

The talent magnet:
building a
workforce that
comes to you



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What is a talent magnet and why should you strive to be one?

For many companies, attracting and retaining the best people feels like a constant battle against larger corporations with deeper pockets and well-established brands. But what if you could turn the tables? What if, instead of constantly chasing talent, the right people were naturally drawn to you?

That's the essence of becoming a 'talent magnet' – an organisation so compelling that skilled professionals seek you out. It's not about having the biggest budget, it's about being the smartest. It's about building a reputation, a culture, and an experience that top performers can't resist. And for SMEs, which represent 99.8% of all UK businesses, mastering this can be the difference between surviving and thriving – between being just another business and becoming the kind of workplace people talk about and stay loyal to.

The stakes are high. Research commissioned by the Local Government Association estimates that the UK could **lose up to £120 billion in economic output** by the end of the decade if employers can't meet their skills needs. So, in a world of skills shortages and intense competition, becoming a talent magnet is the ultimate competitive advantage.

To better understand talent attraction and retention, we conducted a OnePoll survey of 1,000 employers and 1,000 employees across the UK. The findings reveal a significant disconnect. While businesses are rightly focused on productivity and post-pandemic work models, they may be overlooking the fundamental drivers of talent attraction and retention.

This guide will take you through clear, practical strategies to help your business become a true talent magnet. We'll explore how to build an authentic employer brand, manage your reputation, create an exceptional candidate journey, foster an inclusive culture, and retain the people you hire.

"Employers today can't afford to simply wait for talent to find them, they must attract people to them. Offering competitive salaries is a great start but it's more about creating an authentic employer brand that naturally draws exceptional people and makes them want to stay. By becoming a talent magnet, you're building a workforce that actively advocates for your company and drives sustainable growth. And, we all know, the best talent gravitates towards authenticity."



Ian Nicholas
Global Managing Director,
Reed

Building and enhancing your employer brand

Put simply, your employer brand is what people think and feel about your company as a place to work. It's the story people tell about you when you're not in the room.

The most powerful employer brands are not manufactured in a marketing meeting; they're a genuine reflection of your company's culture. Think of your employer brand as your company's personality – a combination of your reputation, your values, and the employee experience you provide.

In a competitive market where **most SMEs (68%) are struggling to attract skilled staff**, a strong employer brand is your greatest asset. It's the narrative that tells potential hires who you are and what you stand for. But it must be authentic. Our employee survey shows that a strong organisational culture (31%) and clear career development opportunities (30%) are major factors for candidates when choosing a role. This is where you can truly shine. You don't need a FTSE 100 budget to build a compelling brand; you need authenticity and a commitment to your people.

In fact, companies that invest in employer branding are **three times more likely to make quality hires**. A strong brand attracts people who are genuinely aligned with your mission, leading to better performance, lower turnover, and a more engaged workforce.



Start by asking:

- **What truly makes our organisation a unique place to work?**
- **What are the core values we live by every day, not just the ones on our website?**
- **What is the one thing our employees tell their friends they love about working here?**

The answers to these questions form the foundation of your employer brand narrative.

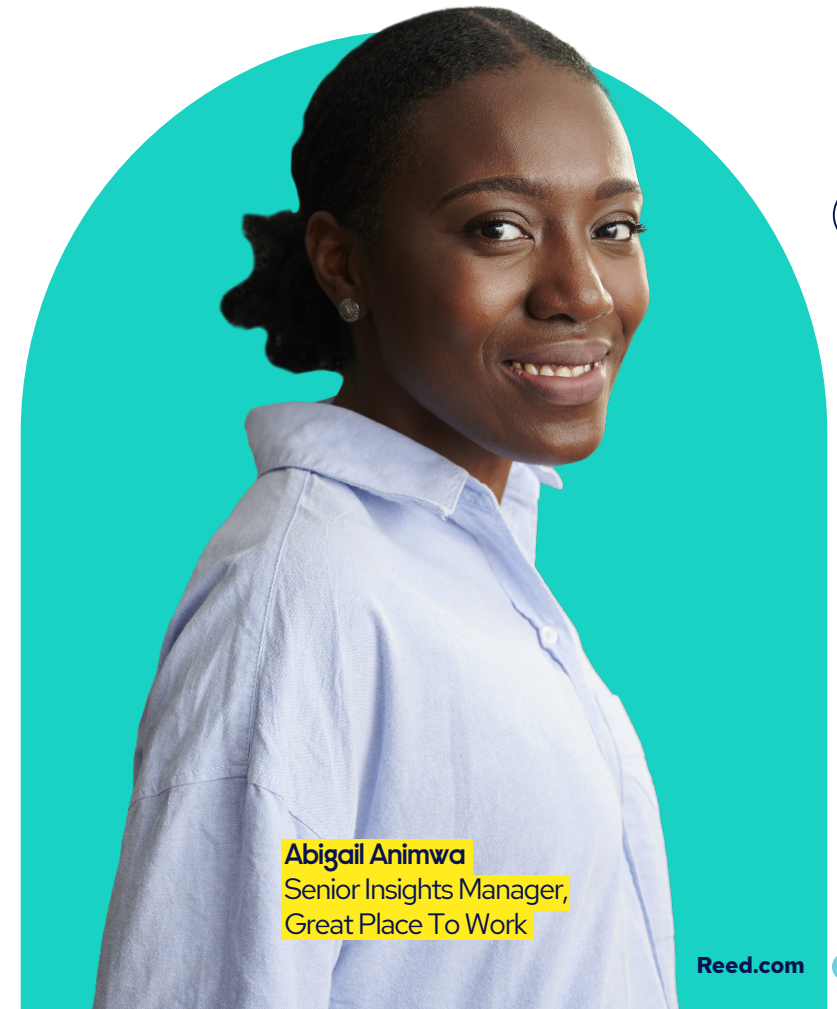
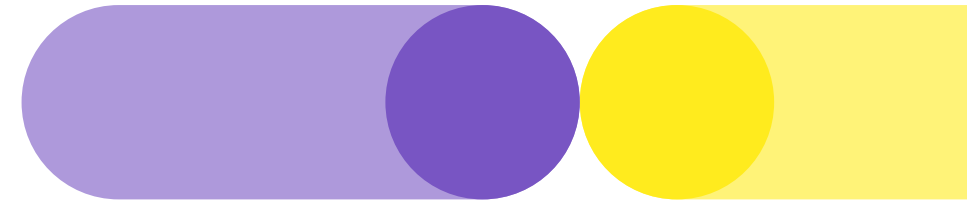
However, the challenge for many companies is visibility. While large corporations may invest millions in marketing their workplace culture, smaller businesses must be more strategic. The good news is that authenticity often trumps budget.

The role of authenticity in employer branding

Authenticity is the cornerstone of a strong employer brand. It's not about crafting the perfect narrative, it's about telling the true one. Jobseekers are savvy and they can spot a polished façade from a mile away. What resonates with them is real culture, lived values, and honest communication. This is much easier to achieve for an SME than a larger organisation.

Abigail Animwa, Senior Insights Manager at Great Place To Work, said:
"Often, it's the larger organisations who find themselves looking to create the family feel that's more easily developed and sustained in a smaller company. Day-to day behaviours, particularly from people managers, can have a more significant impact on employee experience vs just having more budget and resources."

