

The New Science of Hiring: 7 Strategies

By James A. Martin



Faced with a labor market that shifted nearly overnight from **historically low unemployment to record-breaking high unemployment**, talent acquisition and human resource leaders have scrambled to adapt in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak. And while there's no end in sight to the pandemic, one thing is certain: Business as we know it can't be recovered, as [The Wall Street Journal](#) recently noted; it must be reinvented.

At the same time, the world's heightened awareness of the **Black Lives Matter movement** has added more urgency to mandates for change. This, then, is the ideal moment to take the lessons learned from the past few chaotic months and transform your hiring strategies.

In this ebook, you'll learn why now — despite gloomy economic indicators — is an ideal time for employers to hire great talent; why you should consider looking for talent beyond your traditional geographic boundaries; and how virtual hiring can help diversify your hiring. You'll also come away with strategies for narrowing the candidate pool when faced with an overwhelming volume of applicants.

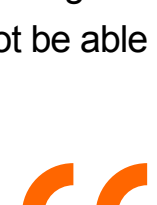
And above all, with the seven strategies that follow, you'll learn how to build a solid foundation for hiring today that will see you through tomorrow's challenges.

STRATEGY #1

Make transformation part of your job

For TA and HR leaders, transformation is always part of the job, says William Tincup, president of [RecruitingDaily](#). "It's not a to-do item you can cross off the list, because the conversations about transformation should never end."

Many organizations avoid transformations because they're so difficult, Tincup adds. The pandemic and BLM movement have forced many employers to reconsider their hiring strategies and make difficult decisions they needed to make anyway — but probably wouldn't have attempted without those motivators. And that's the upside of the recent crises. "Rarely, if ever, are talent acquisition teams given a chance to go out and build something from scratch," he says. "There's no telling how soon things will turn around, so this is a 'use it or lose it' moment. Go carpe diem it."

