



The remote talent handbook

A complete guide to interviewing, onboarding and managing remote talent

How we work is changing. Specifically, the increased prominence of remote-first and hybrid offices mean that many of the “in-office” practices we are used to will have to adapt. As a manager, this means less time than ever before to see your team. This ebook will detail how interviewing, onboarding and managing talent has changed, how your role as a manager can evolve and provide you with tips and techniques you can begin to apply today.

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1

Interviewing remote talent

The importance of the interview

It's hard to not view the interview as the main event of the hiring process. While all stages of the hiring process play their part, ultimately the interview is the make or break of a candidate's success in the process. For that reason, it can be pretty nerve-wracking for both the interviewee and the interviewer.

We're not about to downplay its importance. The interview's main function is to discover three key points.

- **Is the candidate able to fulfil what the role demands?**
- **Is the candidate interested in the kind of work?**
- **Would the candidate fit well in the team?**

Should be simple enough, right? Wrong. Bear in mind that every interview is conducted somewhere in between a candidate's needs (nervous, potentially over-keen to perform well) and an interviewer's needs (under time pressure to fill a role). That's actually a pretty highly pressurized middle ground! Both sides want the interview to go well to such an extent that there's a good chance both will not perform to the best of their ability.



How to structure your interview questions

While lots of things can go wrong, the biggest mistake you can make is to not plan adequately for the interview.

An interview isn't a casual chat, and while you will want the candidate to feel as relaxed as possible, it's important you still have a steer on the direction of your questions.

- **Start broad**

We recommend that you open with a pattern of broad, general questions. This will allow the interviewee to answer with content they might have already prepped, and that they feel is important. Essentially, all interviewees will come with a number of key points they want to make. Allow them the space to make these. Indeed, you might want to expand on them or extrapolate further. Either way, it is important for your candidate to make these points.

- **Once the candidate has settled a little, move into more focused specifics**

Once you have heard the information the candidate has prepped to share with you in the broad questions, you can start to focus on specifics. The interviewee will be more relaxed because they have said the key points they wanted to, and this will help them to answer your more specific questions with more confidence.

- **Finish on the closed “yes/no” questions**

A closed question, or one you can answer with a single word, isn't great for earlier on in the interview. However, this isn't to say they don't have any place in the interview. As they can somewhat close the natural flow of conversation anyway, we recommend leaving them until the end to wrap things up.

There's no denying it. Lots can go wrong with interviews. From overcoming bias, managing small talk correctly, making the candidate feel comfortable and being confident in your non-emotional assessment – SocialTalent can help.

Find out more about our extensive interviewer training today.

How to conduct video interviews

We can't talk about what's changed in the world of interviewing without shouting about video loudly from the rooftops. The use of video interviewing has snowballed. While remote interviewing became a temporary necessity in 2020, there's no denying that employers are also seeing the long term benefits of adopting these tools permanently.

The scalable solution: On-demand video interviews

All tech, in its broadest sense, should enable us to be more effective at our jobs. Video is no exception. One increasingly popular type of remote interviewing is on-demand interviewing, which lets candidates record their interview answers at a time that suits them. You can still control the questions and give a deadline for the answers to be submitted, but it frees both the interviewer and interviewee from any sort of calendar restriction.

This simplification is extremely scalable and time-effective. As a recruiter, you can interview a larger number of candidates in a shorter period of time, removing the bottlenecks of availability and business hours operation.

By allowing the candidate a certain degree of autonomy to conduct their interview, it removes some of the pressure and improves the candidate experience. For employers, it speeds up the hiring process, which hopefully increases the likelihood of filling the position faster.



Considerations for video interviews

1. Properly prep the candidate

It's important to do this for every interview, but especially the case for video. Let the candidate know what software you will be using, and provide information on where to download it. Why not go the extra mile and send them helpful tips for lighting, sound and background best practices?

2. Prep yourself

Although you might be conducting the interview from home, you are still representing the company. Make sure you dress the part, that you're familiar with the software, that your backdrop is appropriate and that you behave professionally.

3. Take time to chat to the candidate and calm them

While video is as close to the real thing as possible, let's not forget – it isn't the same. As an interviewer, any pre-amble or office tour has now been removed. In real life, this serves

to help calm the candidate and also give an opportunity to show your office culture. With video interviews, it's very tempting to jump straight into the questions, but take time to settle your candidate first.