On top of shaping how your brand is perceived externally, being authentic directly influences how your employees feel. When they see that what's being promised and promoted publicly aligns with what's lived day-to-day, trust is built. And trust is the foundation of belonging. In smaller businesses, where culture is often shaped by close interactions and shared experiences, there's a real opportunity to create environments where people feel valued, included, and connected to something bigger than their job title.



Abigail Animwa
 Senior Insights Manager,
 Great Place To Work

Leveraging the power of employee stories

Your most credible and persuasive brand ambassadors are already on your payroll. The authentic experiences of your current employees carry far more weight with potential new recruits than any corporate slogan.

Consider implementing simple, structured ways to capture and share these stories:

1. Employee spotlights:

Regular features on your blog or social media that profile a team member, their role, and their journey with the company.

2. 'Day-in-the-life' content:

Short videos or photo diaries that give a genuine glimpse into your workplace culture. Use real photos taken by your teams, even on smartphones. Authenticity resonates more than perfection.

3. Testimonials and quotes:

Weave real employee quotes into your job descriptions, careers page, and social media posts.

By showcasing a diverse range of voices from different departments, backgrounds, and levels of seniority, you paint a rich, honest picture of what it's like to be part of your team.



Employee value proposition

Your employee value proposition (EVP) is the unique combination of the benefits, culture, and opportunities that your organisation offers to employees in exchange for their skills and commitment. It acts as a differentiator, helping you stand out from your competitors who are vying for the same professionals.

While your EVP and employer brand are interconnected, they serve distinct purposes in your recruitment and retention strategy. Your employer brand is the outward-facing reputation of your organisation as an employer and how your company is perceived in the market by jobseekers, competitors, and current employees. On the other hand, your EVP focuses inward, representing the tangible and intangible benefits employees gain by joining and staying with your organisation. It articulates what sets your workplace apart in terms of culture, growth opportunities, and rewards, creating a compelling case for jobseekers to choose your company over competitors.

A compelling EVP should highlight key elements that resonate with potential hires, such as career growth opportunities, work-life balance, company culture, and any unique perks your organisation offers. It's also crucial to align your EVP with your organisation's values and goals to ensure authenticity and long-term retention.

To develop or refine your EVP, start by listening to your people, don't simply presume to know what they want and how they feel. Reed's research of 1,000 employees and 1,000 employers uncovered a worrying perception gap. While over half of employers (54%) believe staff are more productive in the office than at home, a significant portion of the workforce has embraced remote and flexible working not just as a perk, but as a core component of their ideal work-life balance. Aside from salary, flexible working policies or benefits was the number one most influential factor in their decision to join their current company. Additionally, almost one in five (19%) said that the ability to work from home more would help them be more productive at work.

While 51% of employers think increasing pay is the most effective lever for productivity, our employee survey tells a more nuanced story. Factors like career development, recognition, and a strong company culture are powerful influencers in their own right.

Your current employees are your most valuable source of insight as they can tell you what makes your workplace special, what keeps them engaged, and what could be improved. Use surveys, interviews, or informal conversations to uncover the values, experiences, and benefits that matter most to them. This input forms the foundation of a credible EVP that reflects your culture and resonates with the kind of talent you want to attract.

Once your EVP is clearly defined, make sure it's visible and consistent across every touchpoint, from job adverts and careers pages to social media, onboarding materials, and internal communications. It should be woven into the candidate experience and reinforced throughout the employee journey. A well-articulated EVP helps build a more engaged, loyal workforce that understands and believes in your mission.



Download Reed Talent Solutions' free guide for more advice on how to build an EVP that resonates here.

Nine cost-effective tips to help boost your employer brand:

1 Create and optimise a careers page that tells a story

Highlight your culture, values, employee testimonials, and growth opportunities. Use real photos and quotes to make it authentic. Optimise your website for search engine and large language model visibility.

2 Share employee spotlights on social media

Plan a mix of content that includes celebrating team wins, sharing industry insights, highlighting learning opportunities, and offering behind-the-scenes glimpses of your work environment. It humanises your brand.

3 Create a culture blog or vlog series

Let employees share their experiences, career journeys, or what makes your workplace unique.

4 Partner with local colleges or training providers

Offer internships, work experience, guest lectures, or mentorships. It positions you as a growth-focused employer and boosts your visibility in your local community.

5 Support employee volunteering

Promote corporate social responsibility initiatives and team volunteering days. It reflects positively on your values and culture.

6 Enter employer awards or rankings

Even local or niche awards can boost credibility. Many have free or low-cost entry options.

7 Run targeted employer brand ads

Use social media to promote your culture or employee stories to relevant audiences.

8 Use retargeting ads

Remind people who visited your careers page about your brand and culture through subtle retargeting ads.

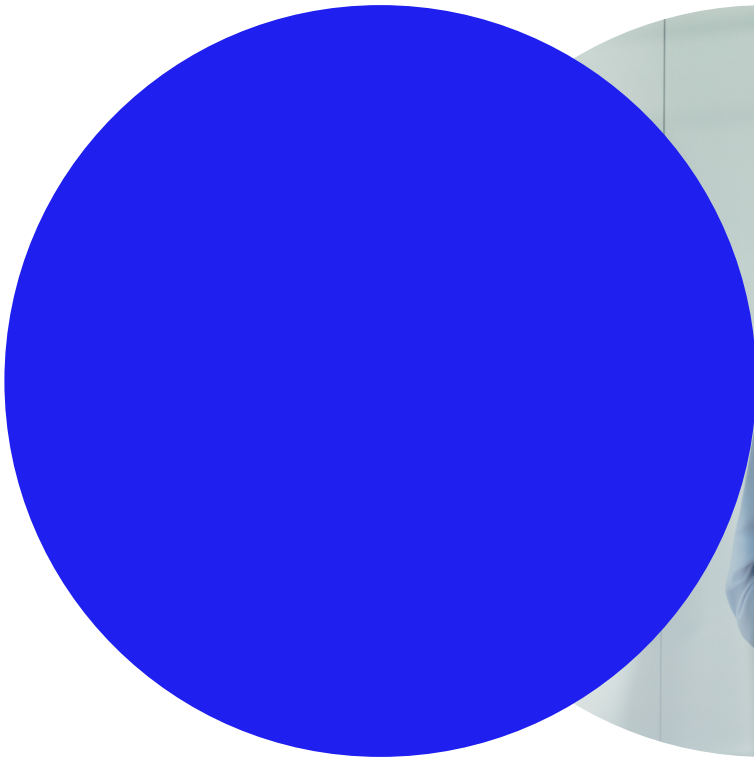
9 Pitch employer brand stories to local media

Share unique hiring practices, diversity and inclusion, or employee success stories.

Managing your reputation

Your reputation is your currency, and it plays a critical role in attracting people to work for you. A single negative review online or a negative press release can discourage potential employees from even considering your company. On the other hand, a strong, positive reputation can set you apart as an employer of choice.

Proactive reputation management, including having a well-executed PR strategy, monitoring online feedback and addressing concerns with transparency and care, is essential. Equally important is cultivating a team of internal advocates – employees who genuinely believe in your company mission and culture and share their positive experiences. Together, these efforts create a workplace that naturally draws people in.



