



Building Blocks For A Successfully Blended Workforce

Insights

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If you have been keeping an eye on growing trends in the gig economy, you know that around a third of workers reportedly use contract or freelance gigs as their primary source of income, and that this number is only expected to grow in 2019 and beyond. You may even be managing one of these workers as you read this. If not, odds are that you will be soon. So what are the rules in this context? And more importantly, how can you most effectively manage and lead a workforce blended with both full-time workers and freelancers?

It is important to keep in mind that the gig economy is not just simply changing how work gets done. The gig economy is in many ways changing the role of managers. While the process of building and managing a blended workforce can be uncharted territory for many of today's leaders and HR managers, the following considerations can strengthen and ensure successful partnerships with your freelancers:

Streamline How You Find and Engage Freelancers

Through the gig economy, businesses no longer need to rely exclusively on hiring the full-time jack-of-all-trades employee. Rather, a team of experts can be retained on an *ad hoc* basis when specialized projects or even small, but costly administrative tasks need to be completed. As this need arises, however, so does the need for simplicity and efficiency in finding, onboarding, and managing gig workers.

One way managers can find affordable talent and streamline the onboarding process is through Freelancer Management Systems (FMS). These platforms have grown increasingly popular and help businesses integrate freelancers with the existing full-time workforce. Other large companies have even chosen to build their own FMS platforms to provide their own employees and internal teams with direct access to highly-skilled freelancers for different projects.

However, even with a simplified onboarding process, maintaining a consistent brand experience when building a blended workforce continues to remain a top management concern. With freelancers moving quickly from gig to gig, consider providing a primer on brand standards, company culture, goals, and guidelines before starting your next project. Doing so will help keep everyone on the same page.

Define the Partnership at the Outset

Communication, transparency, and accountability are central building blocks of any successfully blended workforce. From a practical standpoint, clearly defining who is going to do what and when at the outset is essential. When working on a team, both freelancers and full-time employees need to know when collaboration is possible. You should make sure to designate at least a few hours of overlap time for your blended workforce to collaborate and communicate. Utilizing face-to-face communication tools allowing employees to communicate in real-time as opposed to through the back-and-forth of email can foster greater collaboration and efficiency. And maintaining easily accessible shared task-list documents can also ensure that business goals are ultimately achieved.

As for transparency and accountability, setting deadlines when working with freelancers is important now more than ever. In this space, project deadlines need to be firm because a freelancer's availability is firm. Setting specific, incremental goals as opposed to the traditional annual goal will keep projects moving and on-schedule. Reaching an agreement with your freelancers beforehand can also clarify any issues on how to execute beyond a deadline in the event one is not met.

Build a “Gig Culture” and Implement an Effective Reboarding Process for Freelancers

To make the most of your blended workforce, consider how to attract and retain this talent. Forming short-term partnerships with gig workers can be a powerful tool for an employer seeking to identify some of the best candidates for long-term, permanent employment. And an effective reboarding process can also ultimately keep overhead down. By implementing one, you can ensure that you are tapping into as much value and knowledge from these workers as possible—many of whom possess years' worth of industry experience. What's more, in turn, you can leverage shared connections among other highly-qualified contractors who may also be interested in working with you.

To attract and to keep these freelancers around, a consensus is growing among industry leaders that companies with successfully blended workforces tend to build a “gig culture” of belonging. Such a culture places value on simplicity, flexibility, and respect.

In the modern workforce, the “freelancer” title no longer simply equates to cheap labor. Rather, more than 60 percent of freelancers now report that they work independently by choice—*not necessity*. And that independent work can be unpredictable. Unlike full-time employees, freelancers are not receiving weekly paychecks and benefits. They also tend to balance multiple gigs at the same time. When viewed through this lens, implementing systems to simultaneously simplify and accelerate the way you find, onboard, manage, and pay freelancers can help drive top talent to your door. Similarly, treating freelancers as part of the team by keeping them informed about how projects are progressing, including them in communications and company outings, and asking for feedback can ultimately make these workers go-to resources for future projects.

While the gig economy is here to stay, the model for this type of management is constantly evolving. When building a blended workforce, companies should also consider that exercising too much control over freelancers could potentially create exposure. If a business has any questions about

misclassification issues in the gig economy, be sure to reach out to a member of the Gig Economy Practice Group for assistance.