

Talent Pulse | 2025 Edition #1

Is the Paper Ceiling Holding Your Organization Back?

Why You Might Want To Go Diploma-optional



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Our research shows that

71% of hiring managers still report difficulty finding skilled talent.

From an oversupply of talent to a shortage, something's got to give—and increasingly, that something is the degree requirement.

When you open the gate to those without a 4-year degree, you'll not only bring in more candidates, you'll also cultivate a richer tapestry of ideas and experiences that benefits all parties.

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Employers in many industries are discovering the benefits of dropping the college requirement: manufacturing, non-clinical health care, IT, education, even finance. This should be good news to the 62% of American workers without a college degree. Many of these individuals are already defying the odds, with 1 in 5 high school graduates earning more than \$70,000 a year by the age of 40. This is above the median income of college graduates.

62% of American workers do not have a college degree

Clearly, the talent is out there.

If you're on the fence about making the move, consider the repercussions of leaving a job open for too long.



Gaps in knowledge transfer.

When experienced employees leave, projects tend to slow down or stagnate. Rarely do any of the departing worker's colleagues possess the same level of knowledge, nor do they have sufficient time to take on extra work.



Lowered morale amongst remaining employees.

Those called on to fill in for a departing colleague may be overtaxed, which is likely to affect morale over time.



Inability to reach company goals.

Unfinished projects can quickly translate to missed goals and, potentially, a decline in production or profitability.



Escalating costs.

A prolonged talent search means that recruiting costs keep piling up.

The Benefits Are Real

Waiving the degree requirement isn't practical in all instances, of course, but in many cases, a degree should be treated as a "nice to have" instead of a requirement.

Cultivating a wider variety of candidates will provide benefits you may not have anticipated:



Real-world experience

A candidate who's been on the job for a while instead of in a classroom may be more likely to hit the ground running.



Fine-tuned skills

Many workers without college degrees may possess certifications that closely align with the job they'll be doing.



Diverse viewpoints

Building a team of workers from different walks of life and experience sets sparks true innovation.



What to Look For

1. Equivalent work experience

Many individuals gain valuable skills and knowledge through hands-on experience in their fields. This practical expertise can often surpass what is learned in a traditional classroom setting. Employers should recognize and value this experience as it directly translates to job performance.

2. Associate degrees and certifications

Community colleges and vocational schools offer associate degrees and certifications that are highly relevant to specific industries. These programs are often more focused and practical, providing students with the skills they need to excel in their chosen fields.

3. Academic accomplishments and volunteering

Academic achievements outside of a 4-year degree, such as specialized courses or extracurricular activities, can be indicative of a candidate's capabilities. Extracurricular or volunteer work can be a great showcase for tech skills or leadership abilities.

4. Soft skills

Skills like communication, teamwork, adaptability, and problem-solving are key indicators of adaptability and learning readiness. Some candidates may feature these skills on their resumes, but others can be explored during the hiring process.

5. Military experience

Veterans bring a wealth of experience, discipline, and leadership skills to the civilian workforce. Their training and real-world experience can be incredibly valuable, and they often possess a strong work ethic and adaptability.



Expect to Reskill

If you do hire someone who doesn't "fit the cookie-cutter mold," you will have to invest in a training or upskilling program. There are scores of free or low-cost options available, either in person or online.

Third-party options: There are many existing online learning programs offered by organizations, businesses and educational institutions. It's quite likely one of these offers the type of training your team needs.

Create your own curriculum: If you don't find a suitable solution from a third-party source, you can create your own program, perhaps leveraging some online courses and blending them with workshops and hands-on learning. Ensure the content is up-to-date and aligned with industry standards.

Whichever route you choose, make sure that your program aligns with business objectives, and is flexible enough to meet the needs of all learners. One effective approach is micro-learning, where units are broken down into easily digestible chunks.

MyPath[®]

Our associates have access to hundreds of online learning options through our [MyPath](#) program. MyPath encompasses everything from assessments to coaching and guidance to certifications, GEDs and even college degrees. Providing these opportunities not only helps our workers, it has helped our clients improve talent attraction and retention.

For a more detailed example of an upskilling program specifically for the manufacturing sector, read [8 Steps to Building Your Own Skilled Technical Workforce](#).

College Grads Still Needed

The long-term outlook still favors college grads over non-college grads, with [overall expected lifetime earnings](#) growing with each step on the educational ladder. However, there are some very notable exceptions—including Bill Gates and Steve Jobs. Both of these uber-successful men dropped out of college, never to return.

The tech industry, in particular, seems receptive to alternative educational backgrounds. For example, [Fortune's Future 50 list](#) highlights innovative companies poised for long-term growth despite global challenges. A full 10% of the CEOs on this list did not graduate college, signaling that technical expertise and visionary leadership often outweigh formal education.



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A Final Thought

About the only downside to dropping the degree requirement is the likelihood you'll receive many more applicants. But in a talent shortage, is this really a disadvantage?

For a shortcut to a pipeline of qualified talent, find out [what Manpower can do for you](#).

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