OMERS Ventures

Talent Playbook
For Start-ups & Scale-ups

OMERS

Why This Guide?

One of the biggest challenges a company faces is talent – how to find the right people, hire them, develop them and, perhaps most importantly, retain them. While every company is faced with this challenge, it can be even more pronounced in the start-up industry. The pace is faster, budgets are tight and time is limited.

The goal of a strategic People function should be to support the employee journey in a way that makes sense for the company at each size and stage without slowing down the business or implementing unnecessary processes. Much of what is created in the earlier days will need to evolve as the company grows, however the foundational pieces that are put in place will remain consistent and influence the overall Talent strategy and related programs in the long-term.

This guide, while not exhaustive, is intended to highlight some of the most common challenges at each stage of a company's growth and suggest solutions that will help Founders and their HR Partners address them. It should be treated as a high-level review with an understanding that some of the recommended courses of action are not easy to implement and will require additional research before the solution is implemented.

Sara Cooper
Talent Director, OMERS Ventures

Sara is the Talent Director for OMERS Ventures. She provides advice, guidance and support to our portfolio companies on talent attraction, employee engagement and retention and other HR related programs. She is also responsible for creating a highly engaged community of executive level candidates for potential leadership and advisory opportunities within the OV portfolio.

Sara has fifteen years of experience in Talent Attraction and HR and has spent the last ten years focused on Toronto's tech industry. Prior to joining OV, Sara worked with Lavalife and Microsoft Canada and also held leadership roles at D+H and FreshBooks.

Contents

CHAPTER 1

Up to 50 Employees

Common Challenges

Culture and Values

During these very early days, the focus is on speed – building the product, testing it in the market, iterating, possibly pivoting and starting the whole process again. Chances are the Founder has spent little to no time thinking about their ideal company culture or defined the values/guiding principles that will help build it. The result is a culture that is evolving without deliberate intention and may not be the one that will ultimately drive the company's success.

Other factors that might not have been given much consideration include the overall office environment, types of social activities and team building events as well as perks and benefits provided to employees. It can be easy to fall back on the typical start-up trappings of ping pong, beer and bean bag chairs which tend to be attractive to a limited variety of people.

Recruiting and Hiring

Issues can quickly arise with hiring due to a haphazard process with little to no structure around recruiting, interviewing and selection. Hiring decisions are made by "gut feel" or based on who the interviewer(s) get along with best (the classic "do I want to have a beer with this person?"). Candidates tend to come through employee referrals and the Founder's network creating a small pool of candidates to choose from. All of these factors can combine to create a homogenous environment.

Our employees are key to everything we do and everything we achieve, and we respect and admire each and every one of them greatly. We believe that a diverse and inclusive culture is a priority for a winning team – you don't get innovation without diversity. It's not only about the way you look though, it's about the way you see. To create a culture that encourages diversity of thought, we need to be truly inclusive.

Ashira Gobrin, SVP, People & Culture
Wave

At Wattpad, cultural fit doesn't mean culturally identical: diversity is our strength and we truly value the different backgrounds, voices and perspectives that make up our team. Our interview process is designed to evaluate whether candidates share a similar set of values as us. Diversity of thought helps us challenge one another to think differently.

Meghan Scott, Human Resources Manager
Wattpad

Compensation inequities are often a problem with employees being paid very differently for similar roles. Compensation packages may have been based on how quickly a position needed to be filled, how hard a candidate negotiated or other factors including unconscious biases.

Employee Development & Retention

Usually in the early days of a start-up, everyone is expected to pitch in across the organization and with an ethos of "no job too small", employees often take on tasks outside of their core responsibilities. They also tend to be extremely focused on getting the job done and aren't necessarily looking for formal development opportunities.

Along with the all hands on deck mentality, there is often an expectation that employees will eat, sleep and breathe their work and the company. Founders will often look for individuals (either consciously or not) who are able to spend extended amounts of time at work and highlight their "commitment" to the rest of the team. This can create an atmosphere in which only certain types of individuals will be hired or rewarded – typically young and without family obligations – and exclude those who do not fit that profile leading to limited career development.