The role of public relations in building employee reputation

Public relations (PR) enables organisations to foster meaningful, mutually beneficial relationships with their audiences. This includes shaping public perception, communicating values, and establishing a positive image. Within the context of employer branding, PR focuses on showcasing a company as an attractive, supportive, and inclusive workplace to both current and potential employees.

Businesses can leverage PR in several ways to enhance their reputation, this could include creating and sharing compelling stories about their company culture, celebrating employee successes through media coverage, and maintaining a strong presence on platforms where jobseekers are active. Additionally, PR campaigns can spotlight initiatives such as diversity programmes, professional development opportunities, and sustainable practices to demonstrate commitment to employee wellbeing.



Seven ways you could utilise PR to boost your reputation:

1 Highlight workplace culture and values

Use PR tactics to showcase what makes your workplace unique. Share stories through press releases, blogs, or social media about your company's mission, values, and day-to-day culture. For example, post about team events, charity work, or employee initiatives to give potential employees a glimpse into life at your organisation.

2 Celebrate employee achievements

Shine a light on the successes of your teams. Feature employee milestones, promotions, or innovative projects in your communications. This demonstrates your organisation's commitment to recognising and valuing its people.

3 Promote diversity and inclusion

Share your efforts and successes in diversity and inclusion through external campaigns. Whether it's highlighting diverse leadership, employee resource groups, or inclusive policies, this helps position your organisation as welcoming and equitable.



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Showcase professional growth opportunities

Highlight internal training programmes, mentoring schemes, or real-life career progression stories. Use case studies, testimonials, or employee interviews to bring these opportunities to life and show how your organisation invests in its people.

A **report by People Insight** revealed that 86% of employees would consider leaving their current role for one that offers better growth and development opportunities. That's a powerful reminder that career development shouldn't be treated as a perk, but rather a fundamental strategy for retaining talent. By clearly demonstrating publicly how your organisation supports learning and progression, you will be better placed to attract ambitious talent while also building a culture where people feel valued, motivated, and inspired to stay.

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Engage with public feedback

Engaging with public feedback is where many organisations stumble. Ignoring or failing to acknowledge negative press can significantly damage your brand's credibility. That's why it's essential to actively monitor what's being said about your organisation across social media, review platforms, and news outlets.

Pay close attention to reviews, comments, and mentions that highlight concerns or areas for improvement. And view these as opportunities, not threats. By using thoughtful PR strategies and responding transparently, you show that your organisation values feedback and is committed to continuous improvement.

Today's 'cancel culture' has made accountability more visible, and more urgent, than ever. A single misstep, if left unaddressed, can quickly escalate. But when businesses respond with honesty, empathy, and a willingness to learn, they shift the narrative from defensiveness to growth. This accountability also builds trust which resonates with customers, current employees, and future talent.



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6. Run employer branding campaigns

Create targeted campaigns to amplify your employer brand. This could include videos, blog posts, or even partnerships with media outlets to share success stories about your workplace. Tailor these campaigns to speak directly to your ideal candidates.

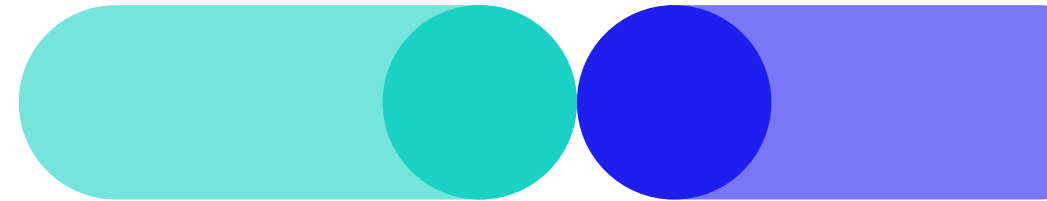
Sophie Hewitt, Managing Director of McCann PR says: "Effective employer branding campaigns don't just attract new talent; they also showcase what makes your company so special and a welcoming and rewarding place to current colleagues. PR can be used to tell authentic stories that resonate with your ideal candidates and what they're looking for from an employer.

"By highlighting your unique culture and values with consistent messaging, hearing from employees and by implementing an integrated, multi-channel approach, you're more likely to attract the right people who will flourish with you."

7. Leverage key communication channels

Ensure consistency across all platforms. From social media and your website to job adverts and press releases, use PR to deliver clear, engaging messages about why your organisation is a great place to work.

By focusing on these tangible actions, public relations can strengthen your employer brand, making your organisation more attractive in a competitive job market while ensuring your reputation aligns with your values.



Sophie Hewitt
Managing Director,
McCann PR

The strategic role of reviews in reputation management

Your online reputation is shaped on platforms like Glassdoor, Google reviews, Trustpilot, social media platforms, and even in industry-specific forums where professionals openly share their experiences and opinions.

These platforms often serve as the first stop for potential employees, partners, or clients looking to learn about your company. Ignoring these conversations is not an option, as they can influence perceptions, impact hiring, and shape your overall brand image. Engaging proactively and monitoring these discussions is essential to building trust and maintaining a positive reputation.

We asked Edward Bolton, Customer Success Manager at Trustpilot about the importance of online reviews in today's climate. He said: "We're living in a time of significant change, where how people find, evaluate, and act on information is shifting faster than ever. In this environment, trust has moved from being a nice-to-have to an absolute necessity."

"It's not enough for businesses to recognise that trust drives performance; they also need to act on the core drivers that build it: authenticity, consistency, transparency, accountability, and customer-focused innovation."



Edward Bolton
Customer Success Manager,
Trustpilot

Top tips

1 Monitor and respond:

Make it a regular practice to check review sites and social media for mentions of your company. When you receive feedback – positive or negative – respond professionally and promptly. A thoughtful response to criticism shows you are listening and committed to improvement.

2 Embrace transparency:

No company is perfect. When challenges arise, honest communication builds more trust than silence or denial. Jobseekers appreciate organisations that are open about their imperfections and can demonstrate a clear plan for improvement.

3 Focus on prevention:

The most effective strategy is to create a positive workplace experience that naturally generates good reviews. When your employees are happy, engaged, and feel valued, your online reputation will largely take care of itself.



Harnessing social media to elevate brand trust and employee voice

Social media provides an unparalleled opportunity for organisations to build an employer brand without a hefty price tag. The key is consistency and authenticity.

Choose your platforms wisely: LinkedIn is essential for professional roles, but don't overlook platforms like Instagram or even TikTok to showcase your company culture.

Leverage employee advocacy: Encourage your current employees to share company updates and positive experiences on their own social media platforms. This not only extends your reach but also provides authentic endorsements of your company culture.

Develop a content strategy: Plan a mix of content that includes celebrating team wins, sharing industry insights, highlighting learning opportunities, and offering behind-the-scenes glimpses of your work environment.

Track and measure your efforts: Use analytics tools to monitor engagement, follower growth, and the effectiveness of your posts. Insights from these metrics can help refine your strategy over time and ensure your approach remains focused and impactful.

Engage, don't just broadcast: Social media is a two-way street. Respond to comments, participate in relevant industry discussions, and share content from others. This builds a community and shows that you are an active, engaged member of your sector.

