Tear the Paper Ceiling:

STARs Hiring Playbook

STARs
SKILLED THROUGH ALTERNATIVE ROUTES.

Opportunity @ Work.
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Labor Shortage or Opportunity Gap?

Seventy-seven percent of employers reported difficulty finding skilled talent in a 2023 survey, a trend that has spiked since 2020. But is the US experiencing a labor shortage? Our analysis says no: a wealth of skilled talent is available, but many employers aren’t aware of this hidden pool.

In fact, what many call a labor shortage is actually an opportunity gap: Jobs that require a bachelor’s degree when someone without a degree can develop the required skills artificially limits the pool of available talent and eliminates potentially qualified candidates from consideration. If employers hired based on skills rather than pedigree, they’d open up opportunities to over 70 million workers Skilled Through Alternative Routes (STARs) rather than a bachelor’s degree who already have the skills to be successful in many of the roles companies are still struggling to fill.

STARs have been blocked from accessing higher-paying jobs that match their skills, due to unnecessary degree screens, biased algorithms, stereotypes, and exclusive professional networking.
STARs are at least 25 years old, currently active in the workforce, and have a high school diploma. They make up half the workforce, work in nearly every field and occupation across the labor market, and reflect our country’s diversity in a way that college graduates do not. When employers include STARs in their hiring strategy, they open their doors to:

- 51% of white workers are STARs
- 62% of Black workers are STARs
- 54% of Hispanic workers are STARs
- 70% of Native American workers are STARs
- 65% of rural workers are STARs
- 62% of veteran workers are STARs
- 50% of female workers are STARs
- 62% of disabled workers are STARs

Companies interested in diversifying their workforce have a much more difficult task if they’re not hiring STARs.

7.4 Million

From 2000 to 2020, STARs lost access to 7.4 million high-quality roles they had the skills to perform but were disqualified from due to bachelor’s degree requirements. These jobs include traditional strongholds for STARs: secretaries and administrative assistants, food service and lodging managers, and registered nurses, to name just a few.
HOW DID WE GET HERE?  
A Brief History of Degree Screens

Globalization, automation, and technology have transformed the workforce since the 1980s, initially impacting routine jobs and later extending to more complex roles.

Over the following decades, employers decreased investments in employee skill-building and on-the-job training as the drive for cost-efficiency led training to be seen as discretionary rather than essential.

The Great Recession of 2008 sped up degree inflation: overqualified workers accepted jobs, leading employers to raise education requirements.

Jobs increasingly demanded social skills (communication, teamwork, and problem-solving) as routine, task-oriented work diminished.

Employers began using college degrees as a substitute for skills.

Harvard Business School; The Aspen Institute

The prevalence of degree screens today:

- 67% of job descriptions require a bachelor’s degree
- 36% of the U.S. population has a bachelor’s degree
- 30% of jobs truly need a bachelor’s degree

No one is arguing that doctors and civil engineers don’t need degrees. But do salespeople? Software developers? Event planners?
The Consequences of Unnecessary Degree Screens

- Artificially constrains labor supply to the degreed labor force, rather than the skilled labor force
- Hinders advancement and advanced on-the-job skill development for most of the working population, resulting in an underskilled labor market that leaves companies less prepared for future needs
- Makes the workforce less diverse, which can affect a company’s profitability and innovation.
- Reduces the talent pools for open roles, leading organizations to take longer to fill roles or to miss out on the critical skills they need.
- Leads to higher turnover rates and increased staffing costs - sourcing for the skills you need instead of a worker’s degree status leads to better and more efficient hires.
The Benefits of Skills-Based Hiring

Skills-based hiring moves away from the traditional focus on education, previous employers, years of experience, and job titles as indicators of a candidate’s capabilities. Instead, it focuses on the specific skills needed to do the actual job for which you’re hiring.

Implementing skills-based hiring leads to five key impacts:

1. Diversify your hiring pool
2. Increase the likelihood of a quality hire
3. Improve retention rates
4. Broaden your access to relevant, qualified candidates
5. Position your workforce to be more competitive in the future

The business impact of overlooking skills

STARs build valuable and critical skills through various pathways, including on-the-job learning, training programs, community college, and military service. Degree screens relegate the majority of STARs to lower-wage roles. Since many people assume lower-wage jobs require few or low-level skills, employers often don’t consider STARs for higher-level roles. But our research shows that almost half of all STARs (32 million) have the skills to move into higher-wage positions now.
By focusing on skills-based transitions, hiring managers can source and recruit workers with the talent to do the job. For example, the graphic below shows the overlapping skills required by two sales roles that have a $40,000 annual wage gap.