Tools

Any documentation that does exist is typically housed in a myriad of inefficient systems (Excel, Google docs etc) and updates to employee files often have to be entered into multiple spreadsheets. The result is duplication of effort, wasted time and lost information.

Solutions

Culture and Values

A house is only as good as its foundation. This is true for a company as well. The foundation to every company are its guiding principles (aka values). These values will create the company culture; ultimately informing decisions around hiring, promotions and terminations and will also establish which behaviours will be celebrated or discouraged. It's important to note that culture is not beer, ping-pong tables or free food; rather it's about how employees, including leadership, interact with each other as well as customers and external partners.

When discussing values and culture, the Founder needs to be honest with themselves around the type of company they want to create and whether it's a realistic reflection of their approach to work. In order for values to go from words on a wall to forming the basis of the company's culture, the Founder(s) need to lead by example and live them every day. They need to be instilled through-out all processes, guide all interactions and influence every decision.

Recruiting and Hiring

Assuming continued growth, this is typically a good time to hire a Recruiter. Recruiting is usually viewed as a speciality area within HR and a high growth company will want to hire someone with previous experience in the role. The right person will be able to develop a more robust selection process by implementing programs to help identify and attract quality candidates. As an example, role personas should be developed for every position in the company. A role persona is a combination of the job description and the personal attributes/traits required to be successful in that position. Candidates should be assessed based on their alignment with company values as well as the role persona.

In order to create a diverse candidate pool, the Founders and Recruiter should intentionally look outside their own networks to target groups they may not otherwise be able to access. This can be accomplished by partnering with organizations which support under-represented groups, championing diversity and inclusivity publically and setting targets for hiring teams for minority representation in the interview process. Without a doubt, this is front end heavy work but the pay-off here will be a larger candidate pool and the creation of a positive employment brand early in a company's evolution. Remember, a team of people who bring various lived experiences, viewpoints, skill sets, life styles, educational and work backgrounds is vital for innovation and should be viewed as business imperative.

A defined interview process will ensure a fair and equitable selection process. These processes will likely look a bit different depending on the role and seniority level (a Developer interview process will typically include a technical test for example) and will naturally evolve over time as the selection team discovers what works. In all cases, it's recommended to continually evaluate the processes, candidate attributes etc to ensure that they are identifying the correct individuals and resulting in successful hires.

Set general compensation ranges including salary, bonus and equity grants for each role based on market data (salary surveys and candidate feedback can be helpful). Again, these will change over time especially as the market evolves but it's helpful to have an idea of what a role is worth. If a high priority candidate comes in outside of the range, a conversation can then be had around how to approach the hire and the impact on budgets and internal equity.

Employee Development and Retention

Less emphasis needs to be place on formal development opportunities at this point as the team is typically focused on getting a product to market. As mentioned previously, employees will often take on responsibilities outside of their core role which can also be viewed as a development opportunity for them. Obviously there is a difference in an engaging development opportunity and one that isn't going to further the individual's career so Founders and other Leaders should be cognizant of the types of requests they are making to employees.

While the early days of a start-up can be time intensive, encouraging employees to go home, enjoy some personal time and recharge will help prevent burn-out and lowered engagement over the long term. Also, Founders and other Leadership should recognize that having commitments outside of work does not decrease dedication or commitment while at the office. Recognize and reward individuals for their performance rather than "face time" and work towards a flexible environment that allows employees to balance their work and family life.

Tools

Research and invest in an Human Resources Information System (HRIS). The goal here is to eliminate duplication and speed up administration, so ensure that the HRIS has the potential to integrate with any current HR related applications (i.e. payroll software) in addition to software that may be needed down the road. Another consideration is whether the software will be able to scale with the business to at least 150-200 employees so system migrations are kept to a minimum.

A "cheap and cheerful" Applicant Tracking System (ATS) can also be helpful at this stage. There are several free and low cost options that can help organize a hiring process and track a high volume of candidates without other features that are typically not required at this stage and can add to the cost of a system.