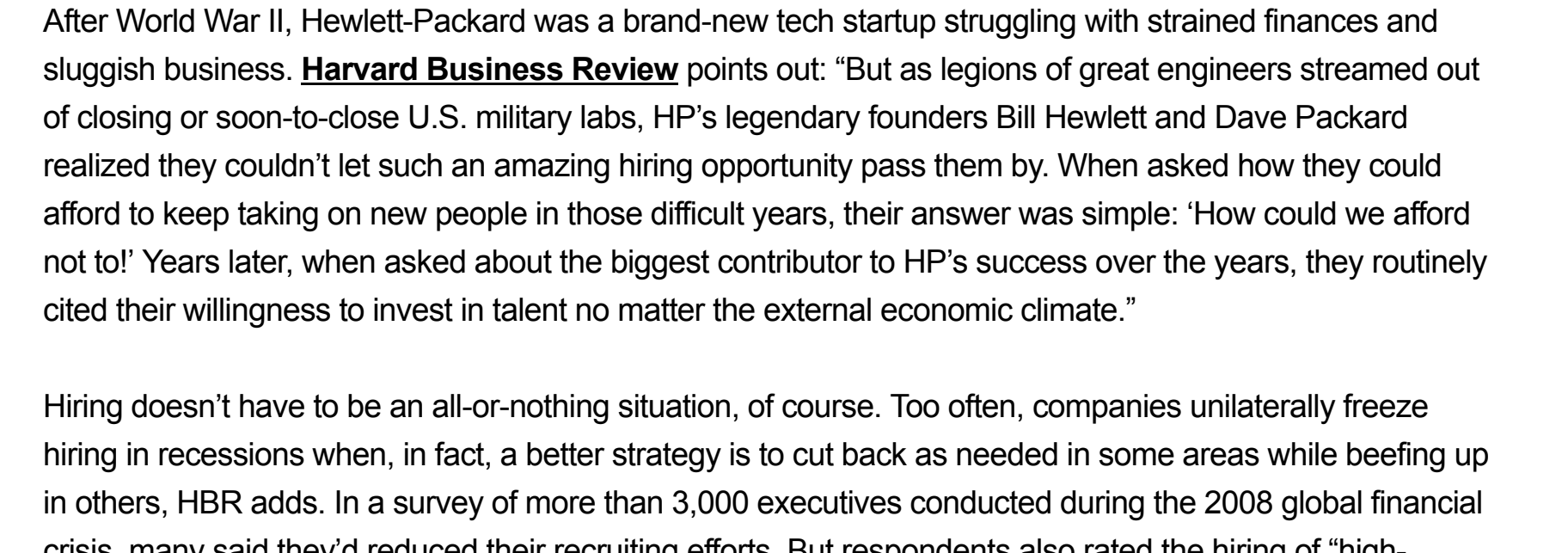


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STRATEGY #2

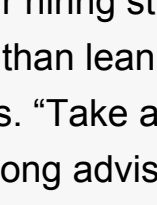
Take advantage of the recession to hire great talent



In the wake of COVID-19, plenty of companies paused hiring or reduced headcount through layoffs and furloughs. But some HR and TA professionals say they're hiring as usual — now, often virtually — or have increased hiring, according to a [recent Indeed poll](#).

In recent months, a number of companies have been hiring on a large scale, especially those needing essential workers, such as [CVS Health](#) (which recently posted 50,000 jobs) and [Albertsons](#) (30,000).

For any company, an economic downturn is a great time to hire — with the caveat that you have the fiscal resources to do so, notes [José Cong](#), an independent TA advisor who previously held lead recruiting positions at Google and Apple. "In a downturn, there's usually a great deal of amazing talent available that you might not be able to hire otherwise," he says.



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Cong uses Apple as an example. The [first iPod](#) was released on October 23, 2001; during those early days, the economy was still recovering from terrorist attacks in the U.S. "Despite the downturn, Apple moved aggressively to hire developer and engineering talent," Cong explains. "We weren't sure how long the economy would be in a downward spiral and we realized there were some companies that weren't in a position to invest in talent, which created an unstable environment for their employees. So, it was a lot easier to recruit great talent at that moment, which helped us stay ahead of the rest of the industry."

Apple, according to Cong, employed the same hiring strategy during the Great Recession of 2007-2009, which coincided with the release of the first iPhone models. "Our strategy was proven effective again," he says, with Apple acquiring top talent to work on the new phone. He admits that Apple's strength as a brand, which grew from a cult-like following to mainstream popularity in the late 1990s, helped attract talent during those downturns. Even so, in a stronger economy, even a brand like Apple would've taken much longer to build top-tier teams because of heated competition from other employers.

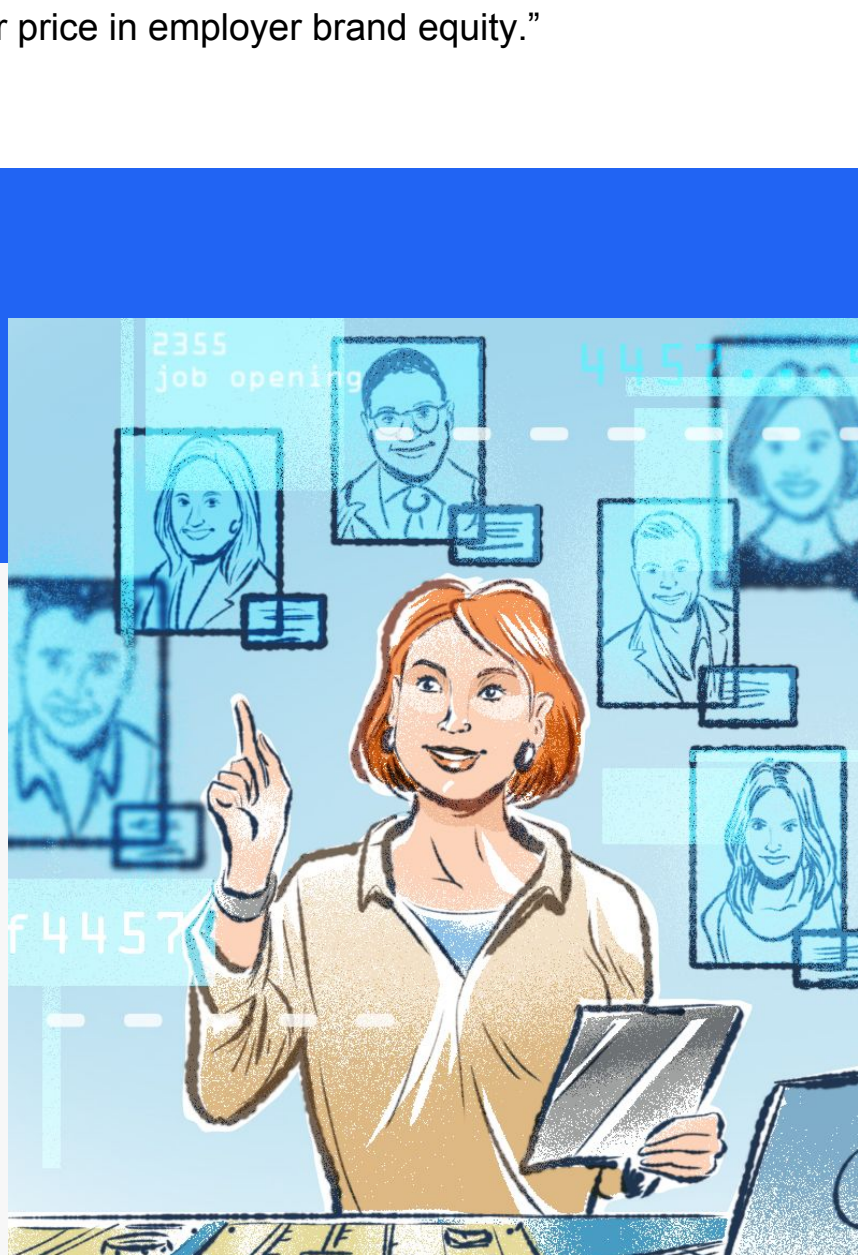
History shows that acquiring great talent during challenging economic times, when funds are tight, can be an effective long-term hiring strategy.

