

An **Unprecedented** Moment for Opportunity



WE **LEARN**



WeLearn is a learning solutions and workforce development company focused on changing the way in which organizations use learning to achieve their best outcome. WeLearn partners with organizations to:

- embed workforce development into their organizational DNA and to find and identify new sources of talent for the roles they need to fill.

- deploy new ways of reskilling and upskilling their current employees to build greater talent mobility and to ensure they have an engaged committed pool of talent.

- ensure learning is deployed as a strategic benefit to their employees and driving to organizational outcomes.

- make their most inspired learning ideas come by creating and delivering current, relevant, beautiful, and engaging learning solutions.

WeLearn does this to enable both organizations and their employees to grow and flourish in the competitive marketplace.

Learn more at [www.WeLearnLS.com](http://www.WeLearnLS.com)

This paper was developed with support from Paper Crane Associates, a consulting firm which helps mission-driven organizations launch, grow, and pivot.  
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# A Unique Moment

Covid-19 is unlike anything we've experienced in our lifetime, and it's shaking everything up. How you work, where you work, when you work, in some cases even why you work may have changed. As recovery mode starts, there are questions of what remnants of the 'temporary' work environment last beyond covid-19. Will working from home be the new normal for your business? If so, will you seek talent from a larger geographic region? Do your employees have the needed skills to adapt to the new, changing economy?

Unemployment numbers are still staggeringly high. However, it may not be as bleak as it appears. In this unique moment, businesses have an unprecedented opportunity to cultivate talent. How so? Some incredibly talented people are out of work and on the market. Many businesses have used this time to unlock usual reach and expand beyond specific locations. This is a moment to pursue creative recruitment and invest in upskilling of your workforce so your business can rise above the pack. Good employees are the key to business success. While the future is unknown, developing a strategy with an agile, talented workforce will help you land on top of the pack.

Though organizations are forced to reckon with the difficulty of layoffs, pause and reconsider. A study done out of the University of Colorado looked at all NYSE publicly traded companies from 1980-2016. It found that "the companies that delayed layoffs as long as they could — whether by cutting salaries, furloughing employees, or even running in the red — saw higher stock returns, two years later, than comparable companies that laid off people from the start."<sup>1</sup> The proof is in the pudding. However, we think you can do even better. Don't just hold onto staff, look at developing your company's talent. Now is time to lean in to evolving the way your organization attracts candidates, promotes lifelong learning, and fulfills its organizational purpose.<sup>2</sup> You can lead by supporting your employees in developing new skills for this rapidly changing world.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/14/opinion/layoffs-coronavirus-economy.html>

<sup>2</sup> The Business Roundtable, 2020



## Step 1 ● ○ ○ ○ ○

### Take a Closer Look at your Workforce

First, take stock of your current employees. Are staff working at their full capacity now? Not in terms of time, but in terms of talent. Thirty-four percent of workers say their manager doesn't know what skills they have, so leaders are flying blind in utilizing the attributes of their team.<sup>3</sup> Take the time to inquire and you may be pleasantly surprised. The first step in cultivating a top talent workforce is gaining a better understanding of the workforce you already have. With this knowledge, leaders can temporarily re-allocate staff to take on roles better suited to the company's current needs. For example, Covid-19 may cause a business to rely more on people who can successfully facilitate remote meetings, foster team development remotely, or anticipate needs for new services in rapidly changing markets. Through learning more about your staff, you find an accountant has experience as the president of a non-profit board. They can run a meeting with ease, although this skill was not previously required in their accounting role. Staff capacity improves as there is another facilitator able to assist. Whether you discover an excel wiz or someone with experience in crisis management, identifying these attributes can increase the organization's effectiveness.

Expanding opportunities for staff can increase job satisfaction and reduce the chance of employee turnover. Figuring out ways to keep talented employees is a challenge facing all industries.

Prior to Covid-19, job retention rates were dropping at alarming rates.<sup>4</sup> This trend is expected to continue in the post Covid-19 economy.



