

# 9 Creative Ways to Find Top Talent



Finding qualified candidates can feel like a near-impossible task. Between oversaturated job boards and a constantly shifting labor market, recruiters face increasingly difficult challenges.

Almost half (**48%**) of HR teams say it's become harder to fill roles with qualified talent. On top of that, more than 1 in 5 recruiters admit they don't even know which of their recruiting sources are working.

If your recruiting attempts are stalling and talented candidates are becoming more difficult to find, your hiring costs will take a hit. The **hard costs of hiring** can be thousands of dollars per candidate, and if hiring processes take longer or you're rapidly churning through underqualified hires, those expenses will only go up.

To help you turn your **recruiting strategy** around, we've gathered nine creative ways to find top talent. Read on to get inspired with ideas for building your network, leveraging new tools, and connecting with the best candidates in your field.

## Is It Getting Harder to Find Qualified Candidates?

When your recruiting efforts keep hitting dead ends, you might start to question your abilities—*is this just in my head?* Don't worry, it's not! The **labor market is in a strange place right now**, and many HR professionals are feeling it.

As of January 2025, **unemployment is at 4%**, and the unemployed people to open jobs ratio **rests at 0.9**. In other words, unemployment is fairly low, and there are slightly more job openings than there are unemployed people.

Generally, this isn't a bad thing—it's good that fewer people are unemployed. But it does mean the **labor market is slow**, making recruiting more competitive.

There's also the issue of *who* is looking for a job. The portion of Americans participating in the workforce has been **decreasing for decades**, and the onset of the COVID pandemic dragged participation down even further. While workforce participation has recovered a bit since the pandemic began, the rate is still low, at only 62.6%. If it feels like your talent pool has been shrinking, it's because it probably is.



## Why Is Your Talent Pool Shrinking?

People are leaving the workforce for a variety of reasons, and while some aren't fully in your control (like **an aging population** that's retiring), there are a few possible causes you can think about when adjusting your recruiting and **compensation strategies**.

### CHILD CARE

**Child care costs keep increasing**, and the range of **childcare options** has narrowed. For many parents, one job's salary isn't enough to compensate for the expense of child care. This disproportionately affects women: as of January 2025, the share of women in the US workforce is **down to only 59%**, compared to men's participation at 70.3%.

### REMOTE WORK

For many employees, remote work has become a must-have. According to a BambooHR survey, **52% of workers** prefer remote work. And if you're wondering whether in-person work is a dealbreaker, executives seem to think so: 1 in 4 executives admit that they hoped their return-to-work policy would increase voluntary turnover.

### WAGE STAGNATION

Workers have become more productive in the last 50 years (in other words, making their employers more money), but their pay **has not increased proportionally**. Putting that into the context of recruiting: a highly skilled, highly productive worker likely already feels underpaid, and if your compensation offer isn't competitive, they won't be interested. Conversely, a pay increase is proven to pull talent from other companies, with **77% of employees** willing to consider changing jobs for higher compensation.

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## 9 Creative Ways to Find Qualified Candidates

### 1. PRIORITIZE NICHE JOB BOARDS

If your go-to job posting website is a major platform like LinkedIn or Indeed, you may need to **change up your strategy**. A massive job board like LinkedIn helps you cast a wide net and maximize your reach—but just because you're getting a lot of eyeballs on your job post doesn't mean you're finding qualified candidates. Auto-apply functions, like Easy Apply on LinkedIn, can result in an unmanageable volume of applications, many of them from applicants who've barely read the **job description**.

Instead, prioritize posting on niche job boards that specialize in the industry or role you're hiring for. You'll probably get fewer applications than you would on LinkedIn or Indeed, but a majority of the applicants will have sought out that particular job board based on their work history and interest areas, giving you a much more **qualified talent pool**.

To get you started, here are some examples of industry-specific job boards.

- Construction: [ConstructionJobs](#)
- Finance: [eFinancialCareers](#)
- Healthcare: [Health eCareers](#)
- Higher education: [Inside Higher Ed](#), [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#)
- Hospitality: [Hcareers](#)
- K-12 education: [K12JobSpot](#)
- Nonprofit: [Idealist](#)
- Tech: [Dice](#)

## 2. START AN EMPLOYEE REFERRAL PROGRAM

Your employees are an invaluable recruiting resource. They often know someone else in their field looking for a new role, and as current employees, they're a credible source to endorse your company. The best way to leverage employee networks is to start an [employee referral program](#).

An [employee referral program](#) offers a streamlined process for employees to recommend a candidate for an open role. If the candidate is hired, the employee who made the referral usually receives some type of bonus or perk. This type of program motivates employees to refer strong candidates and also incentivizes them to keep their referred candidates engaged and excited throughout the recruiting process.

To avoid a conflict of interest, the employee submitting the referral shouldn't be making any hiring decisions.

## 3. EMBRACE COLD OUTREACH

Sometimes your best bet is to reach out to candidates directly. Cold outreach might feel a little awkward, but most people are excited to be [courted by a recruiter](#), especially if they're already looking for a new job.

When you have [unique qualifications](#) or even specific people in mind for a role, send potential candidates a personalized message to show your interest. Most cold outreach will happen via LinkedIn DMs, but since some industries have a big presence on other social media platforms as well, confirm where your desired candidate has the most active professional account so you can send the DM to the best place.