CHECKLIST: Chapter 1

Up to 50 Employees

CULTURE & VALUES
- Determine the company's values and embed them into all processes, decisions and interactions

RECRUITING & HIRING
- Hire a Recruiter
- Create role personas for every position in the company
- Recruit from outside of direct networks
- Define interview processes for every position
- Create general compensation ranges for each role (keep them flexible!)

EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT & RETENTION
- Remember: face time does not equal value and output
- Recognize employees for performance not just their time in the office

TOOLS
- Research and invest in a HRIS
- Research and decided on free / low cost ATS

CHAPTER 2

50 to 100 Employees

Common Challenges

Culture and Values

Values are often one of the first things to be compromised in the search for talent. Most people have heard the stereotype of the "brilliant jerk" – employees whose bad behaviour is accepted because of their perceived talent. Nothing breaks culture faster than tolerating, or even worse, rewarding these individuals with raises or promotions. Employees start to resent both the individual for their behaviour and the company for allowing them to behave contrary to the stated values. Over time, this can lead to employees questioning the authenticity of the values and the Founder's commitment to culture; employee disengagement and eventually turnover.

As the company grows, cultural norms also risk getting diluted. Expected behaviours and the company values may be unintentionally poorly communicated to new hires. Long term employees have institutional knowledge that new hires may not pick up on their own. If there isn't a structured onboarding process or new employee training in place, this information is often not passed on.

We are paranoid about culture. It's the glue that keeps us together in the face of adversity.

Rob Shapiro, Head of HR
Klipfolio

We are building a learning community - full of people supporting your practice, rooting for your success, contributing to your learning, and learning from you. But that same community is going to push you, and so are the processes and the ways the organization works.

Matthew Handford, SVP, People
Hootsuite

Recruiting and Hiring

There is a lot going on from a people perspective. From hiring, employee development, long term engagement and exiting people in the correct way, people-related tasks can often be overwhelming. Problem employees are ignored, hire dates are missed, good employees leave because they're not being developed and culture can be negatively impacted.

Due to the speed of hiring, it's also highly likely that candidate experience hasn't been a priority. Depending on the team or hiring manager, candidates may have vastly different experiences and may come away with very different impressions of the company. These experiences can influence not just the employment brand but the overall reputation of the company as well.

Employee Development and Retention

One of the challenges of hiring high potential, high performing individuals with agile mindsets and a ton of ambition is that they need to be consistently recognized and developed. Employees who initially were completely focused on the task at hand are starting to think about career development. An early stage company that doesn't have much upward mobility needs to be creative in how they approach this situation in order to engage and retain employees.

New leaders have emerged and need development. These individuals typically exhibit natural leadership skills, live the company values and are high performers. They are usually the first managers at a start-up, will often have no management experience and will be tasked with leading people who were their peers at work and, quite often, friends outside of it. This period of transition is difficult on both sides – it's hard to lead former peers and also hard to accept a former peer as a leader. Turnover might spike on the affected team and the new leader might experience a crisis of confidence.

Tools

Assuming a HRIS and ATS have been implemented, there likely aren't many challenges from a tools perspective. If budget allows, investment can be made in tools to help address potential culture and engagement challenges.

Solutions

Culture and Values

Don't make the mistake of assuming people will "just know" what's expected of them or how to behave. Company guidelines and cultural norms should be documented and a formal onboarding program created to pass this information on to new generations of employees. See the *Employee Retention & Development* section for more information on this.

Behaviour that runs contrary to the values of the company should never be tolerated. The long term impact that this type of compromise can have on the individual's direct team and the greater organization can far outweigh their immediate effect on product delivery or sales numbers. Address any unwanted behaviour with a direct and honest conversation around expectations and potential consequences (including termination) should changes not take place.

While Founders and other senior leaders should partner with HR on employee programs and initiatives, the true culture of the company flows from the actions and decisions of those at the top. Founders need to continue to be intentional around scaling the culture as the business grows. It's important to be honest when it comes to values – there's a reason "what got you here won't get you there" is a saying. If a particular value is being compromised on a regular basis, take note of this and ask whether it needs to evolve to suit the current needs of the business. Culture is a living, breathing thing and as such, is going to change as the company evolves. It's when these changes occur haphazardly rather than being the result of a deliberate decision on the part of the Founder that problems arise.

