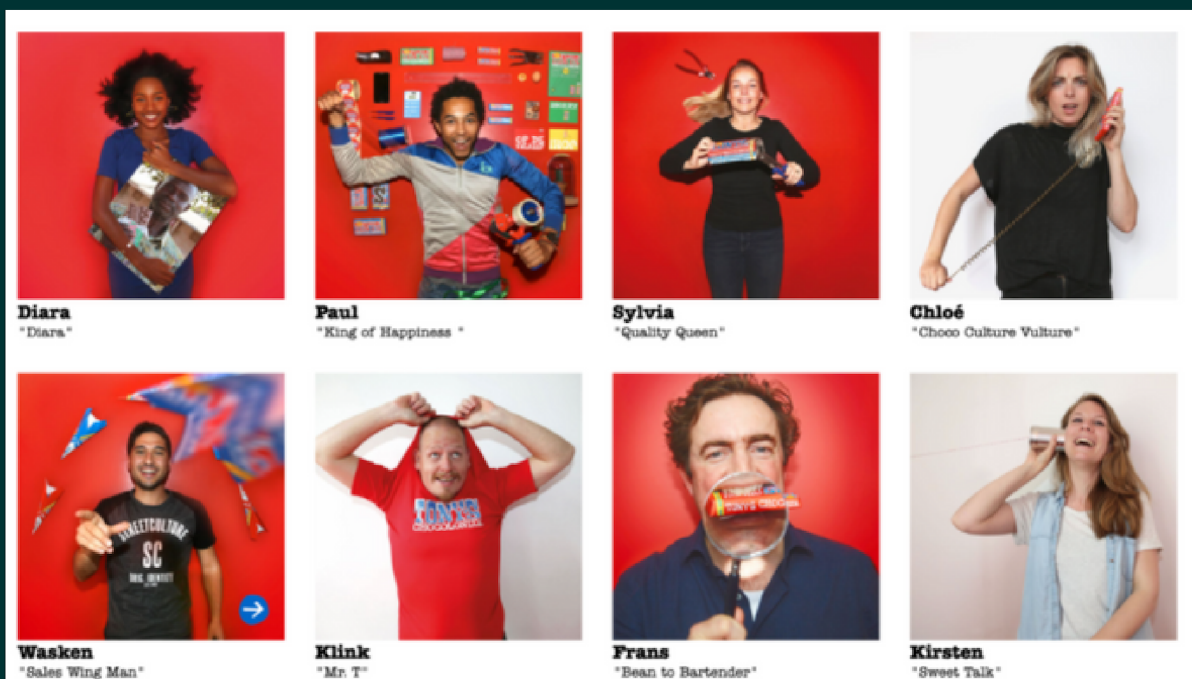
- ✓ Inspiring purpose and opportunity to make a positive impact
- ✓ Challenging and interesting work, appropriately enabled with relevant, timely training and technology tools
- ✓ Psychological safety and REAL culture of innovation (rather than lip service)
- ✓ Ongoing professional development and an attractive career path
- ✓ Commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion
- ✓ Flexibility and reasonable work-life blend (to wit, flexibility is now the fastest-rising job priority in the U.S., according to a poll of more than 5,000 LinkedIn members)
- ✓ Recognition and fair reward system
- ✓ Authentic concern for physical and mental well-being

research found that unsustainable work practices that kept them tethered to technology damaged employees' satisfaction with work-life balance. The biggest culprits were always-on collaboration, a lack of focus time, and unused vacation. The remedies they implemented were prioritizing work, setting boundaries, and reevaluating meetings. Take a page out of Microsoft's playbook here because your organization is undoubtedly facing similar challenges.

