

Maurice Fuller

Hi everyone. I'm Maurice Fuller and thanks for joining us. Today I'm with Amy Bingham with Bingham Consulting, and we'll be covering many topics, including growing your staffing firm, developing the next generation of staffing leaders, and what's ahead in the staffing industry. Amy, welcome and thanks for joining me today.

Amy Bingham

Thanks for having me.

MF

So you've been in the staffing industry a long time. Tell us about your background and the work that you do as a consultant and advisor to the staffing industry.

AB

Well, it's been a twenty-eight year run—a long time now. I've spent the last fifteen consulting to primarily small to midsize firms helping owners to build value in their firms, prepare an event for eventual sale, or do a hand down to one of the children. A lot of my work is in operations, sales effectiveness, and recruiting effectiveness. I also have a leadership development program that I launched last year that is in dire need right now, because the next generation of leaders is really here in staffing.

MF

And we'll be talking about that more in a little bit. In your work consulting with staffing leaders over the last fifteen years, what are some of the greatest constraints that you're seeing to growing a staffing firm today?

AB

There's a number of things I see when I do a kind of look under the hood, but I guess there are three things that jump out. The first would be what I call the culture of nice. The owner is running a culture of nice: we're all happy here, one big happy bunch. "We're like family," that's all good, but nobody's holding anybody accountable to any results. There's no metrics management. There's no cadence of one on ones, coaching, talent development, etc. that's going to move the needle in terms of numbers. That's point one.

The second would be lack of standardization. So visualize somebody that has a recruiting pool of ten people. They're all doing things their own way. That creates inefficiency, which hinders our speed to market with a candidate. We do a lot of work in SOP development of recruiting and sales processes. That is outside of the ATS. That's not the ATS. That's how we do things here artfully at our firm the same way, which will create more effectiveness and efficiency.

And then the third would be not embracing technology. I got a number of calls this year from firms that are still operating in the dark ages, and they know it, and they know it's

constraining growth. It's made them very uncomfortable, and they're looking for immediate help. Those are the top three.

MF

Let's talk about achieving revenue growth. A key part of your practice is growth planning. What should staffing leaders be doing throughout the year to ensure that they realize their growth objectives for the year?

AB

Great question. When it comes to strategic planning, I'm more about simplicity. I have a theory that your average owner or an executive of a staffing firm doesn't have a lot of patience for waiting through a twenty five page strategic plan and trying to make that happen. Rather, what I recommend people do is absolutely put together a three to five year view of where you want to take the business. Then, year by year, try to tackle two or three key initiatives that are relevant and that are potential high return on investment—no more than three. For example, if you're overhauling a website, that's a huge project. If you're turning on a candidate's artificial intelligence, that's a huge project. If you're altering your workflow, your tech stack, that's a huge project. Focus on key initiatives.

But then most importantly, since seventy percent of strategy is never executed according to HBR (Harvard Business Review), I'm really about putting the execution plan together. I like to coach my clients to use project management for that, so the traditional: what are the tasks that are associated with the key initiative, who's going to own it, what are we going to do by when, what are the milestones and the deadlines and so forth. Then revisit that on a monthly basis with status and calls. That's how you've ensured that what you wanted to have happen will happen. Otherwise people go back to their day jobs, and these key initiatives just kind of fall apart.

MF

Those initiatives are so important to the future success of the business, especially as staffing firms are going through digital transformation. Earlier you mentioned leadership development and your leadership development program. Tell us about this training program that you've developed and run for preparing the next generation of staffing leaders.

AB

So a few years back I was getting a lot of calls from owners with the same kind of conversation, which was "I have somebody identified that's high potential, that could be me when I'm not here, but he or she is not ready." So like any good consultant, I see an opportunity. I have staffing leadership expertise, so I've put together a program for one on one coaching, and I named it the Millennial Mentors Program. It was a one on one model for a couple of years and very effective. They would go through a one year

program and they would actually graduate. We would work through my vital nine staffing industry disciplines for effective leadership, and that worked well.

The next iteration of that though I launched this year, and that was to peel away three of those vital nine—leading people, leading process, and leading results—three of the biggies, and formed a group program. I now have an open enrollment quarterly group program that's open to anybody. I have owners and executives in the class. I have brand new recruiting managers in the class. All staffing verticals all over the US. It's interesting what they learned not just from me but from each other on a one hour zoom call every week. There's a training session where I'm imparting some kind of wisdom around the topic. Then there is a debrief on what they did last week with what they learned last week, and then they're learning something new. So it follows the same cadence every week. It's just enough, I think. People don't have time for half day and full day leadership sessions and usually what they learn in a half or full day is going to be lost anyway. I'm about experiential learning: teach them something, then have them go do it. Come back the following week, debrief that, teach them something else, have them go do it. I am having a lot of fun with that.

MF

Yeah, I'm so glad that you're doing it. I like that approach of time space learning where they learn some new concepts and then they can implement it and come back the next week and learn some more.

AB

In soundbites. Yeah, I've learned that's the way to go.

MF

Absolutely. Let's talk a bit about digital transformation. Digital transformation is accelerating across all industries, especially in the staffing industry. Staffing firms that are not investing in technology are definitely losing ground. How are you advising leaders on technology these days?