Recruiting and Hiring

This is a good time to hire an HR/People Ops Leader to work alongside the Recruiter. This is one of the most important foundational hires a Founder makes. The right HR person will help to drive the business forward by understanding how to align the People strategy to the Business strategy. They will also be able to take on tactical responsibilities (documentation etc.), be the company's culture champion and act as an independent resource for employees. Think about the profile of the person you want leading this function. Ensure you're selecting someone who has at least some of the following experience: scaling a company and its culture, building a strategic rather than tactical HR function, working with and developing employees in various career stages and acting as a trusted advisor to the executive team.

Expectations around candidate experience should be identified and communicated clearly to everyone involved in hiring. It's important to remember that every candidate represents something greater than themselves. Yes, they are a potential employee but whether hired or not, they are also a potential network into other candidates and possibly a customer as well. Every candidate should have a positive experience with the company and should leave the process willing to refer someone else in, even if they aren't hired.

Employee Development and Retention

At this stage, opportunities for vertical development can be somewhat limited. Reframe the conversation from promotion to overall skills development and provide employees with horizontal growth opportunities. This can be accomplished by providing stretch opportunities, access to free or low

cost online course catalogues and assigning special projects. One option may be to ask people who are particularly good examples of living the values to create an onboarding program for new employees and set them up as new hire mentors/buddies. Consider creating interview training for high performing individuals and making them the "go-to" interviewers for their respective teams. In short, engage employees in anything that encourages them to become more invested and engaged in the company while furthering their own development.

Require current and emerging leaders to attend a formal leadership development program. This program should set expectations of leadership in regards to developing their teams, conducting regular performance and career discussions and making decisions based on the company values. Ideally it will also provide guidance around transitioning from an individual contributor to a leader.

Tools

Culture and employee engagement can be assessed through employee surveys. Rather than relying solely on an annual engagement survey, consider investing in one of the many pulse survey tools which gauge employee happiness on an ongoing basis. This proactive approach will enable leadership to identify potential problem areas as they arise and address the causes. Pulse surveys can also be used in conjunction with an annual survey to assess whether changes made in response to feedback are being received positively.

CHECKLIST: Chapter 2

50 to 100 Employees

CULTURES & VALUES
- Do not tolerate "brilliant jerks"
- Intentionally scale the culture by living the values and demonstrating adherence to them from a leadership perspective
- Review the values to ensure they are still relevant. Don't be afraid to change or evolve them if they no longer work
- Document cultural norms, processes and employee guidelines

RECRUITING & HIRING
- Create candidate experience guidelines
- Hire a HR/People Ops Leader who can build and align a People strategy with the Business strategy

EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT & RETENTION
- Provide development opportunities including stretch assignments, assigning special projects etc.
- Engage high performance / high potential employees with additional opportunities
- Leadership development program for new and upcoming leaders

TOOLS
- Consider investing in employee engagement / employee survey tool(s)

CHAPTER 3

100 to 150 Employees

Common Challenges

Culture and Values

A smaller team lends itself to more informal communication – updating the entire company over lunch or gathering for a quick stand-up is typical. As the team gets bigger, these informal channels of communication become less effective and relying on word of mouth to get the message out results in broken telephone or some employees not getting the message at all. Keeping everyone informed and focused on the same goals requires more thoughtful communication.

Founders and senior leadership may struggle with feeling out of touch. What was a fairly easy check-in during the early days may now require calendaring and more deliberate effort. It can be hard to understand how employees are feeling, what they're working on and whether their efforts are being spent on high impact activities.

Strong leaders make better decisions and empower teams to do more. As a start-up this is critical. We are focused on leadership development starting with self awareness. Our leaders spend a half-day session better understanding their strengths and key behaviours. This awareness has generated healthy conversation on leading team members, improving communication and maximizing strengths. The next step for us is to build on this foundational knowledge and have all employees complete their DISC profiles.

Lisa Brown, VP, Talent
Vidyard

Recruiting and Hiring

Much like culture, an employment brand can occasionally develop without much thought or effort. An employment brand is influenced by a myriad of things including candidate and employee experience, how employees and candidates talk about the company and the market's perception of the company or product. Remember, candidates are also very savvy consumers and will likely research every company they apply to or that reaches out them.