4. As the interviewer, you should guide the interview

More than ever this is the case. Most video calls are very conversational in tone, which isn't a bad thing. However, it is important for you to control the flow and direction of the interview. A good practice is to open the call with a brief agenda so the interviewee knows the structure to expect from the start. This will help both of you stay on track.

[Check out this blog for more tips to help you get video interviews right](#)

Interviews are crucial to the hiring process. And yet, it's very common for those conducting them to “learn on the job”. This leaves you open to common pitfalls like emotional hiring, illegal questioning and lack of structure.

With SocialTalent, we have extensive training to help you educate your hiring team with all the best practices to make your interviews more effective and successful.



2

Onboarding

Onboarding is a hugely important part of welcoming anyone new to your team. First days traditionally are a whirlwind of tech set-up, meeting the team, sorting out your desk and most crucially, finding out where the biscuits are kept.

More seriously, the data surrounding effective employee onboarding show that it can increase employee performance by up to 11%, increase discretionary effort by more than 30% and that employees are 58% more likely to be at the company three years later if they complete a structured onboarding process. Long story short, it's worth getting right.

Eight easy steps to successful remote onboarding

But what happens when you're onboarding a remote worker? How do you make them feel welcome and part of the team? Here's eight tips to make sure your remote workers are ready, able, and excited to start working with you.

1. Set expectations during the recruitment process

A good onboarding starts during the recruitment process. This is especially true for remote workers.

If you're onboarding a remote worker, you'll know before their first day that this will be the case. Whether you're recruiting for a specifically remote role, or the candidate has requested to work remotely, it's important that expectations are set during the interview process. Be aware of the common struggles of remote workers. Managing workloads, ill-defined hours of work, and lack of accountability perpetuate remote workers' negative feedback.

Burn-out, over-working and confusion is not the expectation you want to set. Be transparent about workload, hours of work, and the metrics for success for their role. Defining these at this early stage will help you avoid misinterpretation or conflict further down the line.

Extra tip: Bear in mind that when your candidate does not come in-house for the interview, they are exposed to much less of your culture, instead relying 100% on what is online. Make sure your website, especially the "Careers" and "About us" pages, are up-to-date and sending out the right message about your culture.

2. Have a remote worker-specific checklist

Before their first day, you should take some time to create an onboarding checklist. There's a good chance you have something like this in existence already.

Some points will remain the same, others won't be relevant, and some new ones will have to be created especially for a remote worker. You want them to feel comfortable and able to do their work as soon as possible, so think about what tools they will need. Consider your tech stack – who needs to set your employee up on what platforms? Be as detailed as possible. If your office manager, or the employee themselves are responsible for fulfilling a checkpoint, they should know exactly what they need to do. Being clear about this from the start means your employee will be quickly ready to work.

3. Send a welcome pack

Speaking of tools – sending things over in advance may be required. While some things, like your company handbook, offer letter and contract, can be sent digitally, some things need a little bit of advanced planning. This is a great opportunity to also send a welcome package in the mail. This can include necessary equipment, training schedules, and style guides, but also some fun things to get them excited about working for you. T-shirts, mugs, pens and any other swag which says “Welcome – you’re part of the team!”

4. Introduce the team

Helping your employee meet their colleagues is easy when they’re in the office. Sure, they might forget some names for the first few days, but nothing beats a friendly, in-person introduction. This definitely is a little trickier with remote workers, but don’t let that be a reason to neglect doing it. Getting to know colleagues and putting “faces to names” early on will help alleviate feelings of isolation, nervousness about reaching out to people, and fast-tracking their assimilation of the company’s culture.

Set up video calls with the team

With no opportunity to casually introduce co-workers throughout the day in the office, you’ll need to get strategic. Think about your new employee’s role. Who are they most likely going to work with? Which people will they need to know? Who is a great representative of your company culture? Beyond obvious

meetings with appropriate management, HR and IT, help your new employee build the relationships that will add to their job performance and satisfaction. As you might set up in-house coffee meetings for in-house employees, set up short video introductions for them with these selected people. Make sure that both parties use video as well – seeing faces is more powerful and bonding for the remote employee. It’s unlikely that they will meet everyone on their first day, but these key introductions will help them feel more comfortable in their first week or so.

