

LET'S TALK ABOUT THE TALENT MIRAGE

Claire Selwood



INTRODUCTION

Who is responsible for the success or failure of talent in your Organisation? It's Human Resources, of course, and specifically Recruitment.

Wrong!

It's you and every other manager, supervisor, director, and team leader in your company. All equally responsible. If you have organisational responsibility to lead a team, department or directorate, then you are responsible for the company's talent success or failure.

This is tough to wrap your head around, and I was the same when it slowly dawned on me that the Talent Acquisition department isn't responsible for the Organisation's talent as they are the door openers, the enticers, the attracters and facilitators. Still, they are not the keepers and growers of talent.

Talent is an enigma, ever-changing, challenging to grasp, and invariably, you only know you have it when it's left your Organisation.

But what if I told you that everything you need to change is right there with you, right now? You don't need any training, no qualifications are required, and no role play is necessary!

Over the following few pages, I will share with you how to rid your organisation of its Talent Mirage and start to positively impact the success of your department and company as a whole.



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ASK YOURSELF A QUESTION

To get started on this journey, ask yourself one question. Answer it quickly, from your heart, not your head. Your first instinct is the most honest one.

*Do I feel
seen,
heard
and valued
in my organisation?*

This is absolutely about your personal perception; this is absolutely about how you feel because your personal perception is absolutely the reality.

So, if you answered anything other than a strong 'YES', then you can take from that the Talent Mirage is living and breathing in your organisation..

Largely because if you are feeling this way, almost certainly so is your department, your colleagues and the rest of your organisation.

But you have everything now to change this.

WAKE UP CALL

A few years ago, I ran a large company's recruitment department.

My recruitment and induction process was slick and smooth. I was impressed. Senior manager colleagues were enthusiastic and energetic. I was feeling excited about this new opportunity, and I then entered my new department. Silence. No talking or laughing, only keyboard clicking. This team was responsible for hiring great talent, but they were robotic. That Friday, I gathered the team for our first departmental meeting, and when I asked for questions. No sound. Nobody looked at each other. No reply.

I spent six weeks getting to know each person and building trust. I discovered their strengths, dreams, and worries. Things gradually changed. Conversation began. People grinned. Team members stayed late to help.

A darker event was emerging in the broader organisation. In our senior leadership meeting, the boss verbally assaulted a coworker with rage, shocking me. I wanted to say something, but sadly, I was too embarrassed to say anything. I was next, as they shouted at me in front of everyone.

It gradually became evident that this style of communication was everyday. Irrespective of this, my team was thriving: helping each other, generating new ideas, and making wise hires. Hiring managers were thrilled.

Unfortunately, our attrition levels were consistently rising, costing millions of dollars each year.

This woke me up: Recruitment alone won't address the talent problem because we're pursuing a Talent Mirage. We assume we're solving things, yet we are not facing the three central truths.



TRUTH #1: YOU'RE FOCUSED ON ATTRACTION, NOT ALIGNMENT

Too often, organisations shine brightest at the very beginning of the employee journey. They captivate us with beautiful employer branding campaigns, offer a smooth onboarding experience, and seal the deal with competitive offers.

But what happens when the promise made on the outside doesn't match the reality on the inside? That's when the talent journey takes a sharp turn. People start to disengage, quietly check out, or worse, they leave entirely.

Your Employee Value Proposition (EVP) isn't just a marketing slogan; it's a promise to your people.

When that promise is broken the moment they walk through the door, the trust you've built quickly erodes.

So, what's the fix? Instead of treating your EVP as a static campaign, think of it as a living, breathing system that you co-create with your employees. Regularly check in and ask: Does our internal reality match the message we're sending to the world?

If the answer is no, no amount of clever marketing will fix it. The solution isn't to change your message; it's to change your reality.



TRUTH #2: YOU'RE MEASURING WHAT COMFORTS YOU, NOT WHAT CHALLENGES YOU.

We've all been trained to track the usual metrics: time-to-hire, turnover rates, and offer acceptance.

And while these numbers are helpful, they only tell us what's already happened. They're like looking at a car's rearview mirror; we can see where we've been, but they don't show us the road ahead.

- What's often missing are the human signals that genuinely matter. These are the subtle but powerful indicators that reveal the health of our organisation:
- Do your employees feel safe enough to speak up with a new idea or a brutal truth?
- Are managers having meaningful career conversations, or are they just going through the motions?
- Are your top performers silently burning out, their energy and passion fading away?

The fix isn't to look harder at the old numbers. Instead, we need to shift our focus from lagging indicators to leading indicators. This means actively listening, not just passively surveying.

It means looking for the signs of disengagement before it's too late. When we tune into these human signals, we can predict who might leave and address the root causes before we lose them.

This isn't just about data; it's about paying attention to the people behind the numbers.



TRUTH #3: YOU'RE DESIGNING FOR BUSINESS NEEDS, NOT HUMAN BEHAVIOUR

In today's world, many of our organisational structures, job descriptions, and leadership models are still rooted in a 20th-century mindset, one built on control and predictability.

We've designed systems as if people are cogs in a machine, expecting them to operate with a predictable uniformity that we, as humans, don't even desire for ourselves.

While we crave a predictable world, what we truly want from our work is something entirely different. At every level of an organisation, people are driven by a need for growth, trust, meaning, and flexibility. It's not just about a paycheck or a job title; it's about feeling valued and connected to a larger purpose.

The solution isn't to tweak old systems, but to fundamentally reimagine them. We need to create environments where humans are at the centre.

By building a culture where autonomy, experimentation, and emotional safety are the norm, we can create workplaces that not only thrive but also allow people to thrive.

MOVING BEYOND THE TALENT MIRAGE

Moving beyond your Talent Mirage, start to challenge your current thinking:

1. How can you start to see our talent strategy not just as an administrative process, but as the foundational infrastructure that supports your entire organisation's growth?
2. When you think about your people plan, how can you ensure it's not just a document, but a living, breathing strategy for your company's future growth?
3. Your teams hold so much wisdom. How can you better work together and invite them to help you shape our culture, values, and vision for the future?
4. How can you shift from simply avoiding a culture of fear to actively building a culture of growth where everyone feels safe to contribute and learn?
5. We all need room to grow. What can you do to create an environment where constant feedback is encouraged and where it's truly okay to take risks and even fail?
6. Feeling safe at work is a basic human need. How can you ensure your employees feel psychologically safe enough to stay with your company, knowing they won't be punished for a misstep and that their future there is bright?
7. As leaders, how can we embody humility, honesty, and courage in a way that inspires trust and collaboration throughout the organisation?

FINALLY

Fixing recruitment is essential, but it's only one piece of the puzzle.

If we don't align promises with reality, measure what truly matters, and design for human needs, we'll keep chasing illusions.

Instead, let's build organisations where people feel seen, valued, and inspired to grow. Because that's how talent, the real talent, flourishes, no matter what industry or country you're in.

Recruitment is an essential piece of the puzzle, but it's only one part of creating a thriving organisation. If we continue to chase illusions, like making promises we can't keep, measuring the wrong things, and ignoring fundamental human needs, we'll never solve our talent problems.

Instead, let's focus on building workplaces where people feel seen, valued, and inspired to grow. When we create an environment where the internal reality matches our external message, and where people are at the centre of our design, that's when real talent flourishes, no matter the industry or location.



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