Conversations happen on social media with or without a company's involvement. Sites like Glassdoor encourage employees and interview candidates to leave reviews on their experiences and allow the user to quickly compare 'like' companies to one another. LinkedIn is essentially an employee directory providing candidates with the means to contact current and past employees for advice and inside information on interview processes and employment experience. Recruiting challenges can develop when they see or hear contradictory messages or feel that the company's message doesn't line up with their research.

Employee Development and Retention

Hierarchy develops as more people move into formal leadership roles. This can impact culture as individuals adjust to new reporting relationships and the loss of a direct line to the senior leadership team. New external leadership hires often bring a playbook that has helped their success in past roles and, as noted earlier, internal promotions mean inexperienced leaders who need to learn how to manage effectively.

Tools

Once a company hits its growth stride, teams get bigger and interview processes require more collaboration, the basic ATS is likely the cause of much frustration. Many low cost systems don't prioritize database search functionality or multiple interviewer collaboration which can potentially impede the speed at which candidates are found and move through the hiring process.

Solutions

Culture and Values

Once a company is over 100 people, formal communication channels tend to be more successful than relying on word of mouth or more informal methods of "getting the word out". This may mean a regular cadence of all-hands gatherings to cover overall strategies and performance of the business to emails and one-off company meetings for more pressing communication. The important thing here is not to assume everyone will find out "eventually". It is better to err on the side of over communication.

Set expectations around a regular cadence of one on one meetings between all employees and their leaders. These meetings should cover progress against goals, roadblocks and will serve to surface any potential issues. Career path discussions should occur at least once a quarter to discuss the employee's longer term career goals and development plans. As a Founder, also consider instituting 'skip level' meetings with individuals who don't directly report into Senior Leadership. These can be invaluable in getting the real pulse of the organization.

Recruiting and Hiring

A real focus should be placed on building the company's employment brand. The brand is built from the company's internal culture and employee value proposition and should be an authentic representation of what a candidate can expect should they join the company. Authenticity is vitally important here as even the most professionally developed brand will fail if it's not a reflection of the actual employee experience. Ideally HR/Recruiting and Marketing will work together along with a cross section of employees to come up with messaging that is impactful, authentic and aligns to overall company brand standards. Much like in product marketing, it's also important to understand the various candidate personas (Engineers versus Customer Success for example) and what will resonate with each group. Adjust recruitment messaging accordingly while still maintaining the overall brand.

While most companies have a love/hate relationship with Glassdoor, it is a driving force in recruiting today. A free account allows for basic functionality such as replying to reviews which helps to position the company as listening and responsive to both concerns and praise while providing another opportunity to reinforce brand messaging. Encourage employees to share both their employment experiences and the company's job postings on Linkedin and their other social accounts. Think about providing guidelines for appropriate social media usage and help make it easy by supplying suggested tweets or posts about specific events or openings on the team. Remember, happy employees are the best brand ambassadors a company can have.

Employee Development and Retention

As noted earlier, all new leaders should attend the same formal leadership development program. Requiring experienced leaders, whether they are internal promotions or external hires, to attend the same program will ensure every employee can expect similar investment from their managers in their careers and will be managed according to the company's standards and values.

Tools

Now is the time to invest in a robust ATS. Consider platforms that are highly customizable and provide options for the user to create distinct interview processes for each role, automates basics tasks, allows for candidate messaging and interview team collaboration to happen within the app and priortizes both employer and candidate user experience.

Goal setting software can be a big asset at this stage. There are many options that will show how individual and team goals roll up into the overall business goals. This type of software can also be used to track performance and development requirements.