Turning employees into brand ambassadors

Employee advocacy is the organic promotion of your company by the people who know it best. It happens when employees share their authentic experiences, insights, and enthusiasm about the company they work for. This form of advocacy is powerful because it's seen as more genuine and trustworthy compared to traditional company communications.

Beyond increasing trust, employee advocacy can also help expand your company's reach, build brand awareness, and attract potential employees by showcasing a positive workplace culture.

Employee advocacy thrives when people feel genuinely involved and valued within their organisation. While many companies recognise the power of employees sharing authentic experiences to build trust and attract talent, our survey revealed a gap in how workplace changes are handled. Only 37% of respondents said they involve employees early and collaborate on changes, while 51% simply communicate or provide training on the change without seeking employee input. To foster true advocacy, organisations must go beyond surface-level engagement. Inviting employees to co-create the future of the workplace strengthens trust, deepens commitment, and turns them into passionate brand ambassadors.





Building an employee advocacy programme

Having a structured employee advocacy programme will help maximise the potential of your team's voices while maintaining consistency and alignment with your company's values. Without structure, advocacy efforts risk becoming fragmented or misaligned, potentially diluting your message or even causing reputational challenges. A well-organised programme ensures that employees are equipped with the tools, guidance, and content needed to confidently represent your brand, highlighting its strengths and positive culture.

Beyond alignment, a structured programme facilitates measurable success. It allows businesses to track engagement, reach, and the impact of advocacy initiatives, providing valuable insights to refine strategies over time. Furthermore, it encourages participation across teams by making the process simple and scalable, ensuring that employees feel both supported and inspired to contribute. This approach not only amplifies your brand's visibility but also strengthens connections with stakeholders, creating long-lasting benefits for your organisation.

Six steps to building your employee advocacy programme:

Step one: Set your goals and content strategy

Determine what you want to achieve, such as increasing visibility as an employer of choice, showcasing company culture, or attracting employees. Develop a content strategy that reflects your employer brand and gives employees meaningful stories, achievements, and values to share.

Step two: Define your audience

Identify the talent you want to attract, whether it's graduates, experienced professionals, or niche specialists. Tailor your messaging to highlight what makes your company a great place to work.

Step three: Demonstrate value to your employees

Explain how the programme benefits them, such as building their personal brand, growing their professional network, or gaining recognition within the company. Make it worthwhile for them to participate.

Step four: Launch

Introduce the programme, provide employees with training, and give them access to the tools and resources they need to easily share content and represent your brand.

Step five: Keep employees engaged

Regularly share new and exciting content, celebrate their contributions, and create opportunities for feedback. Recognise and reward participation to maintain enthusiasm.

Step six: Measure results

Track metrics like engagement rates, clicks, reach, and employee participation to evaluate the programme's success. Use these insights to optimise and refine your approach over time.

Cultivating an environment that inspires advocacy

While an employee advocacy programme is a powerful tool to amplify your brand and talented professionals to your organisation, the real game-changer lies in creating an environment that naturally inspires advocacy without formal structure. By fostering a workplace culture where employees genuinely feel valued, supported, and aligned with your company's mission, advocacy becomes an organic extension of their enthusiasm and pride. This approach goes beyond structured programmes, embedding advocacy into the very fabric of your organisation.

1 Build a great culture

Advocacy is a natural outcome of a thriving internal culture.

- **Purpose and pride:** Employees who understand and believe in the company's mission are more likely to speak positively about it. Make sure your purpose is not just stated, but lived – through leadership behaviour, decision-making, and storytelling.
- **Psychological safety:** Create a space where people feel safe to express ideas, challenge norms, and share feedback. Advocacy grows when people feel heard and respected.
- **Values in action:** Move beyond posters and policies. Embed values into everyday practices, such as how meetings are run, how recognition is given, how conflicts are resolved.



Tip: Use internal campaigns to spotlight how your values show up in real work. This reinforces alignment and pride.

2 Make it easy

Even the most enthusiastic employees won't advocate if it's cumbersome.

- **Curated content:** Provide ready-to-share assets like social media templates, branded visuals, and bite-sized updates. Make them accessible via a central hub or internal newsletter.
- **Personalisation:** Encourage employees to add their own voice. Authenticity is more powerful than polished messaging.
- **Timing and relevance:** Align content with moments that matter – product launches, milestones, or cultural events – so advocacy feels timely and meaningful.



Tip: Consider a monthly 'advocacy pack' with fresh content, hashtags, and suggested captions tailored to different departments.

3 Create community and belonging

Advocacy is relational – it thrives in environments where people feel connected.

- **Cross-functional networks:** Encourage collaboration across teams to break silos and foster shared ownership of the brand.
- **Employee resource groups (ERGs):** Support communities around shared interests or identities. These groups often become powerful advocacy engines.
- **Inclusive events:** Host gatherings that celebrate diversity, achievements, and shared purpose. Virtual formats can be just as engaging with the right facilitation.



Tip: Use storytelling at events – invite employees to share their journey, what the company means to them, or how they've grown.

4 Recognise and reward

Recognition validates advocacy and motivates others to join in.

- **Spotlight champions:** Feature employee advocates in internal comms, social media, or leadership shoutouts. Make it visible and meaningful.
- **Structured referral programmes:** These not only bring in great talent but also signal trust in employees' networks and judgement.
- **Gamify advocacy:** Consider leaderboards, badges, or small incentives for sharing content, attending events, or referring candidates.



Tip: Tie recognition to values, e.g., 'Brand champion of the month' for someone who exemplifies your mission externally.

Bonus thought

Don't underestimate the ripple effect of leadership. When leaders share stories, celebrate wins, and engage with employees authentically, it sets the tone for advocacy. Equip your managers with talking points and encourage them to model advocacy in team meetings and on social media.

Crafting an exceptional candidate experience

The candidate experience covers every single interaction a potential employee has with your company, from the moment they see your job advert to their final days of onboarding. Delivering an exceptional experience is a powerful way to stand out. It leaves a lasting positive impression, whether you hire the person or not, and reinforces your reputation as a great employer.

Shockingly, our survey revealed that one-in-five employees couldn't recall what, aside from salary, influenced their decision to join their current company. This collective amnesia isn't a failure of memory; it's a failure of impact. It suggests a transactional, forgettable hiring process that does nothing to build loyalty or engagement from day one.

Jobseekers begin forming opinions long before they hit 'apply'. The clarity of your job descriptions, the accessibility of your careers site, and the tone of your employer branding all contribute to that crucial first impression. Streamlined application processes, timely communication, and transparency about timelines and expectations help build trust and show respect for an individual's time and effort.

"Candidate experience is a strategic pillar of employer branding. It's about making people feel seen, heard, and valued at every stage of the hiring journey. Even small touches like a warm welcome email before an interview or a follow-up message after a rejection can reinforce your brand's humanity and care," says Simon Baddeley, Managing Director of Business Services at Reed.



Simon Baddeley
Managing Director of
Business Services,
Reed

Why a poor experience costs more than you think

A complicated, slow, or impersonal application process can be incredibly damaging for businesses. People who have a poor experience during the hiring process are less likely to buy your products, recommend your services, or speak positively about your company. This can lead to long-term damage to your reputation and make it harder to attract quality talent in the future. Working with a recruitment partner like Reed can help you deliver a smooth, engaging candidate experience that reflects your company's values and leaves a lasting positive impression, making it easier to attract and retain the right people.