Here are a few visual examples of what differentiating employer brand promise looks like on websites and social media:



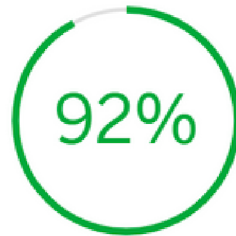
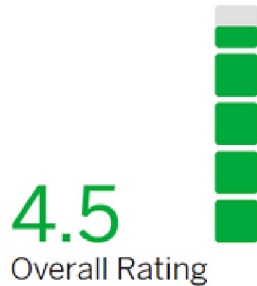
Chipotle Mexican Grill



Tony's Chocolonely, a Dutch company producing and selling fair trade chocolate

95% of our employees LOVE it here

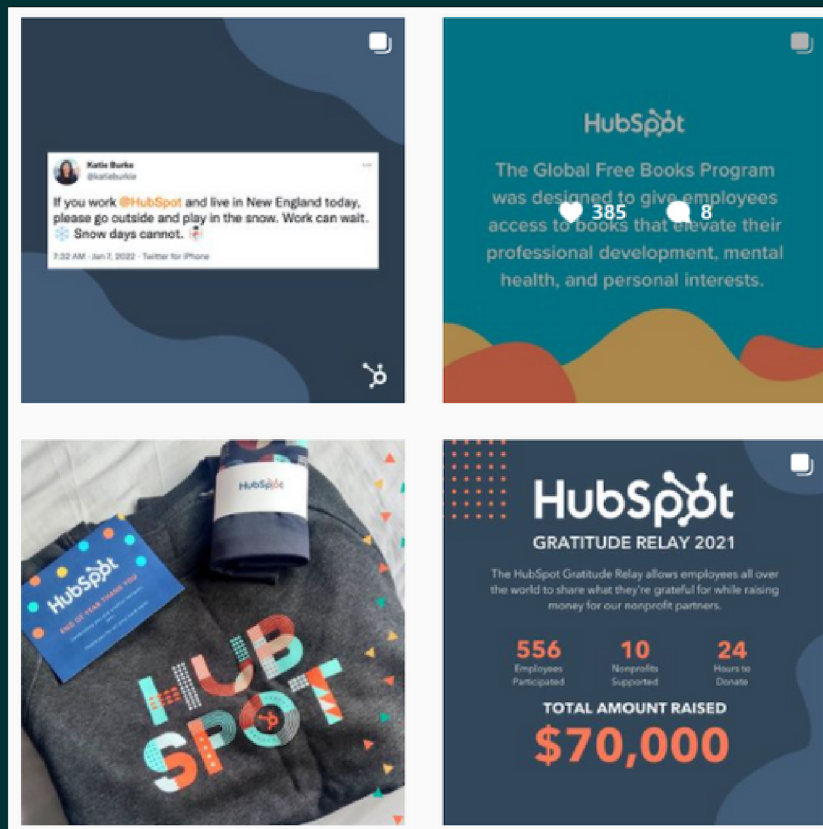
We are passionate about developing deep and lasting relationships with all our employees. Our overall retention rate in 2020 was 95.3%.



Recommend to a friend
powered by **glassdoor**



From SAP (a 95% retention rate is stellar!)



From HubSpot's Instagram account, #hubspotlife

For more clever ideas from exemplary companies, take a look at Fortune's annual list of the [100 Best Companies to Work For](#).

Another important aspect of an employer's value proposition is creating an entrepreneurial culture. Most employees have skills and passions beyond what's required for their current roles, so leverage them for everyone's benefit instead of boxing people in. Ways to do this include:

- Designing **internal talent mobility (ITM) programs** in which someone temporarily works in another role, geography, or functional area to expand their range of experience and bring their expertise to another team. These programs have typically been directed to high potentials to groom them as part of senior-level succession planning. But there is no reason to limit it; ITM programs should include talent at all levels of any organization.
- Assigning people, as appropriate, to **"extracurricular" projects**. This tactic not only builds skill but also expands internal relationships and boosts their exposure, all powerful ways to retain top talent and make them even better candidates for promotion.
- Fostering an intrapreneurial culture which mimics the autonomy of entrepreneurship but with the benefit of deeper-pocketed support and resources. I'm in love with a relatively new idea I've been reading about lately that goes even further: **creating a gig economy within your company**. In my opinion, many employees would see such synthetic freelancing opportunities as preferable to the riskier option of going out on their own because they retain predictable income and benefits.
 - Challenges to be cognizant of with this ecosystem are over-complicating reporting structures and handling competing priorities, both of which can be overcome by regular 360-degree communication (on which I could write another entire treatise!).