We found similar skills-based transitions from a lower-wage to a higher-wage job that could apply to each of the 70+ million STARs. Sourcing candidates from related industries or through internal pathways based on transferable skills enables companies to build a more resilient, competitive, and high-quality workforce.

Low Wage ≠ Low Skill

Imagine the talent you could tap into by hiring workers for their skills and expertise and not their degree.
Alternative Routes

Where do STARs build their skills? In many cases, the same places all workers do—on the job, through training and certification programs, and more. Here are a few insights on how these alternative routes benefit both STARs and their employers:

On-the-job learning
Previous work experience signals that a candidate can bring existing knowledge and abilities to succeed in the role. Valuing a worker’s current capabilities, ability to learn, and transferable skills gives leading companies a competitive advantage as “magnets for talent.”

Skilled credentials
Nearly 70% of workers who have a skilled credential believe it has helped them progress in their careers. Watch our video on the value both STARs and employers gain from skilled credentials.

Apprenticeships
Today, 40% of workers in new apprenticeships are going into jobs that have historically required a bachelor’s degree, creating access to reliable pipelines of talent with specific skills.

Military service
Analysis by the Rand Corporation confirms that STARs’ military service offers extensive technical training; they also leave the service with strong “soft skills” in leadership, communication, and decision making.

See “Sourcing & Screening” on pages 26-33 for more insight on how to incorporate alternative routes into your hiring strategy.
Reflection: The Value of Skills

1. Think through the top 3-5 skills that you use daily in your job that make you effective.
   - Where did you first learn each skill?
   - When and how did you gain mastery of it?

   Most of us accrue more skills and sharpen existing ones throughout our careers. Like STARs, a large portion of every worker’s abilities are acquired through alternate routes.

2. Think of someone you know who doesn’t have a bachelor’s degree.
   - What skills do they possess that could transfer to higher paying jobs?
   - Do you believe that this person couldn’t succeed in a higher paying role simply because they don’t have a bachelor’s degree?

3. Next time you’re in a coffee shop, on a bus, or at the store, take some time to observe the workers.
   - What skills are they deploying?
   - Which of those skills would benefit your company in a key role?
SKILLS-BASED HIRING MOMENTUM GROWS

One of the most effective ways to solve for the workforce issues employers face is to reconsider degree screens and hire and promote talent based on skills. More and more employers are seeing the value in this approach:

The State of Maryland removed degree requirements from 50% of its 38,000 jobs starting in March 2022. The result? 

34% year-over-year increase in STAR applicants in the first six months.

Since Maryland’s announcement, more states have followed suit by passing legislation or examining their hiring processes and requirements, including: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, and Virginia.

The Microsoft Sales Academy was used as a launchpad for STARs to begin their careers at the company. By giving new hires access to the academy, Microsoft enabled them to hone their existing skills and add to their skill sets while the company fulfilled a key business need and drove up employee engagement and retention.

The result?

80% of associates who graduated from the Sales Academy exceeded their sales targets.

Removing unnecessary degree requirements, hiring STARs, and promoting them based on skills can make your organization stronger, more diverse, and more resilient.

→ Keep reading to learn how to build out a complete hiring strategy.
When considering a transition to skills-based hiring, always remember: prioritizing skills over pedigree doesn’t devalue skills developed through a bachelor’s degree. On the contrary, it recognizes and rewards relevant skills learned from any route. When you’re ready to implement your skills-based hiring strategy, change management will be key; teams will have to shift mindsets away from specific ideas of experience and degrees as a proxy for skills to focus on the skills needed for the role.

Use this checklist to:

- Secure key stakeholder buy-in
- Identify & address internal barriers
- Evaluate & select roles
- Identify internal mobility pathways
- Rewrite job descriptions
- Identify new recruitment sources for each role
- Set up internal application/transfer process
- Establish and enforce new screening & interview norms
- Devise new onboarding process
- Update review or feedback processes
- Compile metrics at regular intervals

Use the following pages to begin mapping out your initial activities. Once you’re ready to solidify your skills-based hiring strategy and put our playbook into action, contact our team for support.
Reflection: Effectively Managing Change

Building the case for change requires identifying potential biases and barriers to success that may need to be addressed. Start by asking some of the following questions:

- What competencies do we possess that will enable a new approach?
- Who could be tapped as internal champions of this shift?
- How experienced and capable is our organization at adjusting to new processes?
- What concerns or considerations need to be addressed before shifting hiring practices?
- Will any gaps or inconsistencies in our current hiring practices, organizational processes, or data impact the adoption of a new talent strategy?
- Does our company have any biases that could hinder the acceptance of a STARs hiring strategy? (For example, the mistaken belief that a large majority of the workforce has bachelor’s degrees can lead to the assumption that everyone should have a degree.)