CHECKLIST: Chapter 3

100 to 150 Employees

CULTURES & VALUES
- Formalize employee communication – consider all-hands, all-staff emails etc
- Be deliberate about employee touchpoints. Think about 1:1s, career development conversations and skip level meetings

RECRUITING & HIRING
- Develop the company's employment brand in partnership with Marketing and a cross-section of employees
- Engage on social media platforms such as Glassdoor
- Ask employees to be brand ambassadors

EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT & RETENTION
- Require every leader (including experienced leaders from outside the company) to attend the same leadership development training
- Ensure every employee has the same base experience regardless of team or manager

TOOLS
- Research and invest in a robust ATS
- Consider goal setting and performance tracking software

CHAPTER 4

150 to 200 Employees

Common Challenges

Culture and Values

Dunbar's number! According to Robin Dunbar, an anthropologist and evolutionary psychologist, people can only have 150 stable relationships. While this theory is often debated, there is no doubt that as a company grows, it becomes more difficult for employees to know all their colleagues. People are more spread out as the office space grows. Perhaps there are multiple floors or locations and some people work remotely. Employees tend to socialize just with their teams or those they deal with on a frequent basis and some of that small company "closeness" diminishes. Teams may start developing their own mini-cultures.

Recruiting and Hiring

Many companies experience unexpected hiring delays and candidate pool challenges causing missed targets, poor hiring decisions, skills gaps, diversity issues and attrition. This is often because earlier stage companies tend to use a "just in time" model for hiring partially to control costs but also because of a lack of longer term planning. This also means that teams may grow without an overall strategy beyond getting someone in the door to deliver on the next business imperative. This lack of planning can lead to issues such as a lack of internal movement and promotions, poorly formed teams and under/over staffing.

Depending on the speed of growth, the HR Leader may be largely focused on reactive or tactical activities leaving little time to concentrate on developing programs and long-term HR strategy. Frustration will occasionally develop due to an inability to move other priorities forward.

Employee Development and Retention

Employees will have started to request more structured career development. While stretch opportunities, internships and horizontal development are engaging, employees also want to understand what they need to do in order to grow

Community is key! At Smile, we help brands grow sustainably by creating customer communities and we follow that same principle for ourselves.

View your employees as part of your own community and inspire them with empathy, value adds (not just about the work) and opportunities to learn and grow. It is amazing what you see when everyone feels like they are a part of something that goes beyond the transactional element of the relationship.

Megan Hall, Head of Employee Experience & Operations
Smile.io

The Talent team at Vidyard is focused on reducing time wasters and finding new ways to improve efficiencies. We have many processes that were built years ago that worked when we were under 100 employees but as we grow we want to leverage automation, self serve and technology integrations. We go live with a new HRIS platform in June 2018 and it is exciting to already see the ROI of this investment. Simple reporting is now at our finger tips and we can leverage data better when making key decisions.

Lisa Brown, VP, People
Vidyard

their career in a vertical fashion. Those high performers want their ambition and commitment to be recognized and rewarded in a more formal way.

The senior leadership team may include individuals who have grown with the company but don't have the experience or skill set to help scale the company any further. There may also be a leadership vacuum in terms of individuals who can effectively replace them.

Tools

This is when any of the free, low cost or "simple" software solutions really start to show their limitations especially around reporting, compliance, development planning and performance management. As hiring ramps up, the employee base grows and programs are formalized the need for more robust software increases.

Solutions

Culture and Values

HR and the senior leaders of the organization need to ensure that lines of communication remain open across the company and that teams are working together rather than in silos. Something as simple as arranging seating into scrum teams, product lines or other project teams can promote cross collaboration more than having people with similar jobs sitting together. Great ideas can come from a simple hallway interaction so try to be deliberate in setting up an office environment that inspires "collision conversations".

Additionally, programs that encourage employees to get to know their colleagues in other parts of the organization can impact employee engagement and innovation as people who may never have the chance to talk start interacting. Many companies have had success with programs which set up employees from different areas of the organization on coffee or lunch dates. Company sponsored events, clubs and sports teams are also helpful – just remember to provide options for a diverse set of interests and physical abilities.

Consider instituting reminders around cultural expectations. The Founder or a member of the senior leadership team can speak to employees at every all-hands meeting about one of the values/guiding principles and why they are important. Another option is to reinforce the values by recognizing individuals who go above and beyond in living them during their interactions with co-workers and customers.

