



Commercial Insights with Regions Bank

Episode 9: Hiring and Onboarding Remotely

Chances are, your hiring and onboarding processes were thrown up in the air in the past year. This episode will cover lessons learned and best practices on how to manage new challenges and new opportunities — and make sure new hires feel like part of the team as we move into longer-term remote and hybrid work environments.

Episode Transcript

Ryan King:

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Chris Blose:

That's Ryan King, Executive Vice President and Head of Talent Acquisition for Regions Bank, describing the days in early March 2020 when the future of the workforce changed — both for his organization and likely for all organizations.

Before the pandemic, remote work and hybrid work were popular in certain sectors such as technology, but they certainly weren't the national norm. Then, suddenly, a large portion of America's workers across multiple industries found themselves sitting in front of computers at home instead of in an office.

This sudden shift affected everything from daily operations to hiring and onboarding. The latter is what King and colleague Carroll Stephens, Executive Vice President and Senior HR Business Partner, are joining us to talk about on this episode of Commercial Insights with Regions Bank.

From adapting to video technology for interviews to crafting communications for onboarding, talent acquisition has seen its fair share of challenges. But among all the disruption, there has also been a pleasant surprise for a lot of businesses: opportunity.

Well, Carroll and Ryan, thank you both so much for joining us today. We really appreciate your perspective. Naturally, remote work has been a major topic in the past year and you've both been kind of at the heart of that, seeing a major transition. So how has the pandemic specifically affected the



hiring of new employees?

Ryan:

Yeah, well, from the Regions perspective, we in talent acquisition actually viewed the pandemic and the chaos around 2020 as an opportunity. We are always strategically evaluating our processes and strategies and guidelines around recruiting and interviewing and onboarding. And last year really caused us to advance the changes that we needed to make to become more competitive for talent out in the marketplace. Given that our associates went home to work overnight also meant that all of our competitors were sending their talent home to work as well. So we had to realize that recruiting was going to forever be changed. We're recruiting nationwide now, whereas before we would only recruit in certain geographical locations. So, as a leader of a business, you should always work under the mindset that with regard to talent acquisition and recruiting and managing your talent, you need to be agile.

Chris:

Well, it's interesting. It seems like this actually accelerated some of that analysis of existing processes. So I'm curious, what new concerns or processes have HR and managers had to consider when they are looking for talent?

Carroll Stephens:

Towards the beginning of the pandemic, our turnover was pretty low because candidates were uncertain, so they were kind of staying put. This allowed us some time to think through potential issues. One of the things we knew is there's a really important connection that managers and candidates make during interviews. So since we knew in-person interviews were not going to be possible, it was important to get our managers comfortable with interviewing virtually instead of defaulting to just a phone interview. So to accomplish this, we came up with tools, job aids, and training to help managers get that level of comfort. Also getting more comfortable thinking about, like Ryan said, "Does this position need to be located in a certain geography?" Of course, we're a relationship bank, so certain positions do need to be in certain markets, but others may lend themselves to more flexibility.

Ryan:

The only thing that I would add is that companies need to offer some type of flexibility — and for a financial institution, as Carroll mentioned, with customer-facing responsibilities, that can sometimes be tough. For us, if you're in a customer-facing role, chances are you're going to need to be in market so that you can interact with the customer. But if you're on the support side of things, then there is



more than likely an opportunity for you to work in some type of hybrid, flexible, or even remote situation.

Chris:

When you're looking at the talent pool, does that become even more of an expectation than it was, say two years ago — that you need to meet that sort of flexibility?

Ryan:

Yeah, it's definitely an expectation. I can tell you just from some of the data that we look at, potential employees are actually searching for jobs that have remote or flexible work in the job description at a rate that has never been compared to before. Approximately 78% of all job seekers are looking for some type of flexible work arrangements. So as a business owner, if you're not thinking about that, then you may miss the boat with regard to some good talent.

Chris:

So I'm curious how that might vary by industry. You know, Carroll, you mentioned you're a relationship bank. So certain positions really do need to be in market, in a certain geography. But if you're in manufacturing, if you're in retail, if you're in something that's maybe more of a tech-oriented position, your parameters might be different. So how does a company go about looking at this new era of thinking about a talent pool, how can they decide what positions really do need to be in geography, versus what positions can really offer that sort of flexibility that employees are looking for?