◀ Forty-one per cent of employers who recruited in the past year have experienced new employees resigning within the first 12 weeks, according to research from the CIPD.

While there are many reasons why this might happen, a key factor is often a disconnect between the candidate's expectations, shaped by the recruitment process, and the reality of the job they step into. For example, unclear communication about responsibilities or company culture during the hiring process can lead to disappointment and frustration once employees start their roles.

To avoid these issues, it's essential for employers to create a streamlined, transparent, and engaging recruitment process that sets realistic expectations while treating candidates with respect and care. This not only increases the chances of securing talented individuals but also helps create a stronger employer brand, reducing turnover and fostering long-term success.



The true cost of a bad hire in the UK ranges from one and a half to four times the employee's annual salary. These costs encompass recruitment expenses, wasted wages and benefits, training investments, productivity losses, termination costs, and replacement hiring expenses. The financial impact becomes even more severe when considering indirect costs such as loss of productivity, team morale, customer relationships, and management time.

The power of personalised communication

Artificial intelligence has revolutionised countless sectors, redefining the way we work, innovate, and solve complex problems. When it comes to improving candidate experience, AI can streamline processes and automate repetitive tasks, offering immense potential to improve the experience for both employers and potential employees.

However, while AI can undeniably be a powerful tool, overreliance on technology without human oversight can introduce biases or overlook intangible qualities that are crucial for long-term employee success.

AI also lacks the human touch that's essential for creating an excellent candidate experience. Personal interactions, empathy, and genuine connection are key to making candidates feel valued and understood – qualities that algorithms simply can't replicate. That's why it's vital to see AI as a tool to enhance candidate experience, not a replacement for the human element that defines a truly exceptional hiring experience.

“In a world of automated responses and templated emails, the human touch is often the first thing to go and it's a real shame. Because in recruitment, small gestures of care can make a big difference. Take communication, for example. Templates are efficient, sure. But when I take a moment to personalise a message, maybe by referencing a detail from a candidate's CV or acknowledging something unique in their cover letter, it shows I've actually paid attention. That kind of effort builds trust.

“Before interviews, I like to send tailored prep notes. Not just the basics, but real insights: who they'll be meeting, what the format will be, and even a few tips on how to shine. It shows them I care about their success.

“And when someone doesn't get the job, I always try to offer meaningful feedback. It's not easy, but it's respectful. Jobseekers appreciate knowing where they stand, and I've seen firsthand how a thoughtful rejection can turn someone into a future applicant.

“Recruitment is about people. And when we treat candidates like individuals, not just names in a database, we build stronger relationships and better reputations. That's why working with a recruitment partner, like Reed, can make all the difference. We understand the value of empathy in hiring, and we help businesses put it into practice.”



Adam Buckland
Divisional Managing Director,
Reed

Building an inclusive culture with diversity, equity and inclusion

Inclusive cultures don't happen by accident – they're shaped by the choices organisations make every day. From how teams are built to how voices are heard, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) show up in the details.

Iain MacLeod, EDI&B Consultant at Reed Talent Solutions, says:
"True inclusion is achieved when organisations challenge their own assumptions and create systems that uplift everyone, not just those who fit the traditional mould.

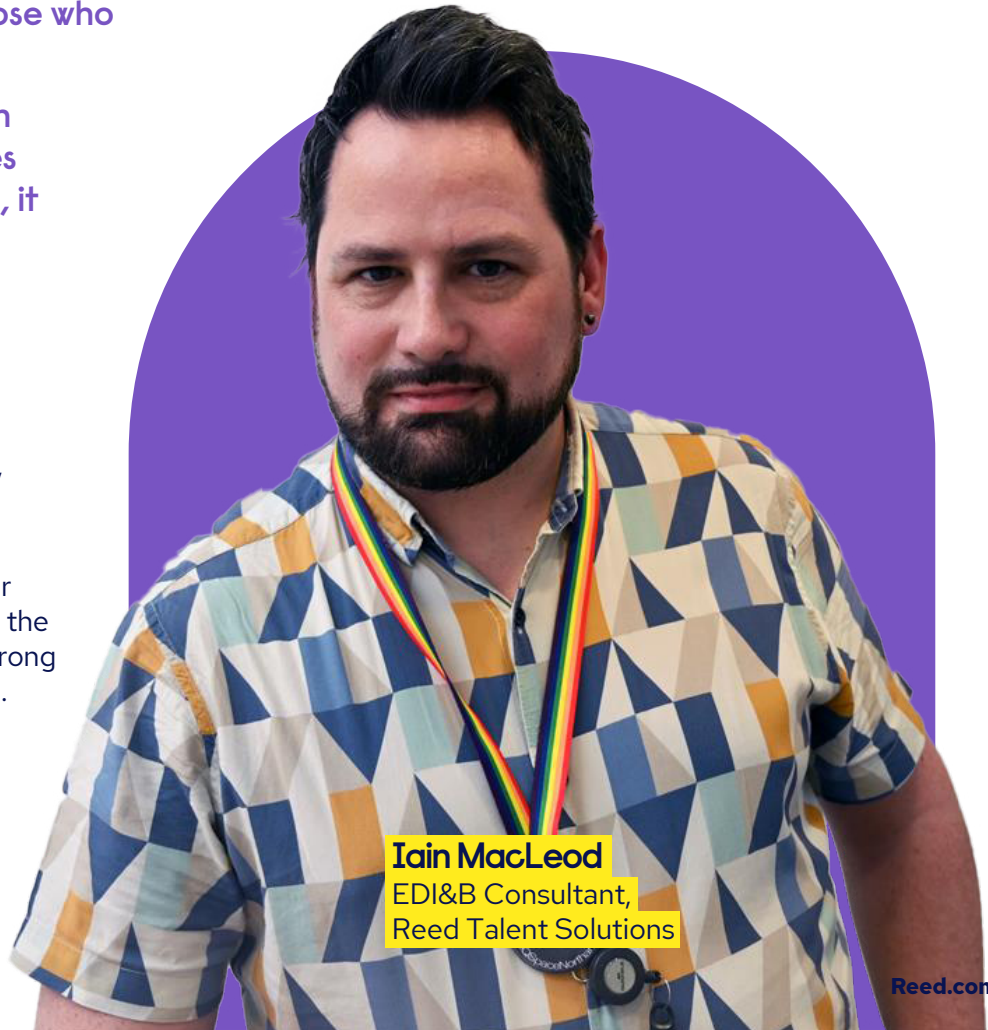
"It's not enough to say you value diversity – you have to show it in how you hire, develop, and listen to your people. When employees see that their perspectives are genuinely valued and acted upon, it builds trust and loyalty that no policy alone can achieve."

The journey starts with inclusive hiring

Inclusive hiring is a strategic approach that drives real business results. By broadening your talent pool to include applicants from diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives, businesses can tap into greater innovation and creativity that homogeneous teams lack.

On a practical level, inclusive hiring strengthens employer branding, making your organisation more appealing to professionals who increasingly value diversity in the workplace. In our survey of 1,000 employees, one in five said their company's strong diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives was a key factor in their decision to join.

