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With changing job climate, employers need to break with tradition to find new hires



Photo by Jacob Lewkow
Shelving Inc. President and CEO **Joe Schodowski** found a gem in a nontraditional hire.

are starting to groom people over the next five years for jobs that don't even exist yet.

"Companies are going to have to start getting creative and figuring out how they can get in front of that."

For some, that means thinking about moving away from traditional cookie-cutter candidates in favor of nontraditional hires. One way to do that is to look in different places for people who otherwise may have no reason to ever come across a company. Immigrant workers, international students, war veterans and the like can bring value, diversity and a fresh perspective to a company looking to expand its pool of talent.

This approach could mean sacrificing certain skills for more valuable ones and putting a greater emphasis on cultural fit. "There are more jobs than talent that is qualified for them,"

Demand is outpacing the supply of talent as baby boomers hit retirement age and the economy improves, putting pressure on companies to try new angles. Here are five less-obvious pools of talent that can bring fresh ideas to the company, as well as fill gaps.

By Rachelle Damico
Special to Crain's Detroit Business

With the talent gap continuing to widen, second-stage businesses are going to have to come up with different tactics for finding talent.

Demand is outpacing the supply of talent as baby boomers hit retirement age and the economy improves, putting pressure on companies to try new angles.

"More people are leaving the workforce than entering," said Pete Davis, founder and CEO of Southfield-based **Impact Management Services LLC**, which provides outsourced human resource services such as employee training and consulting. He's worked with companies that

Davis said. "You have to be open. Some skills are more easily trainable than others."

But specialists say there are extra business rewards, beyond immediate hiring needs, for securing talent off the beaten path.

There are many of these less-obvious pools of talent out there. Here are five.

1. Immigrants

"There is a very large population of highly educated, skilled immigrants here in the United States who have a college education, professional experience and are fluent in English and permanently work-authorized," said Allie Levinsky, Midwest program director of **Upwardly Global**, based in San Francisco. The nonprofit helps skilled immigrants and refugees integrate into the U.S. workforce.

Levinsky said hiring immigrants helps fuel business growth, especially if a company is targeting international customers or markets.

"When you have diversity of thought, it creates innovation and helps to drive better business outcomes," said Levinsky. "Having people who work within your organization who understand different customers can only help you to be more effective in the way you align your business to the needs of different communities and customer bases."

Many organizations offer candidates that are already authorized to work in the United States, do not require sponsorship and are on their way to citizenship.

"A lot of people don't understand the immigration process," said Levinsky. "Refugees are coming here and have work authorization. It doesn't cost the employer anything."

Joe Schodowski, president and CEO of Auburn Hills-based **Shelving Inc.**, reached out to Detroit-based **Lutheran Social Services of Michigan** when he was in need of an installer for his company, which provides shelving and racking systems for warehouse manufacturing and distribution centers.

The nonprofit suggested a Bosnian refugee, who did not require visa sponsorship.

"(Immigrants) have to do a lot of work to get over here," said Schodowski. "To me, that already demonstrates that they have drive, which you can't teach."

The installer has been with Shelving Inc. for more than 14 years. Schodowski said he is one of the company's best employees.

"Our expectations were to find somebody that was willing to do the work and learn how to enhance their skills," said Schodowski. "His work ethic was second to none."

Schodowski said he had to work with his installer for a few years to improve his English. He also flew and paid for his installer's trip back to Bosnia when his father passed away.

"It's always hard to find good people, and when you find someone that's good, you do everything you can to retain, train and keep them," said Schodowski.

2. International students

Another group to consider is international students.

Global Detroit, an immigrant-focused nonprofit led by Steve Tobocman, works with international students and studies their impact on Southeast Michigan's economy.

Tobocman said two-thirds of Michigan international students are majoring in STEM fields — science, technology, engineering and mathematics — which are in high demand among employers.

"It's incumbent upon us to have a strategy to attract those students and help them articulate into the workforce," said Tobocman.

Tobocman said many international students want to stay in the U.S. to work but are forced to leave the country once their student visas expire and have a limited time upon graduation to get a job and a work visa to stay. Companies can sponsor a visa and get top talent as a result.

Read more about visa rules for hiring international students.

"They bring a diversity of perspective that can help Michigan companies have a competitive edge and find customers from across the globe, suppliers from across the globe and benefit from innovation from across the globe," said Tobocman.

Tobocman said visas can cost up to \$5,000, including legal fees. It's not cheap, but employers should consider the long-term investment.

"The notion that you're stopped somehow from considering almost two-thirds of an available talent pool because you're unwilling to consider a \$5,000 expense is penny wise and a pound foolish when you're talking about that kind of top talent," said Tobocman.



Sophia Chue: Recruits international students.

Sophia Chue, office manager at Detroit-based **Process Control & Instrumentation LLC**, recruits many international students because she said that the company values their work ethic.

The firm hires and sponsors international students because many major in STEM fields — a plus for an industrial control systems engineering company.

"Their aptitude for learning is there," said Chue. "They want to succeed because they're given an opportunity here that they're often not allowed at home."

Chue said PCI often finds international student candidates at hiring events held by **Wayne State University**.

"We see the value of the students when we get their résumés," said Chue. "They dig in, get involved and pay attention to everything."

3. Military veterans

Veterans are another often-overlooked group.

"Our veterans come back with job-ready skills, but they're also very trainable," said Jeff Barnes, director of the **Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency**, which connects employers and veterans.

"It's that proven leadership, strong work ethic and trainability that makes them very adaptive," said Barnes.

Barnes said there are incentives for veterans. The military will pay for the last move of a veteran and the veteran's family. A veteran can also receive up to five years of free health care.

"That reduces costs for the business," said Barnes. "Veterans will relocate to where jobs and opportunities are."

MVAA has seen retention ratings of above 90 percent when employers commit time and investment into training veterans.

"You tend to see a lot of loyalty that gets bred in your DNA as a military service member," said Barnes. "When they identify with a mission, feel like they're part of a team and they've got a future with the organization, they tend to stay."

4. Long-term unemployed

Don't discount a candidate because of résumé gaps.

Pamela Moore, president and CEO of **Detroit Employment Solutions Corp.**, a nonprofit that connects employers and jobseekers, said there are many reasons candidates may have a gap on their résumé.

Reasons can include medical issues, layoffs and returning back to the workforce after having a child.

"A really responsible employer doesn't just dismiss a résumé that has that gap," said Moore. "Dig deeper and find out what those reasons are. It's usually not that the employee isn't employable or doesn't have skills."

Moore said that as the talent gap continues to widen, employers will do themselves a disservice to ignore candidates because of résumé gaps.

"Employers are really at the point in Detroit — because things are growing and moving and sectors are growing so fast — that the old rules don't apply anymore," said Moore. "There used to be a time when you saw that gap and set the résumé to the side, but you don't do that now."

5. Ex-convicts

Moore said companies should also consider former prisoners who are trying to establish

new lives.

"They're probably older, more mature, have some work experience and know how to show up every day and come to work," said Moore.

Employers can also benefit financially when hiring those with a criminal record.

Community Ventures Resources Inc., an initiative of the **Michigan Economic Development Corp.**, gives employers up to \$5,000 over time and can also help qualifying employees with transportation and other services.

The **U.S. Department of Labor** provides bonding programs and tax incentives for companies hiring at-risk job seekers.

Moore said she has worked with employers who say returning citizens are their best employees.

"They have the right attitude because they're grateful that somebody has given them that second chance," said Moore.

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