Invite to team meetings

While it’s easy to quickly call a team meeting in the office, don’t forget to include your remote workers. This will not only help remote workers keep on top of projects as decisions are made in live time, but it will also give them an opportunity to contribute. This is important not only for their expertise and opinion to add to the fuller picture, but also to experience the camaraderie of working on problems as a team.

5. Ask what works for them

We’ve so far spoken at length about setting boundaries and expectations from your perspective. However, take the time to ask questions about preferences for things you are prepared to be flexible on. Hearing how your new employee would prefer to hear feedback, take meetings, or be issued tasks. Taking the time to hear their thoughts gives them confidence that you are prepared to listen to them and that you’re considering their specific needs. Why not create a “How I Work” document and ask your new employee to fill it out?

6. Create a regular feedback loop

Following on from the previous point – it's also a good idea to set up a meeting to revisit their working preferences further down the line. Things can change! In these early months, it's easier for you to ask if they are still happy with their set-up than for them to tell you.

The informal feedback that your in-house team gives you – in the kitchen, in-between meetings or dropping by your desk – is much easier to come by. Remember your remote team does not have that luxury. If you're not hearing regular feedback, you're missing out on opportunities to not only make your employees feel heard and looked after, but also achieve their full potential. Set up a regular process for this with your remote employees – whether it needs to be a daily stand up, or in your one-to-ones. Make sure they know where and when they can give you feedback.

7. Individual Development Plan (IDP) and OKRs

Everyone works better when the metrics of their success are clearly defined. After all, if you know where you need to go, it's easier to get there! We recommend after the initial settling period, taking some time to go over

your employee's individual OKRs and the KPIs they can demonstrate as they work towards them. While this can be agreed between the two of you, this should be very much coming from you and the business.

On the other hand, ask your employee to take the lead with their growth and fill out an Individual Development Plan. It's a great way for them to tell you what their more specific career goals are. This is a directive which they set the tone and expectations around. That said, it's important that you listen to them and help them strategise actions to move them towards their goals. Taking the time to understand what motivates your employees not only helps them achieve their personal goals, but helps you be a better manager.

8. Refine the process

While we're confident these tips should help you on your way to successfully onboarding a remote worker, this is always going to be a process which can be tweaked and improved. Three, six months down the line – why not ask your remote employee what worked and what didn't? What helped them settle in, and what could have been done better? Being open to feedback means you're always improving and bettering the process. It also shows that you respect the opinion of your employee and are actively trying to improve things for all remote workers.



3

Managing remote talent

Four steps to successful communication

Communication is at the heart of successfully managing remote teams. Regular human interaction can be easy to take for granted, until you don't have an office full of people to chat to, laugh with and be around every day. Isolation is a huge problem for remote workers, and can lead to deterioration in both mental and physical health. Here's how to stop that from happening to your team.

1. Daily team communication

Set up daily team communication. At SocialTalent, we have morning and end of day stand-ups with our teams via Zoom, where we discuss the goals of the team and individuals. These are 15-20 minutes long, and participants are asked to come prepared with their topics to talk about. This strict time structure keeps the content relevant. The “bookmarking” approach of saying what you'll achieve at the start of the day and then reporting back in at the end of the day builds accountability and transparency. Culture is important here – we work hard to make sure that struggles, blockages and failures are talked about easily, so that we can, as a team, solve them.

During the day, each team regularly catches up and communicates on Slack, Google Hangouts and Zoom. This means isolation is stripped back as far as possible, with a focus on collaboration still in operation as much as it would be in the office.

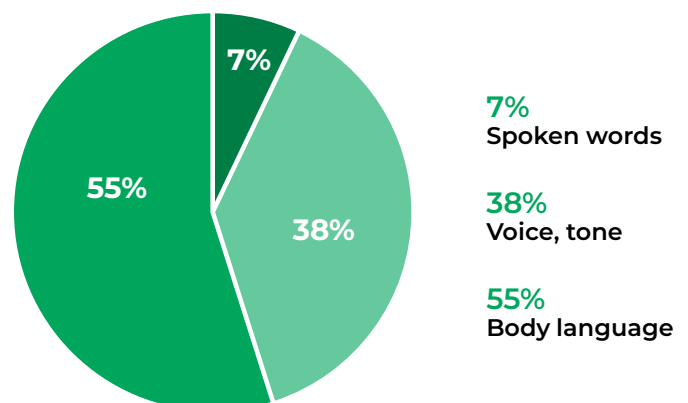
Remote communication with your team might feel like a poor substitute for the in-office chats and banter. But trust us, it's like riding a bicycle. The more you do it, the easier it'll become. As a team leader, focus on taking the lead here – set up the calls. Keep them on track and encourage contributions from all your team members. If a Slack conversation becomes extended, suggest a quick call.