→ Use the “Identify & Address Barriers Worksheet” on the following page.
## Identify & Address Barriers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier:</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accountable Staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stakeholders to Engage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Approach to Solve</td>
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<td>Intended Result</td>
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<td>Timeframe</td>
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</table>
Manage Your Company’s Change to Skills-Based Hiring

Existing hiring processes will need to undergo several specific, targeted adjustments, including how to write job descriptions and how to source and screen candidates. Leadership teams, recruiters, and hiring managers will have to reexamine how they assess talent. Organizations will need to invest time and training to retool procedures. Incentives will need to be realigned to support the transition to a new approach.

Taking these steps requires intentional action and disruption of longstanding habits and norms. Don’t feel overwhelmed—it’s a worthwhile endeavor, and we’ve compiled 10 steps for this new approach.

Planning

Articulate purpose.

The first step requires translating the need for changing your hiring approach into objectives and outcomes directly relevant to the business and its people. Consider both present-day pain points and future challenges.

> Use the chart below to connect a shift to skills-based hiring to your organization’s workforce priorities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example 1: Improve employee retention</td>
<td>X% increase in the number of employees who have been with the company for 5 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 2: Diversify workforce</td>
<td>Y% increase in applicant diversity and Z% increase in team diversity by race/ethnicity, gender, veteran status, and/or ADA status within 5 years.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Define scope.

Will the first steps into skills-based hiring be highly targeted, focusing on a few roles, or will it be company wide, including all roles and business units, or something in between? Either approach can deliver tangible results, but each has different requirements.

→ Use this graph to help determine the scope of your company’s STARs hiring strategy.
Identify the roles that are well-suited to skills-based hiring and STAR talent sourcing.

Every organization has roles or job families that are well-suited for intentional STARS hiring. Like all high-value candidates, STARS have direct experience in the role and can hit the ground running, but the way they’ve built their skills differs from traditional candidate profiles. Make sure your organization isn’t inadvertently screening out seasoned workers with direct experience. Look beyond an exact replica of experience to recognize and value relevant and adjacent skills.

Check out Stellarsight, the STARS Strategy Dashboard powered by Opportunity@Work. Explore the diversity of the STARS workforce in your region, discover the proven pathways to recruit STARS with transferable skills, and validate how job requirements impact the available talent pool.

→ Fill in a similar diagram for the roles at your company.

Pinpoint job skills and rewrite job descriptions to highlight them.

An effective skills-based position description gives a clear picture of the role’s responsibilities and the skills needed to meet them. This focus on responsibilities (like project management or customer service) over requirements (like degrees or years of experience) gives the HR team and hiring managers the latitude to think more broadly about the candidates who are capable of succeeding in the role. It also inspires potential candidates who have developed relevant skills in other industries, jobs, or life experiences, to see themselves in the role.

→ Use “Rework Job Descriptions” and “A Guide to Skills-Based Job Postings” on the following pages.
## Rework Job Descriptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A Traditional Position Description Often...</th>
<th>A Skills-Based Position Description Instead...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focuses on historical requirements to qualify for the job</td>
<td>Focuses on responsibilities and tasks necessary to do the job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritizes credentials, including degrees, as a proxy for skills</td>
<td>Prioritizes specific skills, which can be gained in many ways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not give a clear picture of job tasks and goals</td>
<td>Provides a robust description of specific job tasks, goals, and performance metrics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides a long list of requirements with no prioritization</td>
<td>Differentiates between required and preferred skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over-indexes on years of experience in the consideration of job fit</td>
<td>Focuses on type of experience and acquisition of skills in the consideration of job fit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes technical terms, jargon, or other language that discourages non-traditional applicants</td>
<td>Uses easy-to-understand, inclusive language to invite broad engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes unintentionally biased language that negatively impacts the fairness of internal review processes</td>
<td>Is intentionally reviewed and revised to eliminate biased language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unintentionally excludes STARs from applying</td>
<td>Makes explicit that jobs are open to STARs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is a static document that rarely changes</td>
<td>Is regularly reviewed by the manager and/or person in role for accuracy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*To begin, articulate the five to 10 core responsibilities and tasks of the role.* How does someone in this role spend their day, week, or month? What must they accomplish?
Start with the current description, but evaluate it critically to add missing information and context for the role. Does it accurately reflect the day-to-day responsibilities and tasks of the role? What has changed about the role since the description was last reviewed?