AB

The conversation around technology has really become very urgent for me with my customers. It's one of the first things we're talking about when I'm asking them to tell me about their operation. I want to know how automated it is, how they're using AI, if they're using AI, if they're using programmatic advertising. Then I usually will send them somebody's tool that aggregates all the recruiting technologies. ASA has one for example that you frankly need a magnifying glass to actually read. There is so much noise in the industry that I can see where it would overwhelm an owner, and they really need help with that.

The digital transformation is here. It's not coming. It's here. My message to my customer is that technology is not a nice to have anymore, it's a have to have. The closer you can

get for example to one click apply, the better. Studies show abandon rates—if we're asking candidates too many questions in the early stage of the process, they'll abandon the application. Then on the back end we need to automate the recruiting and retention piece and redeployment of talent that we've already brought in the door so they don't go to work somewhere else. Creating a lot of efficiency is essential. It's also essential for speed to market.

MF

Speed. Yes, this industry is all about speed. Let's talk a bit about leadership development. What are some of the things that staffing leaders should be doing to prepare their teams for digital transformation and the significant changes ahead in the remainder of this decade?

AB

What I recommend people do is first get educated. Maybe it starts with working with someone like yourself, right, with a look under the hood of the tech stack and helping a client understand what it should look like now to enable speed and quality. I think they need to understand that if they're not tech people, and many many of my clients aren't and grew up as recruiters or salespeople and just aren't oriented that way, if they don't have that expertise then they need to find someone on their team that does embrace that. Someone who can get educated and share that education with everybody else. An example is vet suppliers. For a particular technology we want to turn on—let's say it's a texting platform—someone's got to look at demos. Some one has to look at the features and benefits. That shouldn't be the senior executive. It should be someone that works for that individual. So get educated and leverage the resources that are available, like consultants and internal expertise like I mentioned. Then the third would be, and I've seen this happen a lot this year, don't implement so many technologies. Don't be oversold. The more you implement the more change you're creating for your team, and people resist change anyway, it's human nature. So then you have an adoption problem and you've spent a lot of money on a tool that isn't being used. Pick and choose selectively what you're going to implement when.

MF

Yes, lots of great advice right there. You mentioned programmatic earlier. Let's talk about digital marketing. How is digital marketing changing the way that staffing firms are going to market.

AB

My clients who have turned that on, who have invested in programmatic advertising, are getting *far* more candidate flow of better qualified people because of that very specific targeted advertising. They're filling the candidate funnel in particular markedly more after they turn it on. Of course those candidates have to be vetted and touched by somebody. But half the battle today is just getting people to scrape and getting people interested enough to apply and click on the job posting and want to know more. So I think it's been

wildly successful early stage, and I don't have any specific data on that, but I'm sure there are others that are smarter than me that do.

MF

Yeah, it's a game changer in our industry, and the amount of expertise that we need now around digital marketing is really quite significant. I wanted to talk about another topic: you're active in ASA's Women in Leadership Council. What are some of the key topics that the Council is currently addressing?

AB

I've had a really nice run. I've been on the council for two years, and this is my third year. This was started in a very grassroots way by a director, Diana Mertz at ASA, and she just saw an opportunity to provide some care and feeding for staffing industry women who were leaders. That was a couple years ago, and now this thing has grown. We've got a council of thirty executives from all over the industry, all verticals, very talented women. We have a quarterly call and we have key initiatives that certain task forces are responsible for making things happen, like webinars, programs at Staffing World, and an event called Thrive which is a pre-conference event at Staffing World.

The objectives that we focused on a lot this year was diversity and inclusion. It was a big big big topic for the council as well as for everybody really in the world. We also raise the conversation of topics that don't come up that have previously been taboo, like how do I ensure as a female leader in the staffing industry that I'm being paid fairly and equitably as compared to my male peer? We know that women sadly still make eighty two cents on the dollar to what a man makes. That has been surveyed in the staffing industry as well, and we fall right in line with that national average: eighty two cents to the dollar. There's a lot the women can control themselves relative to how they're paid. We do a lot of training and coaching around how to ask for more money and how to justify that. There's confidence, assertion, and soft skills that are required that the average, and I'm generalizing obviously, but the average male leader unabashedly has. He will sit down in front of his boss and say here's why I think I deserve a raise, and six months into the job he's asking for a raise and making no qualms about it.

Females, studies show, are reluctant whether it's fear of conflict or confidence, whatever it may be. So we focus on what the female leaders can control. We're also involving men in the conversation. Diversity inclusion, the gender pay gap, and retaining female leaders has been big. Post pandemic, 1 in 3 women were looking to leave their jobs. Women disproportionately left the workforce as compared to men; 1 point 8 million women left just since the pandemic. When you're stripping away female leaders in that number, we've got to lower them back. We have to retain them and provide this care and feeding, and there's no better people to do that than female industry executives—and men, too, mentoring them. We focus a lot on mentoring, and ASA has a mentoring program for that.

MF

Alright, that's fantastic. It sounds like the council is doing really great work, and these are such important topics to focus on. We need to bring great people and retain the best people within our industry in order to be effective and be successful. I really appreciate this conversation. Amy, it's been really great to talk to you about these topics. This has been a great discussion.

AB

Thanks, Maurice.

MF

Thanks for listening, everyone. I look forward to seeing you on the next Staffing Technology podcast.