2. Use video conferencing when you can

Messaging services like Slack are great, but nothing is as effective as communicating tone and intention as video conferencing. This is hardly surprising when you consider that 93% of all communication is non-verbal – relying on tone, body language, facial expressions and voice. Check out [this blog](#) for the best tech tips when working from home.

Dr. Albert Mehrabian's 7-38-55% rule

Elements of personal communication



3. Individual communication should still be a priority for managers

Even with the best practices in place, it's still easy for individuals to feel isolated. A team is only as good as its component people so it's crucial to check-in on individuals. Remember, you no longer have all those quick moments in the office to build rapport and chat in the kitchen or over a coffee. Have more regular one to ones, and make them longer. We recommend a full hour once a week. Many managers have different approaches to how they conduct their one to ones – whether it's largely pastoral or professional, structured or informal – but when with a remote team, we recommend adding structure and coming with questions ready.

4. Be clear about when you're available

Be available – make sure that your team knows how and when they can contact you. It's easy in an office to see when someone is in a meeting or busy – but remotely, that isn't so simple. Make sure your calendar is accurate and visible and that all team members know how they can contact you in an emergency.

93% of all communication is non-verbal



Four steps to creating structure, setting expectations and establishing processes

The second key component of effectively managing a remotely working team is to focus on structure, expectations and processes.

If you're working with an office team which is now working from home, it's important to remember that their days have completely

changed. While people with WFH experience know best practices to be effective, others won't.

Interestingly, the majority of people believe they'd be more productive if they had the freedom to work from home. FlexJobs' 6th Annual Work Flex Super Survey found that 76% of employees believe they can get more done remotely due to the frequent distractions from colleagues and general office busyness.

However, the reality for many is that this simply isn't the case. Don't expect that people will just know how to continue at home as they did in the office. A lack of structure means efficiency will go out the window.

Avast's Mobile Workforce Report gives a good oversight of the reported downsides of remote working – and distraction and procrastination top the list.

Why not share these seven tips to get your team thinking about best WFH practices?



1. Processes are your friend

Processes are often regarded as rigid and inflexible enemies to creativity. But when regular structure is lost, processes are there to be leaned on. Good processes let you get work done in the absence of all else, providing structure and direction for getting things done.

Software and tools are brilliant for helping with this. For remote teams, you'll need the right tools to help everyone connect and work together. Slack is a brilliant office communication tool, with available integrations with JIRA, Google, Monday and many more all easily added.

Trello, Monday and JIRA are all great roadmapping tools. All operate with Kanban style boards, where people can quickly and at a glimpse see what the team is working on. If your team has something to do, add it to one of these tools. What's also handy for these team-driven "to-do" lists is that if someone has got bandwidth, they can jump in and complete a task without doubling up on work, or having to ask for more things to do from their manager.

2. Find the easy wins and show trust

Working remotely requires a degree of trust that working in an office does not. Simply being able to see someone in the office adds a wealth of accountability which is removed when someone is working privately, at home.

With the best management plan in the world, it's still very much on the part of the employee to fulfil their role. Micromanaging is rarely the right answer and in this instance will show a lack of trust, which can build resentment. This is the absolute last thing you want.

Instead, think about how you can make remote work easier for your employee. Consider what tasks you give to those on your team. For any office team transitioning to remote work – not even considering the difficulties of childcare, health worries, space to work or any other issues they might have – it's important that they get some early wins.

As far as possible, assign the right tasks to people who can get them done easily to begin with. Small wins at this early stage will ease any private concerns about WFH, make the transition easier and feel more manageable for your team members.

Over time as trust and confidence builds, you can start to address the more difficult jobs. This will also give you time to work out any problems with your remote work management habits, and at that point, you'll have established how to communicate and check in together.