Make a conscious effort to instill the company's values at all locations. Understand and accept there may be some cultural differences due to geography, especially in out of country locations, but don't compromise on values. A member of the senior leadership team should make a point of visiting all remote locations at least once a quarter in order to reinforce the connection to the head office.

Recruiting and Hiring

If the headcount budget allows for it, hiring a HR Coordinator to assist with tactical tasks in both HR and Recruiting can help elevate performance and delivery in both functions. If this isn't an option, the individuals in these functions need to set expectations on the delivery of projects that will ultimately help support scaling the business.

The Recruiter's focus should be on moving hiring from a transactional to strategic function. In addition to filling immediate hiring requirements, they should partner with senior leaders on workforce planning, refining role personas by looking at successful, high performing employees and adjusting interview questions to address any newly identified attributes. They should also review the company's external employment brand by conducting a Talent Brand Audit and make any changes or updates that are required.

The HR/People Ops Leader should prioritize programs and strategies directly related to engaging employees with the company long term. This includes things like development, succession planning and other engagement initiatives and should be done in partnership with the senior leadership team. This is also a good time for a compensation evaluation and the creation of a compensation philosophy to ensure consistency across the organization and an understanding of how and why employees are rewarded.

Employee Development and Retention

Formalize career paths and job levels which have likely developed naturally as the company has grown. Document the skills and attributes required for each position and level. As part of regular 1:1s, leaders should advise employees of the level they're currently performing at and the skills and attributes they'll need to move up or elsewhere in the company. Encourage employees to come up with their own development plans (with manager input) and commit to supporting them in their development.

Assess the leadership team's capabilities. Determine where the skills gaps are and create personalized development plans for every senior leader. Direct reports to those leaders should also be assessed followed by succession planning and associated development programs. The key here is to start mitigating leadership risk to the business as much as possible.

Tools

Review software and associated processes with the aim of getting rid of, and replacing if appropriate, anything that no longer makes sense. Invest in scaleable tools that have the potential to grow with the company for at least the next three to five years.

The HR Leader should take the lead on this project with clear guidelines on overall requirements, security, other software integrations and budget. Remember that these are tools that will be used literally all day, every day and are very much an investment in HR's ability to do their job effectively.

CHECKLIST: Chapter 4

150 to 200 Employees

CULTURES & VALUES

- Review and asses cross company communication and collaboration
- Create programs to encourage employees from across the company to meet, socialize and brainstorm
- Reinforce values with employee recognition events
- Ensure senior leadership is in regular contact with remote offices

RECRUITING & HIRING

- If budget allows, consider hiring a HR Coordinator
- HR and Recruiting should move from tactical to strategic with a focus on workforce and succession planning, talent brand audits, employee development etc.

EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT & RETENTION

- Company-wide compensation evaluation
- Formalize career paths and job levels
- Provide individualized performance and capability assessments to employees and work with them on development plans
- Assess the leadership team's capabilities and create development plans for them

TOOLS

- Review and assess current HR tools and replace/update if necessary

CHAPTER 5

200+ Employees

Common Challenges

We love that at D2L, we showcase things that are great about working here, but not in a chest thumping way. We tell the story of #LifeatD2L on various social media channels; whether it's why we use LEGO for recognition, "cake day" for employee engagement, or individual stories of D2Lers. It's more about being proud to share knowledge and tell our story, than it is about trying to tell people we're great.

Yvonne Bell, SVP, People & Culture D2L

We hire in a methodical and structured manner yet do it with a sense of urgency, a sincere interest in mututal discovery and a bit of humour to ensure we achieve a good, long term fit.

Rob Shapiro, HR Consultant Klipfolio

Treat your employees like your customers. This is your biggest priority as a HR/People Ops leader. Know your employees so well that you can implement solutions that will have a lasting impact.

Danielle Strang, Head of People Ops Jobber

Culture and Values

If they haven't kicked in already, this is where growing pains really set in with some individuals finding it difficult to navigate a larger company which has, by necessity, started to embrace things like budgets and (some) process. Often, longer term employees who have been with the company since the early days have the most trouble with this transition. There may be a divide between tenured and newer employees with the former reminiscing about how good things were in the "old days" and resisting the pace of change causing resentment and roadblocks through-out the organization.