Additionally, inclusive hiring practices help address skills shortages by reaching talent segments that are often overlooked, such as individuals re-entering the workforce or people from underrepresented groups.



Top tips to inclusive hiring:

Rethink your job descriptions:

Avoid gendered language and jargon in job descriptions. Focus on key skills, impact, and growth potential rather than listing unnecessary qualifications that might discourage strong, non-traditional applicants.

Standardise your evaluation criteria:

To mitigate unconscious bias during the hiring process, establish clear and consistent evaluation criteria before reviewing applications. Use structured interviews and scorecards aligned with job requirements to ensure that everyone is assessed solely on their skills, experience, and potential. This approach not only promotes fairness but also helps you identify high-quality candidates more effectively.

Invest in targeted outreach efforts:

Expand your talent pool by partnering with organisations and networks dedicated to diversity, helping you reach skilled individuals from underrepresented groups who may not apply through traditional channels.

Implement blind screening:

Remove personal details like names and ages during initial screening to focus on skills and potential. Working with recruitment specialists can ensure blind screening is applied consistently and objectively, without compromising candidate quality.

Diversify your interview panels:

Include interviewers from diverse backgrounds, experiences, and departments to create a more robust and unbiased evaluation process. This shows potential employees that your commitment to diversity is genuine.

Leverage technology to streamline processes:

Applicant tracking systems (ATS) can centralise candidate information, making it easier to manage and track progress, while AI-powered tools (like [Reed's interview question generator](#)) can support identifying the most suitable candidates for your role.

Download our free interview evaluation form, helping you evaluate interviewees consistently and fairly.

Reed
Interview evaluation form

Use this form to record interview questions, score interviewees fairly, and reflect on potential biases. Tick the appropriate score box and use the notes section to capture key points.

Scoring matrix	Description
1 – Weak	Response was unclear, lacked interview or did not address the question
2 – Fair	Response was somewhat relevant but lacked depth or clarity
3 – Good	Response was clear and relevant, with some supporting details
4 – Strong	Response was well-structured, relevant, and included thoughtful insight or examples
5 – Excellent	Response was highly relevant, insightful, and demonstrated strong alignment with the role or company values

Question asked	Score
	1 – Weak 4 – Strong
	2 – Fair 5 – Excellent
	3 – Good

Notes

Everyday actions that strengthen DE&I

Laying the groundwork for diversity, equity, and inclusion means making a sustained, purposeful effort that's woven into everyday workplace routines. It requires an ongoing promise to create an environment where everyone feels genuinely valued and respected.

Here are some practical, everyday actions businesses can take to embed DE&I into their workplace culture:

1 Foster open communication

Create a culture where employees feel genuinely safe and empowered to voice their opinions, concerns, and ideas without fear of reprisal. Actively encourage dialogue, even on sensitive topics, and ensure accessible channels for feedback (e.g., regular anonymous surveys, dedicated DEI committees, etc).

2 Move beyond policies to proactive engagement

Ensure leadership not only supports diversity in words but also listens to and learns from diverse perspectives. Encourage employees to share unique insights and respond meaningfully to feedback, especially regarding exclusionary experiences.

Act on concerns by reviewing processes, providing additional training, or addressing microaggressions directly.

3 Make inclusion part of daily routines

Celebrate cultural holidays and observances to acknowledge and respect diverse backgrounds. Offer flexible work arrangements to accommodate different needs (e.g., childcare, religious observances, personal wellbeing).

Ensure all voices are heard in meetings by inviting input from quieter team members, rotating discussion leaders, and using tools for anonymous feedback.

4 Prioritise ongoing education

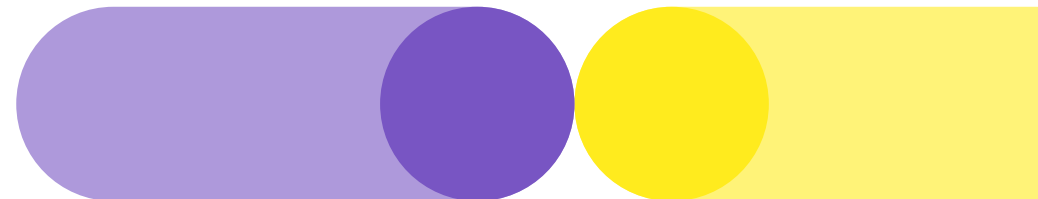
Provide regular opportunities for employees to learn about unconscious bias, systemic inequalities, privilege, and allyship. Use interactive workshops and scenario-based training to encourage self-reflection and practical application in real workplace situations.

5 Establish accountability

Set clear, measurable DE&I goals and track progress consistently. Report transparently on diversity metrics and set targets for diverse representation, especially in leadership.

6 Embed inclusivity into core culture

Recognise that numerous small, consistent actions collectively drive daily inclusion. When inclusivity is woven into the fabric of the organisation, it leads to stronger collaboration, more innovative problem-solving, and a deeply engaged workforce where everyone feels valued and respected.



How inclusive cultures boost intrinsic employee motivation

When people feel included, they feel seen. And when they feel seen, they're more likely to bring their full selves to work – not just their skills, but their ideas, energy, and commitment. Inclusive cultures create **psychological safety**, which is a key driver of intrinsic motivation. Employees are more willing to take initiative, share perspectives, and engage deeply when they know their contributions are valued.

Inclusion also supports autonomy, another core element of intrinsic motivation. When individuals are trusted to make decisions and are given space to work in ways that suit their strengths, they're more likely to feel ownership over their work. This sense of agency fuels creativity, problem-solving, and a deeper connection to organisational goals.

Belonging plays a powerful role too. When people feel they belong, they're not just working for a salary, they're working as part of something meaningful. Inclusive cultures foster connection across differences, helping teams build trust and mutual respect. That sense of shared purpose can be a strong internal motivator, encouraging people to go beyond what's expected because they care about the outcome and the people around them.

Ultimately, inclusion is just as good for performance as it is morale. Motivated employees are more productive, more resilient, and more likely to stay. And when motivation comes from within, it's sustainable.



Culture by design: intentionality over assumption

Culture by design is the practice of deliberately crafting the values, behaviours, and experiences that define how people work together. This approach ensures that culture reflects what your organisation stands for and supports an environment where people of all backgrounds can thrive both professionally and personally.

Traditional workplace cultures often emerge haphazardly, influenced by leadership styles, industry norms, or historical practices. This can unintentionally exclude voices, reinforce bias, or limit opportunity. Culture by design flips this narrative. It begins with a clear definition of what the workplace should represent – including a commitment to equity, inclusion, and respect – and builds the structures, processes, and behaviours to support it.

Designing culture offers a unique opportunity to align internal practices with purpose. With fewer layers and more direct influence, companies can embed values into everyday operations more quickly and authentically. This means culture becomes something people experience consistently, from how decisions are made to how feedback is shared and how success is recognised.

The process begins with clarity. Organisations need to define their values in practical, observable terms and embed them into core processes like hiring, onboarding, leadership development, and communication. Inclusive hiring practices, equitable progression pathways, and open dialogue are essential. When leaders model inclusive behaviours and employees feel heard, culture becomes a shared responsibility, not just a leadership directive.

