



WHITE PAPER · TALENT STRATEGY

# The 10 Talent Decisions That Lead to *Mediocrity*

By Cheryl Braun, Managing Director

*The difference between organizations that consistently outperform and those that plateau often isn't strategy — it's the quiet, compounding cost of small talent compromises made under pressure.*

**If you look at organizations that consistently outperform, the differentiator is not just strategy. It is talent.**

The companies that innovate faster, execute better, and grow more consistently are intentional about who they bring in, how they develop them, and what they choose to tolerate. Most leadership teams understand this in principle.

Where things break down is in the day-to-day. The small compromises that feel reasonable in the moment but, over time, lower the overall standard of the team. What follows

are ten patterns I see consistently when working with leadership teams. Individually, they may not seem critical. Together, they create real drag on performance.

## 01 **Hiring for Adequacy Instead of Excellence**

There is a meaningful difference between filling a role and strengthening a team. When hiring decisions are driven by urgency, the focus often shifts to finding someone who can do the job. The role is filled, the workload is covered, the immediate pressure is reduced — on paper, that feels like progress.

Over time, however, this approach dilutes the overall capability of the team. Top performers do more than complete tasks — they solve problems faster, think more strategically, and raise expectations for those around them.

*Strong organizations hire with intention. The goal is not simply to fill a seat. It is to increase the overall strength of the team with every hire.*

## 02 **Treating Compensation as a Cost Instead of a Strategy**

Compensation is one of the clearest signals you send to the market about what you value. When offers fall below market, the impact is not always immediate, but it is predictable. The candidate pool becomes

smaller and less competitive, and decisions get made from what's available rather than what's ideal.

Even when a role is filled, downstream effects show up in performance, engagement, and retention.

*Organizations that consistently attract strong talent view compensation as part of a broader strategy — not simply a line item to manage.*

## 03 **Overcomplicating the Hiring Process**

The hiring process is meant to create clarity for both the organization and the candidate. In practice, it often becomes more complex than necessary. Multiple interview rounds, overlapping conversations, and extended timelines turn a focused decision into a drawn-out process.

Strong candidates are typically evaluating multiple opportunities at once. When a process stretches too long, it signals indecision — and many will choose to move forward with organizations that operate with greater urgency.

*Effective hiring processes are structured but streamlined — designed to evaluate the right things and move decisively when alignment is clear.*

## 04

## Prioritizing Likeability Over Proven Performance

Personal chemistry plays a role in every hiring decision. The issue arises when it becomes the primary driver. Some candidates are naturally strong interviewers — they build rapport quickly, communicate with confidence, and navigate questions with ease. While valuable, these are not always indicators of how someone will perform in the role.

*The more reliable predictor is track record. Grounding decisions in tangible evidence reduces bias and leads to more consistent outcomes. Likeability may open the door — but performance should drive the decision.*

## 05

### Failing to Show a Path Forward

Top performers rarely make decisions based solely on the role in front of them. They are evaluating what comes next. If there is no clear path for growth, development, or expanded responsibility, the opportunity becomes less compelling — especially for individuals motivated by progression and impact.

A defined career path does not need to be rigid. But there needs to be a clear narrative around how someone can grow within the business.

*When people see a future, they invest more fully in the present. Without that visibility, even strong hires can begin to disengage over time.*

## 06

### **Relying Too Heavily on Job Boards and Inbound Candidates**

Most organizations still depend heavily on job postings to generate candidates. The limitation is that the strongest talent is often not actively searching — they are performing well in their current roles and not spending time applying to open positions.

While job boards and inbound applicants can produce viable candidates, they rarely represent the full market.

*Consistently hiring high-caliber talent requires going beyond who applies — and proactively reaching those who are not actively looking.*

## 07

### **Creating a Competitive Recruiting Environment Instead of a Strategic One**

Engaging multiple recruiting firms on the same search can feel like a way to increase speed and coverage. In reality, it often changes the nature of the search. When firms are competing, the focus shifts toward being first rather than being thorough — candidates are surfaced quickly, but not always with the evaluation or alignment required for long-term success.

*A focused partnership with clear alignment on expectations and outcomes consistently produces*

*better results. When the objective is quality over speed, the caliber of talent improves significantly.*

## 08 **Only Hiring When There Is an Opening**

Many organizations pause talent conversations once roles are filled. The challenge is that the talent market does not operate on demand. The right individuals often become open to new opportunities due to factors outside your control — and if engagement with the market only begins when there is an immediate need, the organization is already behind.

*High-performing teams build relationships with strong talent consistently — even when there is no active opening. When the right person becomes available, they act rather than react.*

## 09 **Allowing Underperformance to Continue**

Every organization experiences variation in performance. The issue is not that it exists, but how it is managed. When underperformance is allowed to continue without clear intervention, it begins to affect more than just results. It impacts team dynamics, morale, and overall expectations.

High performers are often the first to notice — and tolerance of low performance can lead to disengagement among those you most want to retain.

*Strong organizations are clear about expectations and consistent in how they manage them. Addressing performance issues directly protects both the individual and the broader team.*

## 10 **Underinvesting in Development and Performance Visibility**

Top talent expects to grow, and growth requires both development and clarity. Organizations that invest in training, coaching, and skill development build more capable and adaptable teams. At the same time, without clear visibility into performance, development efforts can lack focus — and feedback becomes subjective.

*A strong approach combines clear expectations, consistent measurement, and targeted development. This improves individual performance while strengthening the organization's ability to adapt over time.*



# Talent is the Multiplier

There is no shortage of strategies, tools, or initiatives available to drive business performance. But talent remains the multiplier behind all of them.

The difference between a team that sustains average results and one that consistently outperforms often comes down to a series of deliberate choices. The organizations that get this right are not perfect. They are intentional in how they think about, invest in, and manage talent over time.



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Cheryl partners with leadership teams in the lumber, building materials, hardware, and wholesale distribution sectors to strengthen performance through intentional talent strategy. Her work centers on helping organizations move beyond reactive hiring toward a more disciplined, performance-driven approach.

With more than 25 years of corporate HR and recruiting experience, Cheryl brings deep expertise in supply chain talent needs across raw materials,

manufacturing-adjacent distribution, and retail-facing operations in the lumber and building materials industry.

Her approach is grounded in practical experience across executive recruiting, HR leadership, and organizational consulting — working closely with executives to identify candidates who not only meet role requirements but elevate the teams they join.

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