

TalentX Takeaways

FROM SXSW INTERACTIVE 2014

SXSW Interactive gave those of us in the talent business a glimpse at elements that will impact the Future of Work. Here are some TalentX takeaways from this year's conference:

GET REAL

Across sessions, transcending curriculum tracks, authenticity was the order of the day for brands, whatever the flavor - consumer, employer or personal. Whether in reference to creating the consumer experience, developing products, shaping a workplace, molding company culture, creating content, or managing an individual's personal brand, it's evident that the value of genuineness in this time of digital and social media-driven transparency is a strategic imperative. Brands can build legions of advocates if they acknowledge not-always-perfect reality and communicate a compelling story honestly, creating a more genuine experience. Employers can do the same by getting real about their mission, vision and values, having their leaders walk the walk, and attract employee fans that share those beliefs. Authenticity breeds goodwill relationships between brands and consumers, products and users, sales people and prospects, managers and the managed, and employers and talent.

CULTURE CONUNDRUM

Companies today are challenged to create a dynamic workplace that incorporates the values of a cross-generational workforce. Further, lifetime jobs are dead. Employees know it, as do employers. Therefore, companies need to find ways to meaningfully engage talent of all ages in their work, and figure out the right blend of attributes that make for an attractive culture and inspiring workplace that's hard to leave. This cultural evolution must consider Millennials more heavily, as they will represent 46% of the workforce by 2020. Goal-oriented; feedback driven; enthusiastic about idea sharing and consensus building; motivated to learn and grow, Millennials are not afraid to challenge the status quo and increasingly seek organizations with soul. A minimal first step in building the cultural DNA and upping engagement is defining and communicating mission, vision and values. Companies and their people need to build a recognizable culture together, a vital collaboration in an increasingly global marketplace where the reliance on remote workers increases.

EVERYBODY FLEX

Despite the fact that studies show that flexible work environments boost employee engagement, productivity and retention, the U.S. lags the world in embracing work/life balance policies. Many believe the rate of adoption will increase more rapidly in the next decade, as Millennials, seeking both meaning in their professional and personal lives, begin to represent a larger percentage of the workforce and start moving into management. Additionally, women entrepreneurs are exceeding their male counterparts in the amount of company launches, and are more likely to establish accommodating corporate cultures. Another trend increasing flexibility demand is the rising number of fathers participating in a greater degree in the lives of their children. For Millennials and younger Gen Xers, it is socially acceptable to seek more time at home with their kids. However, flexibility discussions at the conference (whether it was the direct topic or a tangent) underscored that this is not just a Mommy & Daddy issue – it's applicable to those caring for aging parents or ailing family members, as well as overall personal wellness.

GOING HYBRID

Reliance on contingent, on-demand workers is growing as companies have become accustomed to dialing up/back their workforce as needed since the economic downturn. Freelancing is seen as an acceptable, viable career choice that offers talent control over their destiny, work/life balance, and how, when, and where they work. In 1989, 6% of the U.S. workforce was freelance, compared to 33% today, and is estimated to grow to 40% by 2020. While companies are increasingly reliant on this emergent pool of highly-skilled freelancers, they still must evolve their thinking around managing on-demand teams and the notion of local talent. The specialized skills they seek may be halfway around the globe, and companies must accept that work today and in the future goes to where the talent is, not the other way around. Freelancers have successfully challenged the archetype that work must occur within four cubicle walls.





BEYOND HAPPY

While an employee might be happy in their job, this doesn't necessarily mean they are putting forth their ultimate effort or deeply care about the greater mission of the organization. The true power booster for any company is their engaged employees – the ones who are emotionally connected to their company and think like owners. Many talks centered on channeling the power of engaged employees to achieve real bottom line business impact and superior customer/brand experiences. Engagement strategies converge with technology focusing on value alignment, gamification, and socialization – all in an effort to create brand advocates out of a company's greatest employee fans, and to attract high-performing talent with a high engagement potential.

TECH IS IN FASHION

There was an apparent increased presence of fashion and retail brands at the conference as companies embrace the digital disruption of their industries and catch up with technology. Traditional fashion, retail and lifestyle companies now see the value in collaborating with creative technologists and digitally-skilled talent to develop tech-forward product lines, brand strategies and commerce solutions. From click to brick, the infusion of technology is no longer just a conversation about the future but an action plan for today. New career avenues abound for digital natives as fashion & retail companies, once industry-insular when it came to recruiting, are looking to proven talent from early-adopter industries to guide their brands into the digitally-driven age.

WEARABLE WONDER

Along with the expected smart watches and fitness bands, wearable technology was on full display at SXSWi. From off-the-wall to promising, offerings included multiple interpretations of the Google Glass idea, dual purpose garments, and smart sports equipment. While practical uses of wearable tech are still being explored in the larger context of the Internet of Things, forward thinking companies are considering the impact of these emerging ideas on consumer/brand experience, workforce management within their own organizations, and recruiting the talent needed to pursue viable applications to their business.

Watch for expanded coverage on these takeaways over the coming weeks as we follow these ideas and incorporate findings from our own **2014 Salary & Job Market Study.**

NORTH AMERICA
EUROPE
ASIA

New York
Los Angeles
San Francisco
Seattle
Portland

Chicago
Santa Monica
Orange County
Philadelphia
Atlanta

Toronto
London
Paris



WWW.24SEVENTALENT.COM