Note that this exploration and expansion of job function has to be done with buy-in from the staff. When done successfully, the company finds areas that diversify someone's job and better utilize their skill set. This benefits the company as well as the employees' experience.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.fastcompany.com/90508746/why-sweeping-lay-offs-may-hurt-you-after-the-pandemic-subsides>

<sup>4</sup> [https://trainingindustry.com/blog/workforce-development/how-to-address-employee-turnover-a-strategic-solution-for-employers-and-higher-education-providers/?utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=trainingindustry&utm\\_source=linkedin](https://trainingindustry.com/blog/workforce-development/how-to-address-employee-turnover-a-strategic-solution-for-employers-and-higher-education-providers/?utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=trainingindustry&utm_source=linkedin)

## Step 2 ● ● ○ ○ ○

# Upskill/Reskill Your Staff to Prepare for What's Next

For many, the understanding of 'business as usual' has shifted in order to survive these past 3 months. The implications have been reshaping entire industries. Companies like Twitter have said they'll never again open a physical office. Food establishments have to figure out contactless pickup and serving at half of their original capacity. Telemedicine will forever change healthcare accessibility. Fitness organizations have expanded their reach of dedicated followers through hosting online classes. Brick and mortar stores may move towards checkout-less technology.<sup>5</sup>

Every business leader should be asking the key transitional question: As we move forward, what are the gaps between the skills needed for our business's success and the skills our staff currently have?

This is a key question for two reasons. The first, and more obvious, is that employees need to be able to complete the tasks needed for basic business functionality. If a sales business used in-person methods for making sales, the same team may not be equipped with the skills needed to make remote sales. The basic skill set required for this team's success has changed. If the business doesn't take active steps to upskill the team, the sales are in jeopardy.

The second reason is reflected in larger workforce trends. In previous generations, people worked the same job for decades. As of 2018, the average duration at a job was 4.2 years.<sup>6</sup> Twenty-first century jobs require employees to continuously learn new skills. Without proper workforce development, employees leave and seek growth opportunities elsewhere. In 2019, 27% of employees left their jobs, which is a 90% increase from 2018. Most employees report that they leave due to a lack of growth and development opportunities. This trend is projected to continue in post covid-19 recovery. In the example above, if a business does not invest in the new skills that allow a sales representative to succeed in this new environment, the employee would leave the organization to pursue opportunities where their skillset is valued or can grow.

<sup>5</sup> <https://joshbersin.com/2020/05/the-unemployment-report-economic-transformation-before-our-eyes/>

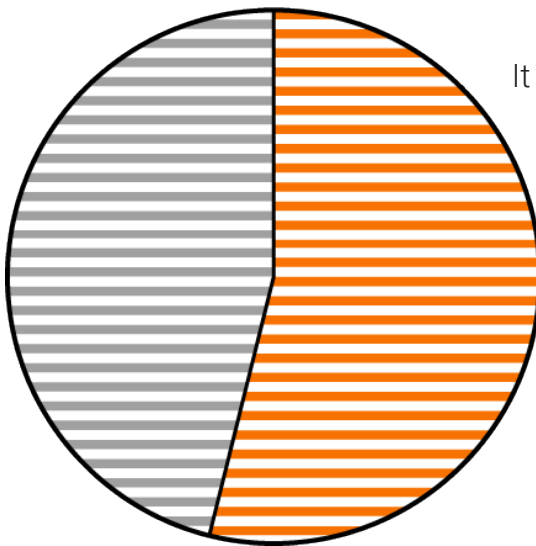
<sup>6</sup> <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/tenure.nr0.htm>

## Step 2 ● ● ○ ○ ○

# Upskill/Reskill Your Staff to Prepare for What's Next

Learning and Development is a key strategy for building talent inside of organizations. But it should not be limited to only that learning which can be provided by the organization. Organizations should build partnerships that span outside of the organization and that allow for employees to develop expertise and the broad competencies needed to be successful. This should be through a combination of external educational opportunities, company provided training, on-the-job training, coaching and mentoring and experience. Leaders must ask themselves how we move our workforce to build the skills, knowledge, and competencies to remain competitive.

**Upskilling**, or building on capabilities that refine skills for an existing job, is a necessity for business success.



It is not a luxury that a company can choose to indulge in if there is a budget surplus. According to the World Economic Forum Future of Jobs Report, **"54% of the workforce will require significant upskilling within the next five years."**<sup>7</sup> Upskilling will help companies continue to play in the arena. For example, if your marketing team does not know how to use analytics for big data, your company will fall behind. Make sure your staff is up to date with the skills needed to compete.

<sup>7</sup> [https://hbr.org/2020/05/now-is-an-unprecedented-opportunity-to-hire-great-talent?utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=hbr&utm\\_source=linkedin](https://hbr.org/2020/05/now-is-an-unprecedented-opportunity-to-hire-great-talent?utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=hbr&utm_source=linkedin)

## Step 2 ● ● ○ ○ ○

# Upskill/Reskill Your Staff to Prepare for What's Next

Given the trends of needed skill acquisition, upskilling may not be enough. Businesses will also have to think about reskilling their staff.