Consult your experts. The manager and those currently in this role have the most in-depth understanding of the job, what it currently entails, and how it may be changing. Interview and shadow these employees, have them review your final product for omissions or corrections.

Articulate priorities for the role. If you use key performance indicators (KPIs), objectives and key results (OKRs), or other performance management approaches, make sure the list of responsibilities refers to those metrics and the intended outcomes of the person’s work.

Identify the five to 10 key skills needed to perform those core responsibilities. Consider both occupational skills (technical skills and subject matter expertise) as well as foundational skills (interpersonal and general workplace skills). You may want to refer to a skills taxonomy or online skills tool that maps common job titles to skills to provide food for thought for this assessment. To build an effective list:

- **Be specific and precise.** For example, “communication skills” and “customer service” are vague, but “presenting to large audiences” and “making business-to-business sales” provide more context.

- **Focus on differentiators.** What skills set this role apart from others? “Teamwork” may not be as critical on a team of two, whereas “being a self-starter” may be more relevant.

- **Factor in learning.** Many skills can be learned quickly on the job. Which skills will someone need on day one? A staff accountant must have baseline accounting skills, but not necessarily experience with a specific software. Presumably, if they have used one system, they can learn another.

- **Prioritize.** Understand the difference between skills and expertise required at the start and preferred skills that can be learned or align with non-essential tasks. Ranking these skills will keep your job posting manageable; include no more than four-to-six required and three-to-four preferred skills there.

- **Translate your job description** into a job posting, a separate document written for an external audience with the specific goal of attracting qualified applicants.

→ **See “A Guide to Skills-Based Job Postings” for more support.**
A Guide to Skills-Based Job Postings

A job posting is different from a job description (a much shorter document archived for HR). The following tools documents are intended to help you build a stellar job post, which includes aspects about your organization’s overall mission and responsibilities, along with the necessary skills and benefits associated with the specific job for which you are hiring.

Instructions

1. **Description of organization**, including its mission and goals, at the beginning or end of the job posting.

2. **Essential information about the job** that is scannable and optimized for reading on a mobile device. Include the following essential information in a way that a candidate can easily find while quickly scrolling (change the coloring, format, put the information on a bar to the side of the main text, or make this into a list):
   - Job level
   - Department
   - Reporting relationships
   - Salary range
   - Accommodations
   - Hybrid/Virtual/In-person

3. **Easy-to-find “Apply Now” button**. Note that a good skills-based job posting invites immediate engagement. Typical applicants only spend 14 seconds on average when they decide whether to apply. The application process should be made to look simple rather than tiresome to attract a broader range of candidates.

4. **Job Summary**, including the job title, role expectation, and department within the first sentence. Keep this summary to about 300 words.

5. **Key Responsibilities**. List out responsibilities for the role—and be sure to avoid jargon when writing these!

6. **Skills, Knowledge, Expertise**, along with a statement that encourages applicants to apply even if they do not meet all criteria. Explicitly state that a degree is NOT required, and identify the skills that you’re looking for instead of the experience. Note: We encourage you to avoid “Experience,” and focus more on “Expertise.” If you are compelled to write that the candidate needs “5 years of experience,” ask yourself why they need that specific experience for that amount of time. Are you looking for knowledge and expertise when it comes to this experience? As a skills-based posting, you will want to avoid these arbitrary temporal marks of experience and focus instead on the specific skills needed to be successful in the job.

7. **Work Environment and Benefits**. Remember that candidates will judge a company culture based on the benefits offered. Ensure EEO statements, at the very least, are present.
Do’s and Don’ts

☑ Do explicitly state that a degree is NOT required; simply removing the degree requirement is not enough.

☑ Do use concise language.

☑ Do a final run through a gender bias decoder to ensure gender neutral language. You can also run the language through other tools to check for plain language and readability.

