Want To Attract Great Employees Post-Covid? Why ‘Remote’ Isn’t Everything



June 27, 2021 5 min read

Opinions expressed by *Entrepreneur* contributors are their own.

Chattanooga? When my daughter told me recently she’d be leaving a remote role in sunny Santa Barbara for a new job in Tennessee, it caught me by surprise. But the more I thought about her move, the more it made sense — and the more light it shed on how to win the battle for talent in the post-Covid economy.

The pandemic may have initially prompted a global recession, but with the “great reopening” upon, us the global fight for top talent is heating up. A record 42% of small business

owners in the U.S. are now reporting job openings they cannot fill. With many people now able to work from anywhere, it's clearly an employee's market.

In this context, "remote work" has emerged as the ultimate trump card for many recruiters. Deep-pocketed companies can hire the best talent regardless of geography, enabling them to work with anyone, anywhere. That's leading to bidding wars and escalating salaries across borders, posing threats to smaller businesses in regional hubs.

But, my daughter's history, coupled with my own experiences leading a robotics company of several hundred people, point to a very different outcome. Even in a remote work context, quaint, old concepts – geography, community, even purpose – may well matter more than ever. And smart employers would do well to play them up as a competitive edge.

Related: Roughly Half of Americans Want to Return to the Office at Least Some of the Time

Remote isn't everything

During Covid, my daughter's company went remote. For lots of professionals, especially those living in a beachside tech hub, that might be paradise. For her, it wasn't. And she's not alone.

While many employees have noted the positives of remote work during the pandemic, it also took a toll. Case in point: 27% of people said they felt they were unable to unplug from work at home, while 16% said they felt lonely and disconnected.

That's hard, and it shows that community and geography *do* matter and can be an asset in the hunt for talent. My daughter moved to Chattanooga to be a part of an in-person team and part of a city. By the same token, being physically based in Boston is absolutely an asset for my own company. Proximity to

some of the world's best technology schools is part of our strength and helps us draw elite talent from around the globe.

Importantly, geography can be an asset even in hybrid work contexts. We went with a blended model during the pandemic, allowing remote work while also providing offices in several cities where people have access to labs and desk space. As we transition back to the office, this hub model allows us to hire borderless talent while still maintaining a sense of community and a chance to live and work in vibrant cities.

Looking beyond the question of remote work, there are other key ways a small company in, say, Chattanooga, can compete with global powers for the same pool of talent.

Be the underdog: Who doesn't love a David vs. Goliath situation? Lean into that. I've worked for major companies before and I don't think I ever will again. When I go into a new role, I'm looking for a chance to do new things and grow something that can compete against giants. I want a sense of purpose, not to be a cog in a massive corporate wheel, and I'm not alone. Studies show that almost as many millennials rank room for growth and a sense of purpose as their top priority on the job hunt as those who rank salary first.

Sell your superpower. Every business needs something to stand out from the pack. At our company, we're able to ask people if they want to work with teammates who have accomplished out-of-this-world things like helping to land a helicopter on Mars. I mean, how many other places can ask that question in a job interview? Find the thing that makes you unique and make it an integral part of your pitch.

Related: As We Emerge From a Global Crisis, It's Time to Rethink How We Work

Culture is priceless. As management icon Peter Drucker said many times, "Culture eats strategy for breakfast." To win an employee, you have to sell them on your culture. A 2017 study

found 37% of people looking to switch jobs were in search of a better company culture first and foremost. It’s all about how a person will be treated and valued in the workplace and knowing your company stands for something important. You can’t put a price tag on that.

In the end, Chattanooga won my daughter over — and me, too. After helping her move in and learning more about her decision, I totally understood the appeal. The fight for talent is now truly borderless, but that doesn’t mean smaller or regional businesses are at a disadvantage. It’s important to remember these negotiations are about more than just money and remote perks. A sense of purpose can be a powerful selling point, and so can a physical community, even in a remote world.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/374019