**Reskilling** is when employees are given training to acquire new or improved skills for a different role.



For example, a cafeteria worker in a healthcare organization who transitions to slowly becoming a Certified Nursing Assistant. Some positions may become obsolete as your business moves into its next stage. Leaders and HR professionals have the option of bringing hardworking and talented employees with you, but that takes investment in preparing them for the role.

**Reskilling** is a smart long-term step, because employee turnover is reduced as are costs associated with hiring new staff (including understanding company norms), and your business becomes more competitive for attracting top talent.

## Step 3 ● ● ● ○ ○

### Bringing on New Talent (Short Term Opportunities)

Right now, hiring new talent may seem an untenable option - especially if you have just laid-off workers. For a moment, put that thought aside. Allow yourself to think ahead several years to your organization could be if you attracted top talent right now.

Hewlett Packard executives cite their greatest key to their success was investing in their talent no matter what the economic climate. They said of their post-WWII hiring, **"We couldn't afford not to [be investing in the best talent]!"**.<sup>7</sup>

We can learn from their approach.

Harvard Business School conducted a study of 4,700 companies and determined that the most successful 10% prospered because they had a 'progressive' focus. These executives applied an 'and' mindset when thinking about strategic decisions around hiring and downsizing.<sup>8</sup> This 'and' approach embeds a growth mindset where a company isn't just making decisions to survive the present, but thinks about needed resources for the future. Businesses that plan for the future, succeed in the future.

If you are *really* not in a position to hire, then start brainstorming. Think of the exceptional people you've met over the course of your career. Due to covid-19, colleagues once settled on a specific path may now be looking for the next great job.

Think less about the **specific role** you are trying to hire for and more about **the person** you want to have on your team.

Reach out to them and touch base. Cultivate the relationship. When you are getting ready to hire, you already have a lead. Don't wait too long though. Not only is there a risk of missing someone's 'window of opportunity' moment of transition, but you also risk losing your competitive advantage by recruiting at the same time as every other recovering business.

<sup>7</sup> [https://hbr.org/2020/05/now-is-an-unprecedented-opportunity-to-hire-great-talent?utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=hbr&utm\\_source=linkedin](https://hbr.org/2020/05/now-is-an-unprecedented-opportunity-to-hire-great-talent?utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=hbr&utm_source=linkedin)

<sup>8</sup> 10 Bridge the Gap: Rebuilding America's Middle Skills, 2014



## Step 4 ● ● ● ● ○

### Bringing on New Talent (Long Term Opportunities)

Whether in a current state of hiring, or thinking about the future, talent may be lurking in areas you least expect. It can be hard to find the right candidate at the best of times; employers have struggled to fill roles with qualified applicants.<sup>9</sup> The market may seem wide open for employers, given the staggering numbers of unemployment, yet it is complicated. Since the last financial crisis, certain trends have made finding qualified employees more challenging. For example, many organizations up-credentialed their frontline and entry-level roles. Logically, they were pursuing the most qualified person for the role they were trying to fill.

However, education level is **not** necessarily the measure of a good or fitting employee.

The unintended consequences of this were twofold. First, individuals who took these jobs were turning over at a higher rate as they sought higher compensated roles. Second, these roles now became inaccessible to those who may have been most qualified to fill them from a skills perspective.

This time around, we need to rethink the credentials required for job descriptions and hire those who are likely to grow with the company. When putting out a job description, build job descriptions “based on core capabilities, not articulating competency requirements and avoiding unnecessary upskilling.”<sup>8</sup> Identify the skills that are necessary for completing the job, not whether someone has a college degree or a judicial record. Paired with a workforce development program, this framework can attract people interested in developing company loyalty and hard work. Not only does this thinking expand the pool of candidates, but it also sets the stage for a new era of employee longevity.

<sup>9</sup> <https://workingnation-com.cdn.ampproject.org/c/s/workingnation.com/the-most-important-covid-19-education-story-is-one-nobodys-telling/amp/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/alexandrawilson/2020/05/19/guild-education-makes-80-million-acquisition-to-build-out-job-marketplace-amid-covid-19-layoffs/#195549c1326a>

## Step 4 ● ● ● ● ○

### Bringing on New Talent (Long Term Opportunities)

It is especially fruitful to apply this thinking to middle-skills roles. Middle-skill jobs, those roles which require more than a high school diploma but less than a four-year degree, make up more than half of the U.S. labor market. They are anticipated to exceed white-collar occupations between now and 2022.<sup>9</sup> These workers have been disproportionately impacted by covid-19 and are losing their jobs at about four times the rate of their college-graduate peers.<sup>10</sup> That means these workers are also disproportionately on the job market, ready to learn the skills needed to further your business.