After World War II, Hewlett-Packard was a brand-new tech startup struggling with strained finances and sluggish business. [Harvard Business Review](#) points out: "But as legions of great engineers streamed out of closing or soon-to-close U.S. military labs, HP's legendary founders Bill Hewlett and Dave Packard realized they couldn't let such an amazing hiring opportunity pass them by. When asked how they could afford to keep taking on new people in those difficult years, their answer was simple: 'How could we afford not to?' Years later, when asked about the biggest contributor to HP's success over the years, they routinely cited their willingness to invest in talent no matter the external economic climate."

Hiring doesn't have to be an all-or-nothing situation, of course. Too often, companies unilaterally freeze hiring in recessions when, in fact, a better strategy is to cut back as needed in some areas while beefing up in others, HBR adds. In a survey of more than 3,000 executives conducted during the 2008 global financial crisis, many said they'd reduced their recruiting efforts. But respondents also rated the hiring of "high-performing employees from competitors" as one of the most effective responses they'd made — and the one with the biggest impact on employee commitment.

STRATEGY #3

Rethink your hiring strategies using the latest data



Given how much has dramatically changed in recent months and how much is likely to change in the coming year, it's more important than ever to build your hiring strategies based on the latest data rather than lean too heavily on past experiences. "Take a step back, pause and analyze," Cong advises. "Look at all the available economic data and forecasts about your specific industry and about your competitors as you develop your hiring strategies."

Some options for obtaining updated U.S. economic data include [The Wall Street Journal's Economic Indicators](#), [the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) and [Indeed's Hiring Lab](#), which uses Indeed's proprietary data and publicly available information to provide labor market insights that are often quoted in media around the world. For global markets, check the [Federal Reserve Bank of New York's economic indicators](#), Bloomberg's [12 Global Economic Indicators to Watch](#) and [The Global Economy.com](#), among others.

To maximize your hiring efforts' return on investment, use data to assess the strengths and weaknesses of those companies where your recruiters wish to seek out talent, Cong adds. "Passive candidates who are working for stable companies will be more difficult to attract now than they were just a few months ago," he explains, especially if your organization has had layoffs or furloughs or otherwise appears to be financially unstable.

STRATEGY #4

Update your employer branding to reflect the new realities

Building and nurturing a compelling **employer brand** is always important for attracting top talent. But it's particularly critical now, as a strong employer brand might help attract passive candidates who would otherwise be reluctant to leave the security of a job with a stable employer.

