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How Talent Acquisition Leaders Can Navigate the Peaks and Valleys of Hiring Cycles

BY JESSICA SWENSON | MAY 22, 2025



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By 2030, four in ten workers will have moved on from the jobs they hold today, according to a recent [World Economic Forum report](#), underscoring just how rapidly the world of work is transforming.

Paul Phillips, global head of business HR, talent acquisition, and onboarding for [Avanade](#), believes that one of the biggest talent acquisition (TA) issues in his industry is attempting to hire for immediate performance rather than potential. To maximize longevity and value, it's important to prioritize learning agility, adaptability, and courage to take calculated risks. These nuanced soft skills can be more challenging and time-consuming to teach than technical skills, so prioritizing them in the hiring process is key to building a resilient workforce, he says.

In a business environment marked by economic and political uncertainty, growth for many companies has plateaued following significant post-Covid peaks. Avanade alone has seen a 50% global drop in hiring, with the U.S. market slowing more significantly than others. Phillips' TA team has halved within the last 18–24 months, he said during a fireside chat moderated by Business Insider senior correspondent Emily Stewart at [From Day One's NYC half-day TA conference](#).

"It's the hardest part of being a leader," said Phillips. "It's really easy to be a leader when everything's growing. The hardest part [of being a leader] is when you have to make some of those tougher decisions around the size and shape of the team." He has since adopted more strategic hiring practices to better navigate these changes in demand. He keeps a core recruitment team in place to handle forecasted annual growth, and hiring needs beyond that are supported through scalable recruiting partnerships grounded in an on-demand recruiting model.

To effectively use TA team resources during those lower-demand periods, he redirects the team's focus to increase billable hours by supporting client-facing teams through CV reviews, scheduling, and workforce planning. It is imperative to stay ahead of the curve and be positioned for future growth, says Phillips.

While many organizations are being more prudent about their direct investments in technology and internal transformation, this leads them to partner with third-party companies like Avanade. To prepare for those peaks, his team embraces what he calls opportunistic conversations, which connect prospective candidates with recruiters and business leaders to discuss speculative roles. This proactively gauges mutual interest and capability, and creates an internal candidate pipeline to fuel future business growth.

Phillips has established a team of talent pool managers to facilitate a regular communication cadence and cultivate relationships with external candidates. This helps eliminate candidate frustration and accelerates conversion once demand increases. "I always say 'Clarity is kindness.' I think it's really important that you, up front, are very clear and set expectations about what this is and what it isn't," he said.

Supporting relationships with around 2,000 candidates, this team helps create those ground rules and keeps both parties informed about progress until hiring ramps back up. Once it does, Phillips estimates that 30% of this pool will be interested in working with Avanade, greatly reducing the company's time-to-hire.

Fluctuations in economic and political conditions impact the candidate side of the labor market as well. While compensation pressure has eased for



Emily Stewart of Business Insider interviewed Paul Phillips of Avanade

employers, he says, it can be harder to attract the talent they need or want because of reduced attrition and mobility.

Additional coaching for TA teams may be needed to offset candidate uncertainty and job security concerns, and companies should look at any differentiators they can offer. For example, Phillips shared that since Avanade is a joint venture between Microsoft and Accenture, the company can offer technologists early access to emerging Microsoft technologies as well as exposure to interesting, complex projects at Fortune 500 organizations.

Adaptability is always top of mind when managing a large global TA portfolio, says Phillips. Avanade offers multiple routes into the organization, as well as flexible, culturally sensitive hiring models. Its internal Avanade Academy invests in non-traditional talent to reskill them for the technology workforce, and then adjusts their exact entry path based on the customs and norms of their specific country or region.

The company also embraces the use of artificial intelligence (AI) for its annual recruiting portfolio of nearly 300,000 candidates. Prospects can opt in or out of an AI-assisted experience, and Phillips says that nearly 80% of them opt in. Recruiters use AI to rate candidates on a letter-based system; humans still review the files and make the decisions, but AI insights help them prioritize candidates who may be better suited for specific roles. This platform has accelerated the recruiting process and freed up valuable time for the TA team, ensuring timely communication and an award-winning candidate experience.

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