If you're only hiring a few people a year and have a [smaller budget](#), you can use regular social media features to build your connections and send DMs. However, if you're looking to amp up your recruiting capacity, consider investing in automated tools, like [LinkedIn Recruiter](#).

LinkedIn Recruiter allows you to search for LinkedIn users beyond your network to find the most qualified candidates and send them messages via InMail, LinkedIn's recruiter messaging system. InMail gives you options to customize automated messages and follow-ups, so you can efficiently reach out to your desired candidates without losing that personal touch.

## 4. DEVELOP YOUR OWN "ALUMNI" NETWORK

Take a page from academia's playbook and start using your alumni as a recruiting asset. Just like a university uses alumni to connect with students, you can activate your network of former employees to reach out to potential job candidates.

Building your alumni network starts with [exit interviews](#). When employees move on, take the time to get their thoughts on their experience, ask if they would recommend working at the company, and find out if they're interested in staying in touch.

You can keep former employees in the loop with a company newsletter or LinkedIn group. When you're hiring for a role, you can share about the job in the alumni newsletter and ask people to spread the word. You can also reach out directly to specific alumni who you think will be helpful in the talent search.

## 5. KEEP PAST APPLICANTS IN MIND

Pining after the one who got away? In recruiting, it's never too late! If you have past applicants who you loved but it didn't work out for that particular role, reach out to them when you're hiring again.

As you go through various hiring cycles, keep a running list of the candidates you liked. [Flag their resumes](#) and take notes on what made them stand out. When it's time to hire for a new role, you'll already have a list of potential recruits.

If you're reaching out to someone who has already applied with your company, be sure to contact them personally to express how excited you are by the possibility of working with them, and cite specific reasons why you think they're a great fit for the role.

Avoid a generic message at all costs—no one wants to feel like a random name in an email database, especially if they've already been [rejected once](#).

## 6. CREATE AN INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

Do you hire interns? If not, you should explore the possibility of **establishing an internship program**. Developing an internship program is a lot of work at first, but once the program is up and running, it's a surefire way to create a talent pipeline.

Internships broaden your recruiting horizons to **people who may have less experience** but have a lot of potential. By the end of their internship, interns are great job candidates—you've already trained them on the role and you know they're a good fit for your company. And even if you don't hire someone straight out of their internship, you can still cultivate the relationship and recruit them later on.

Interns are also amazing spokespeople for your **employer brand**. In addition to interns applying for permanent positions themselves, they're also likely to tell their job-seeking friends about their great internship experience and encourage them to look for jobs at your company as well.

For an internship program to be an effective recruiting tool, you'll need to set it up properly. Here are a few steps to take when starting or rebooting your internship program.

- Create program goals
- Confirm there will be substantial work for interns to do
- Identify intern supervisors who are eager to be mentors
- Connect with college career centers to advertise the program
- Post internships on job boards frequented by students, such as Handshake
- Prepare hiring criteria and **interview questions for interns**

### Free Resource: The Definitive Guide to Creating an Internship Program

Recruit and nurture up-and-coming talent with a stellar internship program. Our free guide takes you through how to design a top-notch internship, get buy-in from leadership, and attract the best candidates.

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## 7. REACH OUT TO EDUCATORS

In addition to promoting your internship program, an educator outreach initiative can become a valuable resource of its own. Teachers want to see their students succeed, which makes them enthusiastic supporters of your recruitment efforts.

Take the time to build relationships with professors, trainers, and advisors at local educational institutions. An internship program is a great start, but that's only one way to get involved with universities and technical schools.

If you want to develop a contact list of educators who have good relationships with high-achieving recent grads, you'll need to get creative with making connections. Some other possible ways to engage educators include:

- Attending on-campus job fairs and career days
- Asking coworkers to reach out to their alma maters
- Cold emailing academic advisors
- Connecting company leaders with professors for guest lecturing opportunities
- Volunteering your company's campus and resources for hands-on learning experiences



## 8. LEVERAGE SOCIAL MEDIA

Get creative with how you use social media to **promote your employer brand** and build your recruiting network. Aside from using LinkedIn to post jobs and search for candidates, you can use LinkedIn to share interesting posts about your company's culture, such as **fun team-building events** or the unique benefits you offer.

You can also use social media to build relationships with industry thought leaders—when it comes time to look for candidates, you'll have an excellent asset for boosting job posts and getting connected with talent.

Remember, you may want to invest time in platforms beyond LinkedIn, such as Reddit, Instagram, Bluesky, or Substack. Wherever the people in your industry are most engaged online, establish a strong presence. Not only will this help you expand your network, but it will also keep you aware of any important **trends** or discourses happening within your industry.

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## 9. HOST PROFESSIONAL EVENTS

Even if your budget constricts you to only a few small-scale events a year, making some personal connections with job seekers—and getting their resumes and contact information—can have a huge impact on your recruitment efforts.

For a straightforward recruiting event, you can host a company open house and invite interested people to come learn more about **company culture**, open roles, and meet and greet with some of your leadership. You can also plan pop-up recruiting events at community hubs, such as college campuses, shopping malls, rec centers, and public libraries.

For other networking events, try offering unique professional development opportunities, like speaker panels on engaging topics or intimate lunch-and-learns with industry experts.

If your events budget allows, you can also experiment with personal enrichment events that really emphasize your employer brand. For example, you could host an industry-themed trivia night, plan a daytime **wellness retreat**, or organize a group volunteer activity with a local charity.