☑ Do focus on “expertise.”

☒ Do not focus on “experience.”

☒ Do not use industrial jargon that is specialized for a small pocket of employees.
SAMPLE: Senior Customer Success Manager

Don’t meet every single requirement? Studies have shown that women and people of color are less likely to apply to jobs if they don’t meet every single qualification. At Opportunity@Work, we are dedicated to building a diverse, inclusive and authentic workplace, so if you’re excited about this role but your past experience doesn’t align perfectly with every qualification in the job description, we encourage you to apply anyway. You may be just the right candidate for this or other roles.

Job Summary

The Senior Customer Success Manager will lead a team of Customer Success professionals to establish, nurture, and grow customer relationships. They will do this by supporting and driving their success via measurable outcomes through their use of Opportunity@Work’s suite of products and services.

The ideal candidate will bring a customer-centric mindset that combines strategic thinking and strong interpersonal and communication skills. They will need to be skilled in leveraging data to problem solve and identify growth opportunities across customers.

The Senior Customer Success Manager will report to the Senior Director of Customer Experience. This is a remote role and can be based anywhere in the United States.

We encourage people who have the skills to perform three of the five key responsibilities to apply.
**Key Responsibilities:**

- Support, manage, and develop a remote team of Customer Success Associates by:
  - Serving as a trusted partner
  - Supporting the team’s professional development and upward mobility
- Develop customized success plans that accelerate adoption and provide the customer with a path to achieve desired outcomes
- Execute an outcomes-based strategy with customers to ensure the successful onboarding, adoption, retention, and expansion of assigned accounts
- Anticipate, identify, and forecast risk and growth opportunities within your assigned customer segment
- Demonstrate a consultative customer approach, through a deep understanding of customer and business needs
- Assist with issue escalation and solution planning in partnership with other key cross-functional teams

**Skills, Knowledge, and Expertise**

- **STARs (workers Skilled Through Alternative Routes) are encouraged to apply; a 4-year degree is not required for this role.**
- Familiarity in Customer Success, supporting a software tool or portfolio of products and services, preferably within a start-up environment
- Proficiency in CRM Tools (Salesforce preferred)
- Strong interpersonal & relationship building skills, with proven experience in developing and growing customer relationships
- Strong project tracking skills, experience in successfully managing multiple priorities and accounts
Work Environment:

The physical demands described here are representative of those that must be met by a colleague to successfully perform the essential functions of this job. Reasonable accommodations may be made to enable individuals with disabilities to perform the essential functions.

While performing the duties of the job, the colleague will be required to meet the demands of the following requirements: sit, stand, talk, and hear.

Healthcare: We pay 100% of your medical, dental, and vision coverage and 50% of the premium for your spouse and dependents.

Retirement: We match 4% of your salary (up to a maximum of $5,000) annually and will contribute an additional 1% of your paycheck, even if you don’t contribute.

Accommodations: Accommodations are available for applicants with disabilities in all phases of the application and employment process.

Parental Leave: To help support new parents in the workplace, we offer 12 weeks of paid parental leave.

Flexible Work Schedules: We offer flexible schedules and locations; the majority of our staff work from home. Our policies and norms around work schedules are a recognition that we care about work outcomes over time spent at the office.

Professional Development: We believe that developing our team members’ skills is a pathway to accomplishing our mission. To this end, we offer you $1,000 annually for the professional development opportunities of your choice.

About: Opportunity at Work

Opportunity@Work is a nonprofit social enterprise focused on increasing career opportunities for the 71 million adults in the US who do not have a bachelor’s degree but are Skilled Through Alternative Routes (STARs).

For STARs, the American Dream has been fading due in part to an “opportunity gap,” in which access to the good jobs required for upward mobility often depends less on people’s skills and more on whether and where they went to college, who they know professionally and socially, or even how they look.

We envision a future in which employers hire people based on skills rather than their pedigree. We are uniting companies, workforce development organizations and philanthropists in a movement to restore the American Dream so that every STAR can work, learn and earn to their full potential.
Job Summary (300 words)

The first sentence will include the job title, expectation, and department. Paragraph 1 will disclose the key components of the role. The summary will be about 300 words.

Paragraph 2 will focus on what an ideal candidate will bring to the job. This will disclose some of the key skills needed for the job.

Paragraph 3 will disclose who they will report to, and ensure the location and remote/hybrid status are clearly stated. This will be the shortest paragraph.