As covid-19 shifts business strategy, the trend of rapid skill acquisition is even faster than before. Hiring a qualified workforce will require more than a process of filling one qualified job description at a time, especially as the core competencies change. Successful organizations should seek to build a competitive advantage by building a repeatable process that is crucial to HR and internal strategy.<sup>11</sup> Consider creating your own talent supply chain. It is a more up-front investment, but can save thousands of dollars in time and resources. By having a process in place, an organization can have a steady stream of qualified, incoming talent from community colleges and trade schools.

This holistic approach to recruiting, involving embedding educational, technical, and training opportunities, results in the ability to **create the workforce you desire**. More importantly, a workforce that is aligned with the core strategy of the organization.

Hiring may not be on the brain, but plan now for better success later. Position your company to be ready to launch into a recruitment strategy ahead of your competitors so you still get your pick of the market and be ready to train for the skills you need most. An HBS, Accenture and Burning Glass study warns against a passive approach, “by failing to anticipate which workforce capabilities that are critical to their strategic health, companies risk requiring workers with skills in emerging areas for which there is limited or no supply.”<sup>12</sup> Try to get ahead of the curve and forecast your hiring the way you would other aspects of your business. Think about what workforce development opportunities to put in place to get new hires ready on day one (or even before).

<sup>11</sup> Bridge the Gap: Rebuilding America's Middle Skills, 2014

<sup>12</sup> Bridge the Gap: Rebuilding America's Middle Skills, 2014

## Step 5 ● ● ● ● ●

### Be Exceptional in Executing Steps 1-4

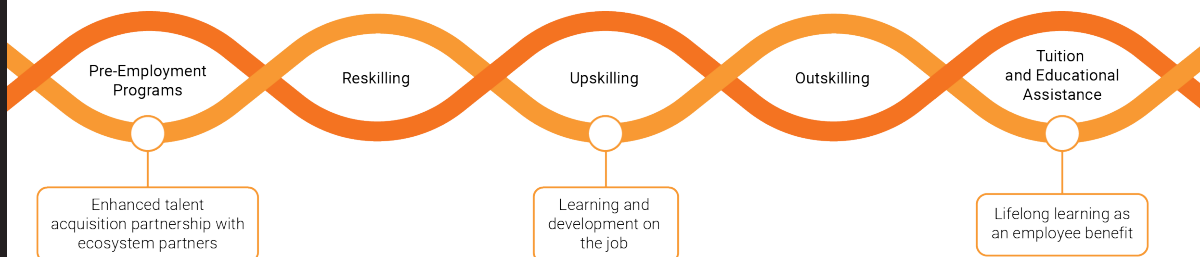
Whether focusing on upskilling, reskilling, hiring, or building a talent supply chain, invest in developing a plan that works for the needs of your specific organization. Treat these areas with care as they can provide a direct path to further your business's success. How does one design programs that are aligned with the core needs of their business?

#### We can help.

WeLearn specializes in developing tailored workforce development plans. Serving as one single point of contact to guide business through each of these areas, WeLearn assesses the Organizational DNA™ of your business. Through this analysis, we outline the steps for optimal strategic investment of your workforce.

### Our Organizational DNA Model

a model for workforce development



## Step 5

### Be Exceptional in Executing Steps 1-4

We help the most complex organizations roll out a targeted workforce development strategy. Whether program or individual focused, our experienced practitioners have developed tools focused on building employees' skills. Applying these strategies inside the organization will allow the organization to optimize the internal talent pipeline and reduce the cost of filling positions. By shifting these policies and programs, not only are organizations embedding workforce development in their DNA, but they are also communicating that lifelong learning is a cornerstone of their employee value proposition.

When executed exceptionally, these processes will help maximize efficiencies, reduce turnover, and increase employee productivity. We believe that fundamentally embracing workforce development is good for organizations and drives not only organizational results – but ultimately employee engagement and retention.



Let us help strengthen your employee capability **today** and into the **future**.



# In Summary

The future is even more uncertain than it was six months ago, but let that be an opportunity for your business to get stronger.

**Take action now to invest in your company's most precious resource, *your employees*.**

Even if you are not ready to start hiring or invest in new training (and we'd certainly argue otherwise), now is definitely the time to strategize and lay the groundwork. Covid-19 could be a reset for your business; use this unique opportunity to reconfigure your competitive advantage. Embedding internal systems to future-proof your staff investment, planning, and foresight. Research has shown that this progressive mindset will pay off. WeLearn can be the key to developing the right systems for your business. Use this unprecedented moment to develop top talent, and have a progressive lens for making it through the recovery and beyond.

# WE LEARN

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