The benefits of culture by design are tangible. When people feel safe, respected, and empowered to contribute, they're more likely to stay, perform well, and advocate for the organisation. A well-designed culture also strengthens brand reputation, supports compliance with legal standards, and builds resilience in a diverse and values-driven workforce.





Culture fit or affinity bias?

When building a team, hiring for 'culture fit' has long been considered best practice. But is it truly the best approach, or does it risk limiting diversity and innovation? While it's important to hire candidates whose values align with your company's mission, there's a fine line between selecting for common purpose and inadvertently creating an echo chamber.

Hiring for culture fit can sometimes lead to affinity bias – the tendency to select people who think, act, or even look like you. This may feel comfortable, but it stifles creativity, encourages **groupthink** and prevents organisations from benefiting from fresh perspectives, which are essential for growth and adaptability in today's evolving world.

Instead, focus on how individuals can add value to your culture. Seek individuals who bring something new to the table – whether it's a unique background, fresh ideas, or challenging viewpoints. These hires not only enhance your team but also push your company culture to evolve in ways that better reflect your customers, industry, and the world around you.

By focusing on culture contribution, you create a richer, more dynamic workplace where innovation thrives. It's not about finding people who perfectly fit into the mould you've created; it's about hiring those who will help reshape that mould for the better.

Employee retention – the winning formula

Start with smart hiring

When does employee retention really begin? Is it after the first week? Six months in? A year down the line? Actually, it starts long before you make an offer. When you approach your hiring process with long-term fit in mind, you're investing in future stability, performance, and culture.

"Retention is the ultimate proof of a successful hiring strategy," said Ian Nicholas, Global Managing Director at Reed. "It shows that you're not just building teams but you're building belief. When someone chooses to stay, they're saying, 'I believe in this place, and I see my future here,' and that is powerful."

While competitive salaries undoubtedly play a role in retaining talent, lasting employee commitment is built on deeper foundations: alignment with company values, clear growth pathways, and a sense of purpose from day one. A thoughtful hiring process helps identify professionals who, as well as being qualified, are genuinely motivated to grow with your organisation.

Having a high employee turnover is costly. It also disrupts team cohesion, slows progress, and can damage your reputation as an employer of choice. By hiring smart, you set the stage for stronger engagement, better retention, and a workplace where people choose to stay.



The importance of transparency

Transparency is one of those buzzwords that gets thrown around a lot, but when it's done right, it's a genuine game-changer for attracting and retaining people. It starts with the hiring process, but it's really about how you show up as an organisation every single day.

Think about it: when you're upfront with applicants about what a job involves – the good, the challenging, and everything in between – you're showing respect for their time. No one wants to walk into a new role and discover it's nothing like what was promised. That kind of misalignment doesn't just lead to disappointment; it can send talented people right back out the door. This kind of turnover is costly and avoidable.

But transparency shouldn't stop after you hire someone. The best workplaces keep the lines of communication open, sharing business performance, upcoming projects, or even setbacks. When leaders are honest about what's happening in the business, it builds trust and makes people feel like they're truly part of the journey.

Ultimately, organisations that prioritise transparency, both in hiring and in everyday operations create environments where people genuinely want to be. Employees feel respected, informed, and empowered to contribute their best. By embedding transparency as a core value, you build stronger relationships, boost retention, and establish your reputation as an employer of choice.



Creating an engaging onboarding experience that promotes loyalty

First impressions matter, and how you welcome someone into your organisation speaks volumes about your culture and values. Great onboarding shows new hires they're supported from day one. It's your chance to embed them in your company's purpose, clarify expectations, and equip them with the tools to thrive. When done right, it builds trust, boosts engagement, and lays the groundwork for long-term loyalty.

Start by creating a **structured induction plan** that is both informative and welcoming. Introduce new hires to their team members, provide a clear understanding of their role, and offer training sessions to build confidence in their responsibilities. Regular check-ins during the first few weeks can address concerns and ensure new employees feel supported. Additionally, make use of technology where appropriate to streamline administrative tasks, leaving more time for meaningful interactions.

By focusing on a personalised and comprehensive onboarding experience, employers can reduce early-stage attrition. Investing in this crucial phase of the employee lifecycle will not only improve retention rates but also enhance your organisation's reputation as a supportive and employee-centric workplace.



Download our **free onboarding guide** to discover actionable strategies, proven techniques, and tools to streamline your onboarding process and improve employee retention.

Perks over pounds: the new currency of employee happiness?

In the competition for talent, smaller organisations may not always be able to compete on salary alone, especially against larger corporations with bigger budgets. However, a compelling and holistic approach to rewards, professional development, and meaningful recognition can often be far more attractive to ambitious professionals than just a competitive salary.

Today's employees view their work as an extension of their identity, not just a way to earn a living. With work consuming such a significant portion of our time, people want to get out what they put in. As employees bring their energy, passion, and commitment to their roles, they increasingly look to their employers to create environments that support growth, purpose, and wellbeing in return.

While salary remains important, non-monetary benefits are gaining prominence. Employees increasingly prioritise work-life balance, personal growth, and overall wellbeing.

The rise of remote work and flexible schedules – has redefined what people expect from their employers. Where flexible working was once a perk reserved for a select few, it's now the expected standard – especially in office-based roles. And younger generations entering the workforce are driving demand for workplaces that reflect their values: career development, diversity, mental health support, and ethical leadership.

Employees want to feel invested in and valued. They view initiatives like mentoring programmes, learning workshops, and wellness resources not as extras, but as evidence that their employer cares about their long-term growth and happiness not just their output. In short, they're looking for a relationship, not a transaction.

Foundational benefits like flexible working, health cash plans, and pension contributions remain essential for attracting and retaining talent. But as the workplace continues to evolve, so do employee expectations. People are looking for benefits that feel more personal, purposeful, and reflective of how they live and work today, and they don't have to cost the earth!



Affordable perks that will help your company stand out, energise your team, and build loyalty:



Passion projects time

Allow employees to dedicate a few hours each month to work on a personal or professional project of their choice, encouraging creativity and autonomy.



Recharge hour

Encourage employees to take one hour a week for personal wellbeing – whether it's a walk, a yoga class, or simply unplugging.



Work-from-anywhere weeks

Offer a few weeks per year where employees can work from any location, giving them a change of scenery and boosting motivation.



Extra leave for milestones

Give additional paid leave for life events like moving house, getting married, or adopting a pet, recognising that life outside work matters too.



Voice-of-the-employee panels

Create regular forums where employees can pitch ideas, give feedback, or help shape company initiatives, making them feel heard and valued.



Reverse mentoring

Pair junior employees with senior leaders to share fresh perspectives, digital skills, or generational insights, building mutual respect and learning.



Customised perks menu

Let employees choose from a menu of perks (e.g. gym membership, childcare support, tech upgrades) based on what matters most to them.

Affordable perks that will help your company stand out, energise your team, and build loyalty:



DIY learning credits

Let employees choose their own learning path with a small annual budget for online courses, conferences, or creative workshops.



Values-based rewards

Recognise employees not just for performance, but for living company values, e.g. collaboration, innovation, or empathy.