Another way to stand out in the talent marketplace is to respond proactively to emerging trends. Below is an excellent summary of what may emerge in the coming years from Harvard Business Review authors.

9 Trends That Will Shape Work in 2023 and Beyond

by Emily Rose McRae, Peter Aykens, Kaelyn Lowmaster, and Jonah Shepp

1

QUIET HIRING

Employers acquire new skills and capabilities without hiring new full-time employees through quiet hiring. Encourage internal talent mobility, provide specific upskilling opportunities, and leverage alternate methods such as alumni networks and gig workers.

2

HYBRID FLEXIBILITY

With hybrid work becoming more permanent for desk-based employees, it's time to find equitable flexibility for frontline workers.

3

LEADER AND EMPLOYEE EXPECTATIONS

Fresh training and support will be provided to mitigate the growing managerial skills gap while clarifying manager priorities and redesigning their roles.

4

NONTRADITIONAL CANDIDATES

Organizations will need to become more comfortable assessing candidates solely based on their skills, rather than their credentials and experience.

5

HEALING

Turbulence in recent years has resulted in low productivity, no-notice resignations, and conflicts. Leading organizations will support employees by providing proactive rest, discussion opportunities, and trauma counselors.

6

DEI MOMENTUM

Pushback to DEI efforts must be addressed early to prevent it from evolving into disruptive forms of resistance. HR must equip managers with tools and strategies to engage resistant employees.

7

PRIVACY CRISIS

Leading organizations will create a data bill of rights supporting employees' healthy boundaries and overall well-being.

8

CONCERNS AROUND AI

New regulations will put pressure on organizations using AI and machine learning in their hiring processes, as well as the vendors they rely on for these services.

9

LACK OF SOCIAL SKILLS

Employees who are new to the workforce who are struggling. Gen Z employees say their education did not prepare them for the workplace.



Having advocated for many non-financial aspects of employer value propositions and employee engagement tools, I'd be remiss if I didn't mention that **money does still matter**. People care about being paid fairly, on a relative and absolute basis. Macro factors such as the highest inflation in over 30 years and sub-inflation wage growth have hit workers hard in the wallet, while many companies have been able to pass higher costs along to customers. Combined with a historically wide gap between productivity gains and wage growth, there will undoubtedly be great pressure to improve compensation. Companies that don't acquiesce will find themselves with an even bigger dearth of interested candidates.



You've got to continue to grow, or you're just like last night's cornbread – stale and dry.

Loretta Lynn, legendary Singer & Songwriter

Conclusion

Long-time executive recruiter Donna Gaines encourages us to “Look at today's situation more holistically; it's **actually a Great Transition**. Baby Boomers are retiring, and because of gaps created during the pandemic, the bench has not always been transitioned properly (Note from the peanut gallery: such gaps are common all the time, not just during times of duress, due to underinvestment in talent). Also, come to terms with what diversity really means and don't just check the box. Look at up-and-comers. Hire today for tomorrow.”

In summary,

- Keep your antennas up for “good clay” candidates with valuable transferable skills.
- Be open to alternative “stacks” of education.
- Stop dissing younger generations. “Help Them Grow Or Watch Them Go,” as my colleague [Bev Kaye](#) urges in the title of her [best selling book](#)).
- Risk the unusual so you don't have to settle for the ordinary, i.e. expand your search to include less obvious talent.
- Look to promote from within, and if you conclude there aren't many options, either you aren't open-minded enough or the talent management structures in your org are broken.
- Consider formal “returnships” for your own alumni and other professionals who took time off and would consider rejoining the workforce under the right circumstances.
- Brush up on effective behavioral-based interview questions to get candidates to show instead of tell.
- Line up a diverse slate of interviewers if you want to increase your success rate in identifying diverse talent and reframe “culture fit” to “culture tapestry.”