3. Create a culture of trust and accountability

We mentioned earlier to have daily stand ups, both first thing in the morning and then again as the day draws to a close. This is great for communication, but also accountability. Sharing progress is great for reinforcement from the team and also for others to spot areas where they can potentially help. While it isn't a direct correlation (as obstacles to progress will exist either way), sharing their progress can help your team achieve their goals.

An incredibly important part of this depends on the culture that you set up in your team. A team nervous about hitting their targets and afraid to talk about problems for fear of retribution will not participate in this activity honestly, if at all. It's crucial that you, as the leader, make sure they know that you understand that a 100% win rate isn't possible. Make it clear to your team that these check-ins are to help you fulfil your function as manager to help them do their jobs effectively, and achieve their goals.

A great way to set the tone is to be accountable and honest yourself. When you say you are going to do something, do it. While you probably can't communicate every project you are working on with your team, if you can talk about obstacles and how your projects are progressing honestly, they are likely to follow suit.

4. Focus on outcomes, not activity

With many of your team members working from home now, some with little to no preparation to do so, it's important to remember that every set up is unique. Some team members may have space issues, child care to consider or other obstacles to inhibit them from doing their job. Try to bear this in mind when setting up expectations. Flexible working hours may be something you have to consider to help your team hit their goals. Equally, it can be easy to be active on Slack but just have Netflix on in the background. By focusing on outcomes as the ultimate goal, people know clearly what is expected of them, and can work to that.



Five tips for developing the manager-employee relationship remotely

Finally, the key to a successfully managed team of remote workers is compassion and motivation. To have a truly motivated team, you need to not only communicate with them and set clear expectations, but also look after their human needs.

1. Make time for small talk.

We've already recommended coming prepared for meetings and adding extra structure to your days. While we stand firmly by that advice, it is not at the expense of making small talk with your team. When you've a list in front of you and you're talking to a face on a screen, it's easy to rattle through what needs done and get on with business. The casual chats of the office are no more, but don't forget that they too serve a purpose.

Taking the time for small talk in your team stand ups or individual calls shows warmth,

compassion and the human touch which could very easily be the first casualty of remote working. Especially with the COVID-19 crisis, people are worried, uneasy and looking for security. If you can, as a team leader, provide that in some small part, it's a small contribution that your team will thank you for.

Building rapport

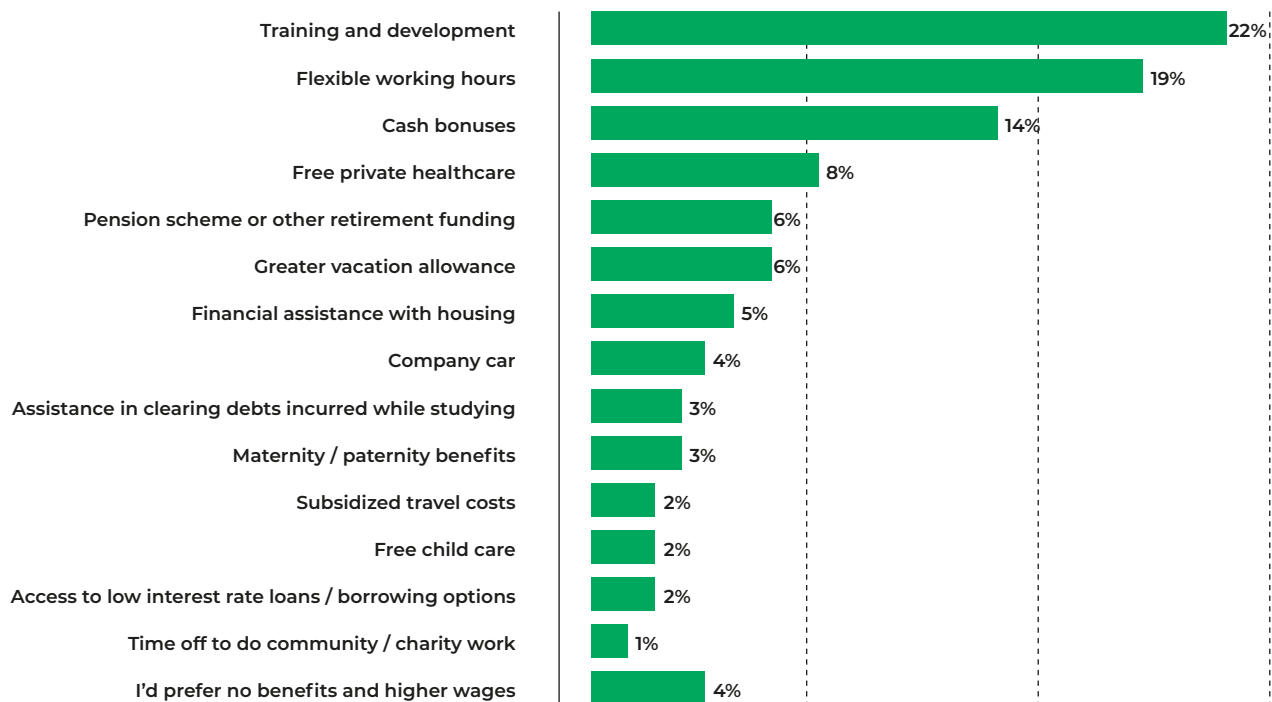
Building rapport with your team, especially in the current climate of uneasiness and worry, is incredibly important for you to do as a manager. Camaraderie, togetherness, and team successes will become increasingly important for people in times of worry. The rapport you have as a team and also individually with your team members will help you problem solve and work through challenges. It also affects how honest your team are with you, whether they will come to you with problems, and how much they will be prepared to go that extra mile – all of which have huge implications for you, your team, and the business.