Include a sentence here that encourages applicants to apply even if they do not have experience with all responsibilities.
Key Responsibilities:

This section will be about 5 bullet points. Keep language concise, and avoid industrial jargon.

Sample skills-based verbs to use in this section:

• Support
• Manage
• Develop
• Execute
• Anticipate
• Identify
• Demonstrate
• Assist

Skills, Knowledge and Expertise

Build on the skills that a candidate will need on day one of the job to be successful. Keep language concise and avoid industrial jargon. Make a point about hiring ST ARs and emphasize that a 4-year degree is not necessary for the role.

Include bullet points of necessary skills that are specific to the open role as well as soft skills. Identify the skills that you are looking for rather than the experience.

We encourage you to avoid “Experience,” and focus more on “Expertise.” If you are compelled to write that the candidate needs “5 years of experience,” ask yourself why the candidate needs that specific experience for that amount of time. Are you looking for knowledge and expertise when it comes to this experience? As a SBH posting, you will avoid these arbitrary temporal marks of experience and focus instead on the specific skills needed to be successful in the job.

• ST ARs (workers Skilled Through Alternative Routes) are encouraged to apply; a bachelor’s degree is not required for this role.
• Advanced knowledge in [skill].
• Proficient in [skill].
• [Soft skill]
• [Soft skill]
**Work Environment:**

Include your EEO statements, benefits, and physical demands of the job. Try to keep this section succinct and organized; candidates will judge a company culture based on the benefits offered, but also skim through this section.

*Healthcare:* [1-2 sentences]

*Retirement:*

*Accommodations:*

*Parental Leave:*

*Flexible Work Schedules:* [Include information about whether this is a remote/hybrid/in-person position.]

*Professional Development:*

---

**About: [Your Organization]**

Include a short description of your organization, its mission, and goals. It will be anywhere from 1 to 3 paragraphs.
Sourcing & Screening

Identifying and sourcing from skill-based trajectories enables career development for STARs, contributes to a stronger labor market with more skilled talent available, and leaves fewer positions unfilled.

Rethink talent sourcing routes, including internal talent pathways.

Colleges provide a steady pipeline of talent to recruiters. Why not apply the same recruiting strategies to community colleges, training providers, and local or regional workforce development organizations to be more inclusive of STARs?

→ Use the “Source for Skills” on page 27.

To account more effectively for skills developed through on-the-job experience, start by seeing if any internal roles have skills-adjacency to a target position. This can help create internal mobility pathways, and promoting from within retains proven talent with institutional knowledge. Being able to demonstrate effective upward mobility within an organization can also help attract external candidates.

→ Use “Map Internal Pathways” on page 28.

Don’t forget the value of transferable skills: Consider which industries train workers with related skill sets and how to attract candidates from those fields.

For example: companies tend to source for customer service representatives from call centers or customer service operations in their industry. But the same essential skills—communication, persuasion, negotiation, and a service orientation—can be found in the hospitality industry among hotel clerks and waiters, as well as in retail service roles.
## Source for Skills

**Role to fill:**

**Skills required:**

**Certifications or training required:**

### Potential Recruiting Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Colleges</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training Programs/Bootcamps</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Workforce or Support Organizations</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Military Veterans’ Organizations/VA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Industry Aggregators</td>
<td><em>(For example, do retail workers possess the skills you need? How can you reach them directly?)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusive job sites/tech tools</td>
<td><em>(For example, Jobcase and Indeed in addition to or instead of LinkedIn)</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Map Internal Pathways

**Origin Job:**

*Key skills:*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pathway A</th>
<th>Pathway B</th>
<th>Pathway C</th>
<th>Pathway D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Role:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Role:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Role:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills required:</td>
<td>Skills required:</td>
<td>Skills required:</td>
<td>Skills required:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected skills gained:</td>
<td>Expected skills gained:</td>
<td>Expected skills gained:</td>
<td>Expected skills gained:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Frame:</td>
<td>Time Frame:</td>
<td>Time Frame:</td>
<td>Time Frame:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Destination Job:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Destination Job:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Destination Job:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Destination Job:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Key skills:</em></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Expand Sourcing Selections.

While skills-based job postings signal specific needs to potential candidates, jobs must be advertised to reach all candidates with relevant skill sets. For skills-based hiring, that requires combining some data and research with a little creativity.

