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Win the War for Manufacturing Talent with an Executive Search Firm

John Nimesheim

SENIOR MANAGING DIRECTOR



If you work in manufacturing, you know all too well that your sector is thriving in spite of numerous pandemic-related challenges. It's the kind of turnaround nobody would have predicted more than a year ago, when manufacturers became faced with a level of economic uncertainty not seen in a century. But much like extreme heat tempers steel, the pandemic has made industrial manufacturing stronger, more efficient, and more resilient, thanks to [deft process changes](#) and hard lessons learned over the past 18 months.

As vaccinations against COVID-19 are distributed, money is being channeled from goods back to services, [according to Reuters](#). Even so, the six largest manufacturing industries, including computer and electronic products, chemical products, and transportation equipment, reported moderate to strong growth. The Institute for Supply Management has also confirmed this stellar performance in a [recent report](#).

In examining today's manufacturing landscape, optimism seems to be consistently high across the board. [Grant Thornton](#) surveyed more than 100 manufacturing CFOs and finance VPs and found that 91% of them indicated their company's outlook was positive. This optimism comprises many factors, driven in part by external forces such as anticipated improvements in the economy. But the biggest factors were internal, starting with increased efficiencies in production processes and improvements in employee culture.

The future is not without hurdles, however. As manufacturers prepare for higher production costs, they should also prepare for some of the challenges associated with positive growth—a nice problem to have, but a problem, nonetheless. Many manufacturing CFOs cite competing for talent as one of their biggest concerns.

What's Fueling Manufacturing's War for Talent?

We've established that the future looks bright for manufacturing. So why fret about workforce issues? Professional services giant PwC recently conducted a pulse survey on the [future of work](#); they discovered, among other things, that despite 14 consecutive months of manufacturing growth, some manufacturers still face workforce strategy challenges amid the pandemic. The number of workers continues to grow at an impressive rate—U.S. manufacturing added [26,000 jobs in September](#) alone—but employee turnover continues to churn things up. The same PwC survey reveals that 41% of people are leaving for better wages, 28% for a greater sense of fulfillment, and 24% to find work better aligned to their passions and values.

Given the sector's perennial challenges in securing talent, industrials grasp the need to appeal to employees' changing needs and expectations, especially after the personal and societal tumult created by the pandemic. [McKinsey reports](#) that, in the wake of such rapid change, a top priority for many companies has been to take a hard look at talent-related issues, including how to optimize hybrid teams, attract and retain workers with needed capabilities, and make the most of scarce skills. Industrial manufacturing is no stranger to these needs.

Tactics for Winning in a Candidate's Market

As many outlets have suggested, we're in the middle of a very candidate-friendly market—one in which the top talent has more options than arguably ever before. These highly qualified experts are continually courted by recruiters with desirable and customizable job offers. To put it plainly, there are a lot of moving parts to account for when trying to attract the best talent, and it may not be feasible to take on the task all by yourself.

Industrial manufacturers looking for top talent should consider an executive search firm for myriad reasons. For starters, the right search partner can help you create a better candidate experience. They can assess your recruitment process to find weak points like outdated paper-based systems or gaps in technology that could be upgraded—for example, an applicant tracking system that boasts candidate relationship management capabilities.

They can review hiring practices, too. Are you still requesting every applicant take the same old assessment you've been administering for decades? Do you require candidates to provide several references? If you answered yes to either of these questions, you may be ready to work with an executive search firm.

Speed is of the essence in a candidate's market, which makes tapping a search partner to streamline your interview process a necessity. Speaking from experience, we see that candidates are getting taken off the market quickly and fielding multiple offers, so a long, clunky interview process all but guarantees another company will nab your prospect. To the fullest extent that you can, reduce the number of stages required for an interview and keep things flexible. If a hiring manager is unavailable, find someone else to run the interview or move the applicant ahead in the process. Rigidity can mean the end of an otherwise functional hiring experience.

We also recommend preparing yourself for counteroffers. Spend time on preventative maintenance by figuring out if money or a lack of promotion is the main motivator for a given

candidate. Only then should you put together an appropriate job offer. Take remote work into consideration as well. Offering completely remote positions can exponentially increase the amount of talent available to you—across the U.S. and beyond. If you can't offer fully remote positions, allowing candidates to come into the office less frequently may still entice the caliber of candidate you seek.

These are just a handful of the methods reputable and experienced executive search firms bring to the table to help you win the war for talent—and as self-serving as it may seem, we hope you find value in them. You may have previously had success recruiting directly, using your own connections or job postings. However, the right recruiter will have spent their career networking in your target area. They can move quickly and have access to available candidates who perhaps wouldn't be on your radar. As manufacturing ramps up for a bright future, make sure you've got an executive search ally who can help you win the war for talent.