- Recognize that B2E (Business to Employee) is a thing. This requires companies and teams to pay more attention to their culture and employer brand to evolve into an employer of choice.

I hope this treatise serves as nourishing food for thought and a valuable reference tool. Please share it far and wide to drive more systematic change in the way we identify high-performing talent.



About The Author

McKinsey-style expertise.
IKEA-like simplicity.
Jon Stewart-esque irreverence.
This is what you get when you work with
Shani Magosky.

After many years of diverse leadership experience across multiple industries, Shani started her leadership development consulting and executive coaching practice, [The LeaderShift Project](#). Having worked for venerable institutions and unknown startups, in a range of economies from bubble to recession, and in revenue-producing, advisory, and senior leader roles, Shani's broad experience enables her to help executives and teams achieve "BHAGs" (Big Hairy Audacious Goals) at a wide range of Fortune 500 and private companies, startups, universities, trade groups, and non-profits.

In addition, Shani designs and facilitates breakthrough team coaching and other highly interactive workshops that are relevant, fun, and memorable so learning has the best chance of being retained and applied on the job. She is also the author of [The Better Boss Blueprint](#) and host of [The LeaderShifter Show](#) podcast.



CONNECT WITH SHANI

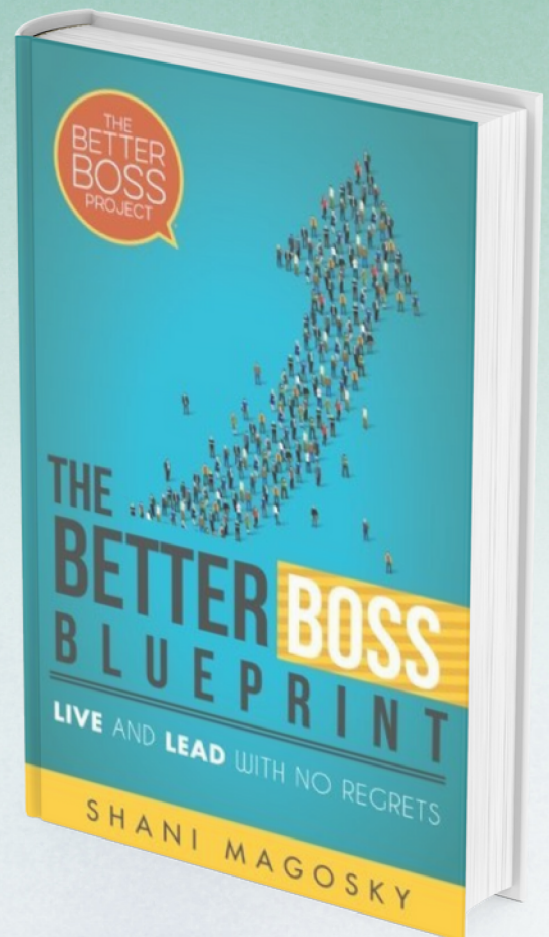


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The Better Boss Blueprint

*Live and Lead with
No Regrets*



"A wild, fun adventure in leadership."
- Robin M.

Shani's book [The Better Boss Blueprint](#) is packed with easy-to-apply tools and candid personal stories that cut through the BS, clutter, and complex messages standard in "old, white-guy discourses" on leadership.

The chapters walk through ten simple—yet not simplistic—commitments that propel better bosses to success. It starts with getting your own shit together and then delves into a variety of practical topics to help you be a more effective boss of others, ultimately creating an empowering and results-oriented culture in which everyone thrives—you, other leaders, employees, customers, vendors, and all stakeholders.