Create new points of entry and mobility in the organization by developing a coordinated approach to engaging job-ready talent alongside prime candidates for tailored training.

Set goals and use data to hone a sourcing strategy. Evaluate the historic applicant pool to identify critical gaps. Targeted analysis of company data, and additional surveys of current staff and candidates, can be helpful in clarifying current sourcing dynamics.

→ Use the “Evaluate Your New Hiring Strategy” worksheet on the following page

Rewire Hiring Mechanisms.

Once the skills required for the open role are defined, consider how to use varied hiring mechanisms to attract and retain talent:

1. Internal mobility is a special application of skills-based hiring that taps into current employees, an often-overlooked talent pool.

2. Internships are a key tool in identifying and developing talent for roles where soft skills and a few (but not an overwhelming number of) hard skills can be learned in months, rather than years.

3. Apprenticeships help develop talent for roles that require a significant level of hard skills not commonly taught in the education/training ecosystem, as well as skills that are niche or unique to a company.

4. Contract-to-hire placements offer a trial period where an employer can assess skills and determine fit before bringing a worker on full-time.

5. Vendor hiring requirements can be reduced, enabling them to hire from a broader pool of talent. While this doesn’t change the composition of an enterprise’s workforce, it can expand skills-based hiring among partners and potentially include more STARs in the staff supporting the business.
The Business Roundtable’s recent work on measuring the impact of skills-based talent practices provides a useful starting point for understanding the range of metrics you should consider regarding practice adoption and impact on the employees and the business. The list below outlines 10 critical questions to answer if you are early in the process of adopting skills-based hiring.

**Top 10 metrics to understand impact**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key questions about skills-based strategies</th>
<th>Suggested metric to analyze biannually</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Practice adoption</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Are we expanding access to opportunity at our company for job seekers?</td>
<td>#, % and % change of total job postings that do not require a bachelor’s degree or bachelor’s equivalent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Are we actually hiring more people based on skills?</td>
<td>% of new hires without a bachelor’s degree or bachelor’s equivalent out of total job postings without a degree requirement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Are we diversifying our sourcing partners and creating pathways into our company for non degree-holders?</td>
<td>% of entry-level hires coming from internship, apprenticeship or other work-based experience programs that do not require a bachelor’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Are we investing in scaling our skills-based strategy?</td>
<td>$, % and % change of total HR budget allocation for non-traditional talent pipeline development/sourcing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Key questions about skills-based strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employee impact</th>
<th>Suggested metric to analyze biannually</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5. Are people without a bachelor’s degree able to access a family-sustaining wage at our company?</td>
<td>% of employees with/without a 4-year degree or bachelor’s equivalent who earn a family-sustaining wage*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Are people without a bachelor’s degree able to grow their careers meaningfully at our company? How do the outcomes differ by race and gender?</td>
<td>% change in promotions among employees with/without a 4-year degree or bachelor’s equivalent, disaggregated by race and gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Are employees with and without bachelor’s degrees engaged in their work and feel a sense of belonging in our company? How does lived experience differ by race and gender?</td>
<td>Average employee engagement and belonging/inclusion scores among employees with/without a bachelor’s degree or bachelor’s equivalent, disaggregated by race and gender</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Business Impact

| 8. Does skills-based hiring improve fit for role and support employee productivity? | Average time to proficiency/productivity or performance ratings*** among employees with/without a bachelor’s degree or bachelor’s equivalent (or other preferred metric for employee performance) |
| 9. Do upskilling efforts and strengthened career paths for non-degreed talent improve employee retention? | % change in retention of employees with/without a bachelor’s degree or bachelor’s equivalent (company overall, by business unit, by level and disaggregated by race and gender) |
| 10. Do our strengthened skills-based practices increase the representation of diverse talent? | % change in representation of POC and women in the company overall, by business unit and by level |

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* Family-sustaining wage definition will be based on MIT’s Living Wage Calculator and defined by region and/or state.

** If not available, question should be added to engagement surveys asking for education attainment.

*** If your company does forced rankings, you may not be able to get as much information from this metric about improvements in workforce performance.
Retool processes for skills-based hiring.

After determining the set of roles, crafting new job descriptions, and selecting sourcing channels, hiring practices need to be adjusted to support engagement with a more diverse set of potential candidates. This includes reworking screening and selection criteria, interview protocols, and onboarding and professional development plans.