Recruiting and Hiring

Assuming that experienced Recruiter(s) have been hired, the recruiting function is usually a well-oiled machine at this point. The challenge is in not cutting corners to facilitate speed and also to consistently evaluate and iterate on processes, outreach programs and talent pools to ensure the needs of the business will continue to be met.

The company career site and other web properties (i.e. Linkedin, Glassdoor etc) may no longer accurately reflect culture, employee perks or the general tone of the organization, especially if they haven't been refreshed since very early days. These sites are usually the first stops for individuals interested in a company as an employer and out of date messaging can cause confusion or actually discourage potential candidates from applying.

Overall recruitment messaging might also need an update as a company grows past two hundred employees. At this stage, a company is no longer a "small" or early stage start-up which may mean they are less attractive to individuals who are specifically looking for a start-up experience.

Employee Development and Retention

The employee demographic is constantly evolving. Depending on how quickly the company has scaled, the experience required for some of the roles and the company's continued focus on diversity there will likely be a wider age range and differing life stages and styles. Benefits, perks, employee programs and social activities might not appeal to, or be appropriate for, the entire employee base.

Despite the personalized development plans, some members of the senior leadership team may still lack the essential skills to help drive the business forward. This tends to become obvious as the speed and scale of the company increases and planning and decision making becomes more complex. Founders may struggle to effectively manage these individuals and they can become a drag on the overall leadership team as well as the teams they are responsible for leading.

Tools

If investments have been made during the earlier recommended stages, there likely aren't any major challenges from a tools perspective.

Solutions

Culture and Values

In situations where there are a small group of employees having difficulty with change, it is usually best to speak with them one on one to address their concerns individually. Often their disillusionment comes from a place of fear or a lack of understanding of the company's direction and why changes to the culture or how "things are done" need to happen as the company grows. The employee might also be questioning the impact they can have now in a bigger organization versus a smaller one. If, after repeated conversations, the problem persists it's fair to ask the employee if they think they can be happy at the company in its current state and if not, to support them while they decide what's next for them in their career.

Recruiting and Hiring

This is a great time to complete an overall Talent audit to check in on the competition and overhaul employee personas, messaging on all web properties and recruitment scripts. Gain a better understanding of where the company wins against hiring competitors and highlight those points in recruitment messaging. Reflect on how the employee experience has changed now that the company is bigger and highlight "scale-up" versus "start-up" status. Scale-ups are very attractive to a lot of candidates due to their perceived stability and reduced risk – these are the individuals that should be targeted at this stage.

Employee Development and Retention

Review all employee related programs by auditing usage and conducting employee surveys to determine if changes should be made and what to focus on. Often, historical perks that have low impact like free breakfasts can be replaced with higher impact perks like additional money in health spending accounts at a similar cost. Remember to engage employees in conversation around decisions that directly affect them (i.e. changes to benefits packages) and listen to their feedback. Carefully communicate all changes ahead of time, erring on the side of over communication to explain reasoning and the resulting changes.

Consider looking externally for new senior leadership with experience in successfully scaling either a high growth company or a business unit within a larger, more established company. As difficult as this can be, effective senior leadership is another differentiator between companies that succeed and fail. Current leadership can either be retained in alternative roles or gracefully exited from the company.

Tools

"If it ain't broke, don't fix it!" That being said, it's always worth keeping an eye on what's happening with HR technology and exploring what might be useful for the organization as it continues to grow.

CHECKLIST: Chapter 5

200+ Employees

CULTURES & VALUES

- Assess whether any employees are having difficulty with the pace of change or growth and address their concerns

RECRUITING & HIRING

- Conduct a Talent Audit if not recently completed
- Update recruitment messaging and employer branding to reflect new realities
- Update target candidate profiles as appropriate

EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT & RETENTION

- Review and assess usage of all employee benefits and programs and research potential alternatives
- Over communicate any benefit changes and provide plenty of lead time prior to the change
- Assess senior leadership to determine if changes are required on the team

TOOLS

- Keep an eye on HR technology and assess which new tools might be right for the company