There's no shortcut to creating rapport with people. Insincerity and duplicitousness can be sniffed out a mile away. If you "care" about your team only in terms of what they can do for you, they will not want to work with you. Being a taskmaster who doesn't care about their struggles, development and personal life is a cold and ineffective way to manage people.

And let us be clear – the hope very much is that as a manager you don't care about your team because you have to. You should want to. It's a more effective way to manage a team, but it's also a better way to lead, and be a part of a team.

Which three benefits would you most value from an employer?

% Ranking each 1st place, global



Mary Meeker's Internet Trends

2. Focus on team and individual development

Time and again, reports (such as Mary Meeker's Internet Trends above) show development is the top item for most employees. Remote workers often feel overlooked when it comes to this, often due to limited interactions with their managers. Don't allow this to happen. Demonstrating that you care is important to your team and essential for you to truly understand their motivations. Everyone has career goals and motivations, and as a manager, you should take the time to understand your team's. Taking the time to do this will also make them like working for you more.

One of the best ways to offer consistent encouragement and motivation for your remote team members is to set up a

Millennials' most valued work benefits

1. Training and development
2. Flexible hours
3. Cash bonuses

development plan with them during your regular one on ones. An Individual Development Plan (IDPs) is a great way to get the individuals on your team to think about what they want to achieve, and then for you to consider how to action it together. Taking the time to do this with your team is a proactive step to demonstrate your efforts to help them grow, development and achieve their goals.

3. Consider mentors and in-house peers

Research by Deloitte found that mentors can be hugely instrumental in retention of staff:

“Those intending to stay with their organization for more than five years are twice as likely to have a mentor (68%) than not (32%).”

Perhaps you can be the mentor, perhaps not. However, once you’ve done your IDPs with the team, you’ll have a better idea of the direction they would like to head. Look in house, or in your network. Who would be best positioned to chat with your team members? It might feel like you’re simply facilitating a new connection, but that could be an extremely rewarding relationship that your team will thank you for.

4. Trust your instincts

For many of you reading this, your office team might have become remote workers as a result of the COVID-19 health crisis. More than ever, you need to check in on the emotional and mental well-being of your team. Remember to ask the human questions, where appropriate, and check that your team is coping. Most importantly, trust your instincts when you see something might be wrong. Ask in a call, or make time to ask about it. Those non-verbal clues you see on video are your opportunity to fix problems when they’re small for your remote employees.

5. Show compassion

These are uncharted waters for many businesses, and indeed, many employees. Show compassion by considering people’s situations. Will one of your team members struggle to keep regular work hours because of carer duties? Suggest flexible hours or other alternatives. Do all your team have the correct technology at home to be effective? Check in with them individually to see how you and the business can best equip them. Do some of your staff have other pressing concerns? Make yourself available and have these important conversations with your team.

“Those intending to stay with their organization for more than five years are twice as likely to have a mentor (68%) than not (32%).”



If you would like to learn more about how SocialTalent can help you and your organization to develop your skills to find, hire, onboard and engage with top talent, contact us today.

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