Many current candidate sources are aligned with a traditional hiring approach. Instead of using a blunt instrument like a degree screen, take advantage of tools and support available to effectively match work with workers’ skills:

☐ Review your applicant tracking system (ATS) filters to guarantee candidates aren’t being excluded from the hiring process by screening parameters that target years of experience or education. All ATS filters should be set to align with new skills-focused qualifications. Some companies mask names in resume and application reviews, and many are using pre-screening assessments aligned with required skills.

* All ATS filters should be set to align with new skills-focused qualifications. Some companies mask names in resume and application reviews, and many are using pre-screening assessments aligned with required skills.

☐ Research platforms that enable access to STARs or skills-based matching, including Stellarworx, Jobcase, and LinkedIn.

☐ Create a skills-based interview guide that consistently asks all candidates questions directly connected to the top skills required on day one. Adding training for all recruiters, interviewers, and hiring managers can improve the effectiveness of interviews and educate key stakeholders on the inclusive mindset that will be the most productive.

➔ Use “Prepare for Skills Based Interviews” on the following page.

When implemented correctly, this retooled hiring approach can result in more and better quality matches for the work that needs doing. In a true win-win, screening directly for the skills needed instead of using a biased proxy can deliver more relevant and qualified candidates to an organization’s open roles.
## Prepare for Skills-Based Interviews

### Job Simulations: The Advantages of Showing Versus Telling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Standard Interview Question</th>
<th>Scenario-Based Simulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senior DevOps Specialist</td>
<td>Tell us about your experience as a DevOps Specialist.</td>
<td>A non-technical stakeholder asks you what is meant by XYZ application architecture and why we need it. Please record an audio of yourself explaining this to the stakeholder and outline 2-3 benefits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product Manager</td>
<td>Tell me about a time when XYZ happened. How did you deal with it?</td>
<td>Our engineering team has been working toward the big release of a new tool. The planned release date is tomorrow, but there are still a number of bugs in it. What would you do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salesperson</td>
<td>Tell us about a time when you had to sell a product you knew little about.</td>
<td>Please give us a five-minute sales pitch selling our product to us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing Analyst</td>
<td>Explain a time when two key stakeholders had opposing views on a campaign. What did you do?</td>
<td>You have run A/B testing for a campaign and there is no significant difference in the results. The CEO likes one campaign but the COO prefers the other. Run us through the conversation you’d have, and how you’d get to a decision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analyst</td>
<td>Tell us an experience you’ve had with analyzing data in the past. What was your process?</td>
<td>Please take the next 15 minutes to analyze the following data. Once complete, talk us through your findings and observations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Service Assistant</td>
<td>What tactics do you use to calm an angry customer?</td>
<td>You have to say “no” to an angry customer who has requested XYZ. How did you handle the situation in order to preserve the relationship?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Hiring**

**Reimagine onramps and onboarding.**

Traditional onboarding is often HR- and compliance-focused; skills-based hiring invites organizations to consider using this initial training to address areas of growth and support the success of new hires from different talent pools.

Leading organizations are moving past passive onboarding practices like directing new employees to a section on the company intranet. Deepen insights on what employees need to succeed in a role—employers have an opportunity to make huge strides by creating more intentional onboarding programs and bridging the gap between what a worker typically knows when they are hired and what they need to know to thrive.

**Continue to strengthen your pipeline for the future.**

Planning for future talent needs starts today. Over 30 million STARs have the skills needed for higher-wage work, and new talent enters the market every day. How can employers work today to capitalize on that talent in the coming years?

- Design targeted upskilling and reskilling initiatives.
  - Are new roles with specialized skills anticipated?
  - Look to the STARs for potential talent: Send clear signals to community, training, and post-secondary partners about the skills needed in the future, and what proficiency in those skills looks like.

- Take advantage of established upskilling and reskilling programs.
  - For many roles common across employers (such as HR, project management, IT, and cybersecurity), graduates of these programs are an eager pipeline. Building relationships with the organizations that offer these programs can help meet future demand.

- Integrate in the local employer ecosystem.
  - Coalitions with other employers and organizations can drive network effects that transform labor markets.
  - What associations and partnerships can be built outside a company’s walls?

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“If you don’t have a STARs talent strategy, you only have half a talent strategy.”

*Byron Auguste*

CEO, Opportunity@Work

Opportunity@Work offers many tools and services to support organizations as they get started with a STARs hiring strategy.

[Contact us today to learn more.](mailto:info@opportunityatwork.org)