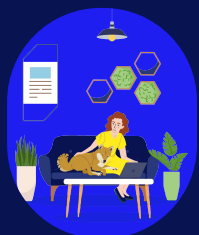
Mini sabbaticals

Offer short, unpaid, or partially paid, sabbaticals after a few years of service, to recharge, travel, or pursue personal goals.



Wellness subscriptions

Provide access to wellness platforms (e.g. yoga, fitness, nutrition apps) or partner with local studios for discounted memberships.



Pet-friendly office days

Designate occasional days where employees can bring their pets to work, creating a fun and relaxed atmosphere.



'Try a role' days

Allow employees to shadow or temporarily switch roles for a day to explore other parts of the business. This is great for development and cross-team empathy.

Empowering progress through personalised growth plans

Personalised growth plans are tailored roadmaps that align an employee's career aspirations with the organisation's goals. These plans are co-created with the employee, incorporating their strengths, interests, and long-term ambitions. They often include:

- Clear short- and long-term career objectives
- Skills development pathways (technical, leadership, soft skills)
- Opportunities for mentorship, stretch assignments, or cross-functional exposure
- Regular check-ins and progress reviews



When development is actively supported, employees are far more likely to return that investment with energy, ideas, and long-term commitment to the business. A personalised growth plan signals to the employee that their organisation sees their potential and is committed to helping them realise it, not just in their current role, but in their future career.



These plans also play a key role in strengthening loyalty. One of the biggest drivers of attrition is uncertainty around career progression. The results from our survey were telling. Of those planning to leave their organisation in the next year, over one in five (21%) said it was due to a lack of career development or training.

When employees can see a clear path forward, tailored to their strengths and aspirations, they're less likely to look elsewhere. It builds a sense of direction and belonging that's hard to replicate with generic development programmes.

Beyond retention, individualised growth plans directly impact performance. By focusing on the specific skills and experiences each employee needs to thrive, businesses can unlock stronger results and more confident teams. It's a win-win – employees grow, and your organisation benefits from their evolving capabilities.

Finally, growth plans support internal mobility by encouraging employees to explore new roles and opportunities within the company, which helps preserve valuable institutional knowledge and fosters a culture of continuous learning.

To be effective, personalised growth plans must be:

Collaborative: Built with input from both the employee and their manager.

Flexible: Adaptable to changing goals, business needs, or life circumstances.

Visible: Supported by systems that track progress and celebrate milestones.

Integrated: Linked to performance reviews, succession planning, and L&D initiatives.



Download 'A manager's guide to learning and development'.

This short guide from our sister company, Reed Learning, is designed to help managers provide the best opportunities to their team, regardless of budget.



The simple power of recognition

Feeling valued and appreciated is a fundamental human need, and in the workplace, it's a key factor in boosting morale, motivation, and overall job satisfaction. One in four employees who were considering leaving their organisation in the next 12 months said it was due to a lack of recognition of efforts from management, our survey revealed.

A culture of recognition is one of the most powerful drivers of employee engagement and, best of all, it can be completely free. When employees feel their efforts are noticed and valued, they are more likely to stay committed, productive, and aligned with the company's goals. Looking to foster a strong culture of recognition? These strategies can help:

Make it timely and specific:

Recognition is most impactful when it happens in the moment. Don't wait for the annual performance review or a quarterly meeting to acknowledge great work. Celebrate achievements as they happen! Be specific about what you are recognising, whether it's meeting a tough deadline, executing a creative idea, or going above and beyond to help a teammate, and highlight the positive impact it had on the team or company.

Encourage peer-to-peer recognition:

Recognition doesn't always have to come from the top. Peer-to-peer recognition is a powerful way to cultivate a sense of belonging and teamwork. Create systems or platforms where colleagues can easily recognise and celebrate each other's contributions, whether it's through shoutouts during team meetings, shared digital spaces, or even informal notes of thanks.

Chris Brindley, Head of Reward and Co-Member Experience at Reed explains: "Peer recognition is at the heart of our reward strategy. Our Golden Ticket initiative puts the power in the hands of our co-members, allowing them to nominate colleagues who have gone above and beyond in their work or who consistently demonstrate our core values: working together, being fair, open and honest, and taking ownership. Golden Ticket winners are entered into a prize draw for a £3,000 holiday voucher. We find that peer recognition goes a long way in boosting morale, strengthening team culture, and reinforcing the behaviours that make Reed a great place to work."

Formalise it but keep it personal:

While an informal "thank you" and verbal acknowledgments are great for building an everyday culture of appreciation, formal recognition programmes can provide additional structure and reinforce your company's values. It tells employees, "You matter here," and that message can be transformative. Consider implementing initiatives such as 'employee of the month' awards, small bonuses, or personalised gifts for outstanding contributions. Ensure that these programmes align with your company's goals and values, so they feel sincere and meaningful. At the same time, keep the personal touch, for example, tailor the recognition to reflect the individual's unique efforts and preferences so it resonates on a deeper level.



Chris Brindley
Head of Reward and
Co-Member Experience,
Reed

How feedback fuels motivation

While incentives and perks have their place, it's feedback – consistent, meaningful, and actionable – that truly fuels long-term motivation.

When employees receive feedback that acknowledges their strengths and guides their growth, they feel valued and empowered. This sense of recognition and direction is a powerful driver of engagement, performance, and loyalty.

Constructive feedback, when delivered with empathy and clarity, helps employees overcome challenges and build new skills. It encourages a mindset of continuous improvement and shows that you're invested in their success. This kind of support builds trust and strengthens the employee-employer relationship, which is essential for motivation to thrive.

When feedback is part of the everyday rhythm of work, it creates a ripple effect. Motivated employees are more likely to take initiative, collaborate effectively, and contribute innovative ideas. They're also more likely to stay and advocate for your company, reducing turnover, preserving institutional knowledge, and strengthening your employer brand. Teams become stronger, cultures become more resilient, and organisations become more agile and successful.



Measuring and optimising your approach

Becoming a talent magnet is a continuous journey of growth and improvement. In a dynamic and often challenging job market, attracting and retaining top employees means consistently refining your strategies to remain competitive.

To determine how effective your efforts are, measurement is crucial. A data-driven approach helps you analyse **key recruitment metrics**, identify what's working, and pinpoint areas needing adjustment. This insight allows for more effective resource allocation and better optimisation of your strategies. By tracking trends and adapting to feedback over time, your approach can evolve to deliver the best possible results.



Establishing a culture of continuous improvement

To be recognised as a truly great place to work, businesses need to shift from being reactive to proactive. They must become agile, constantly scanning for emerging trends and adapting before challenges escalate. The most admired organisations treat employee insight as a strategic asset. However, our research reveals a significant gap: only 23% of organisations would reconsider or withdraw workplace changes even if employee feedback showed they weren't working. This highlights a missed opportunity to use insight as a strategic lever for positive change.

To truly stand out, organisations must embrace a mindset of continuous improvement, constantly learning and refining their approach based on real feedback. Building this culture isn't just the responsibility of HR, it's a collective effort. Hiring managers, leadership, and current employees all have a role to play in shaping how the organisation attracts and retains talent.

Ultimately, businesses that create genuinely engaging, supportive, and rewarding workplaces will always have the upper hand. By embracing these principles, you can build a community of talented individuals who are proud to work for you, helping you bold.