Carroll:

So, I think it's up to the company to look at what are the different factors for this position? Is face-to-face contact with the customer important? And if so, in-person's probably going to be what needs to happen. But if it's more about a support function, if they are more technology based, I think there are a variety of different types of factors that may lend a job to be flex or remote.

For manufacturing, if you're working on a product or creating a product — probably going to have to be in-person. But if you're the accountant for that company or you're doing different types of operational roles, those may very well lend themselves to flexibility. So I think it's kind of making a list of those different factors and then looking at positions and seeing where they fall within that range.



Chris:

You mentioned something else I'd like to dive a little bit deeper into, and that is getting the folks who are making these hiring decisions comfortable with some of the newer technology. Whereas you may have been in-person before, now you're doing that job interview over videoconferencing, for example. So what have been some of your best practices for implementing that, for getting people comfortable with that, for making sure you're establishing the right relationships in those early interviews?

Carroll:

So we have really pushed the technology more than just for interviews. So we're really encouraging managers, "Use it in your team meetings. Use it in your one-on-ones."

It also keeps you more in touch with your group. You can see when someone else is responding versus being on a call and kind of being blind, especially when you're in a group setting. The more times we use it, the more comfortable we become.

Ryan:

I think one thing to mention is thinking back to March the 1st of 2020, and I'm just using the Regions associate population as an example here. Carroll made a great point: We've used technology for quite a while, but we never used the video functionality. We would have meetings that were audio only. So two weeks later — March the 13th, 14th, whatever the day was that we got sent home — immediately, we had to shift our focus to being able to conduct video conversations. So there was a time period there, where my recruiting team felt like a help desk to some degree because we were having to not only educate our hiring managers on how to use this new technology and to be efficient with it, but also the candidates that were interviewing for the jobs. So now it's amazing how technical everyone is. It's secondhand nature now, but back then it was an issue and a challenge.

Chris:

It certainly did seem like there was a switch thrown for everybody to move over to videoconferencing in a way that they were not using it before. It's almost like you've rewritten the manual for training for hiring managers.

Once companies have found the right talent, let's talk about onboarding. How has onboarding actually changed? What are the best practices for replacing some of those processes that might've had to take place in-person in the past, but now they're taking place via technology, for example?



Ryan:

Yeah, for us, just the realization that you can't have someone just come sit in a waiting room, for instance, to take a drug test or you can't have someone just go stand in the lobby of a facility to do their fingerprinting for their background check. We had to come up with a solution so that those things could be done, in a calendaring format. We had to schedule them, which can be difficult because remember when you're recruiting talent, most of the time that talent is currently working. So it's not like they can just take all day to go sit at a drug-testing facility.

So realizing that that process had to change. But also realizing once you get past the background check and facilitating the other aspects of onboarding, like getting them equipment, making sure that that equipment works, making sure that they can access the network so that they're productive at eight o'clock on their first day — that's a challenge too. So business leaders, make sure you're thinking about those deployment strategies because things could change at any moment.

Chris:

Well, and it may be important to talk about the cultural aspect of this, right? Culture is a critical part of onboarding. And with remote or hybrid work, what are some ways that you're ensuring those new employees who may be working in a completely different environment, get a sense of your business's culture and they feel like they're a part of a team?

Carroll:

So as part of onboarding, we have a presentation that new employees go through and it lets them know who we are as a company. It has things like a message from our CEO, our mission statement, our core values, and also how they fit into our organization and the importance of the role they'll be doing. Pre-pandemic, most of our teams were co-located, and connections just happened naturally. In a remote or hybrid work environment, managers really need to be more intentional about creating those connections, especially for new associates.

We encourage managers, like I said earlier, to really stay connected through virtual team meetings and one-on-ones. Also thinking about setting up a mentor for a new associate so that they have a peer who can help them get integrated, where that would have maybe naturally happened on its own when you're all working together and co-located. Also encouraging team members to welcome the new associate and make time to connect. It's really all about creating those relationships.

Chris:

I know a lot of this was put in place because — as you mentioned earlier, Ryan — 20,000 associates suddenly were working from home almost immediately in March of last year. We're entering a phase



where we're moving toward that more hybrid setup, right? How are you shifting back to that? What lessons are you taking from, say, the in-person environment versus the remote environment to build hiring and onboarding for a truly hybrid work environment?

Ryan:

Well, I think, quite simply, you have to realize that there are going to be two different pockets of your employee base. You're gonna have the in-person crowd and you're gonna have the remote crowd. And you're also going to have that hybrid work crowd, but being intentional about understanding the needs for each of the pockets of associates is going to become more important than ever. Carroll mentioned it earlier around connections. That's the most important thing, the connection that your in-person crowd is going to need is going to be very, very different than the connection that you're going to have to keep constantly in place with your work-from-home crowd. Because it's that crowd that can become quickly disengaged if that connection is not intentionally strong.

Chris:

You've both mentioned the geography aspect of this, too. Let's say hypothetically, I'm a business that traditionally has always had employees in one location and drawing from one geographic talent pool. But I now have an opportunity to start looking elsewhere. Is there any advice you can offer on best practices?

Ryan:

I think it's important that you go about that process in a very organized way. It's really easy to sit back and say, "Oh, the world is now my oyster with regard to talent," and just start searching everywhere. Without the ability, without the processes, without the thought of how you're going to incorporate that talent back into the organization, you're really doing everyone a disservice. So really make sure you have an organized, thoughtful strategy around the attraction efforts. If you're going to use the entire country.

Carroll:

It will open up the ability to attract more diversity. Possibly, it will also open up the opportunity for you to attract talent that possesses a very specific skill set, that might not be plentiful in the area with which your company is located. So there are tons of positives to be gained from it. But again, the negative could be if you're not thoughtful about the potential side effects of looking nationwide for talent.



Chris:

Well, I'm curious, too, in terms of working with a dispersed employee base. Going back to the process, how does that affect the way you approach something like training for diversity, or training for even just harassment policies, or some of those basic HR things that need to be covered? Has it affected the way you approach that? Or is it more just about delivering that in a new communications format?

Carroll:

A lot of our training was already electronic. As a financial institution, we, of course, have mandatory compliance training and then also additional training on respect in the workplace. Topics like that, those were already delivered electronically. So that hasn't been a big shift. But some of our leadership development classes, things like that were typically delivered in-person. So our L&D [learning and development] team has spent time looking at those. Can they deliver those virtually? And that does take time and that's something they've started to roll out again. But again, it's not as much a flip of the switch. It does require some retooling.

Chris:

Well, I know a lot of this has been a big shift for companies, and most indicators are that there's going to be some amount of remote or hybrid work even in the post-COVID world. So just, from your perspective, what are the most durable lessons from the past year? What do you want to make sure that you carry forward from a hiring and onboarding standpoint?

Carroll:

I think the ability to be adaptable. I think our associates and our managers have really shown that they can come together, get things done and be adaptable. And I think as we're looking at who we recruit, that's also something we'll be looking at, are we hiring somebody who can also be adaptable? Because we know things are always going to be changing. And so I think that's definitely an important characteristic that maybe we weren't looking at as closely in the past.

Ryan:

Carroll used the word "adaptable." I was going to use the word "agile." I think it's critically important that companies think in a more agile way, realizing that anything can change at any moment. Who would have ever thought that we would have faced the uncertainty that we all faced in 2020? No one did. It's important to be able to quickly adapt, quickly put yourself in an agile mindset to make those changes for any reason moving forward. Whether it has to do with talent, attraction, talent management, or just simply managing your business.



Chris:

If you've listened to past episodes of Commercial Insights with Regions Bank, you know "adaptability" and "agility" are common themes, regardless of the topic of the show.

For hiring and onboarding talent, those two words will continue to be important as we move into a post-COVID world. Examine your business' various roles, and ask yourself what functions need to be rooted in one place versus those that might be served by a broader talent search. Examine your industry, and look at what data says about the people applying for jobs within it, because their expectations are shifting, too.

Thanks to Carroll Stephens and Ryan King for joining us today, and sharing their perspectives on the changing world of work. Get related resources for commercial business and listen to future episodes at regions.com/commercialpodcast. And be sure to subscribe to this podcast on your favorite podcast service.

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