"Your employer brand is even more important because your character is revealed in challenging times," says [Bryan Chaney](#), Indeed's Director of Employer Brand, Talent Attraction. "Job seekers want to know how you're taking care of your employees and empowering them to be successful, especially now."



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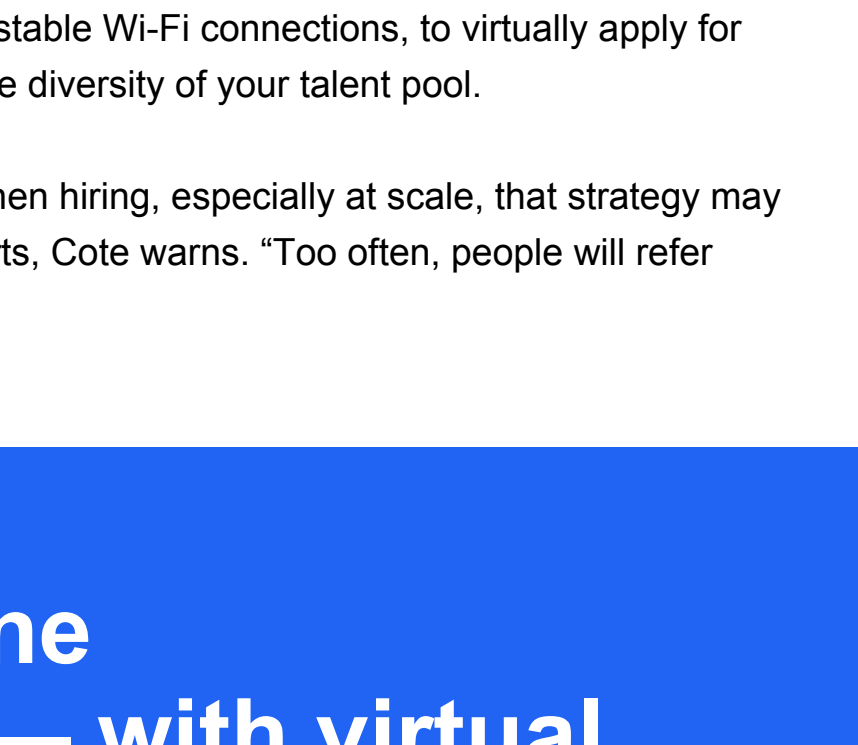
Bryan Chaney
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Employers should also realize that future candidates may ask about your organization's response to the Black Lives Matter movement. Cong says. He adds that a potential employer's stance on social issues, such as BLM and #MeToo, will make a particularly big difference to [Generation Z](#), which is joining the workforce in significant numbers.

"Gen Z wants corporate America to do a better job saving the world," says Jeffery TD Wallace, CEO of [LeadersUp](#), in a recent article on [Lead with Indeed, a new content and resource hub for hiring professionals](#). "That sentiment is going to pay a higher price in employer brand equity."

STRATEGY #5

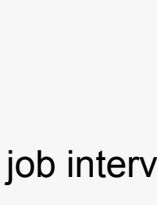
Look for talent everywhere



COVID-19 propelled a rapid surge in white-collar professionals working from home, many for the first time. During the early phase of the pandemic, the percentage of people working remotely in the U.S. jumped from 31% to 62% in just three weeks, according to [Gallup](#). By June of 2020, an [Indeed poll](#) found that one-third of companies have transitioned their employees to remote work. And some businesses — especially large tech employers, such as [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Square](#) — are now giving many employees the option to work from home indefinitely.

The shift to a largely remote workforce offers the potential to dramatically expand your labor pool and hire talent independent of geographic limitations, says [Dr. Timothy Golden](#), a professor of management at [Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute](#) who has studied remote work for over 20 years.

For example, Dr. Golden explains, if your company is located in an expensive metro such as the San Francisco Bay Area, your revised hiring strategy might include searching for talent in more affordable locations, such as Boulder, Colorado or Tucson, Arizona — provided those roles can be performed remotely. As a result, your organization could save money, as talent in the Bay Area tends to be much more expensive due to the high cost of living. "Removing geographical limitations will have the net effect of helping you increase the ethnic and racial diversity of your organization," he adds.

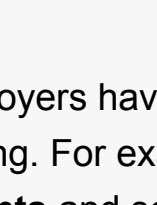


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Also, there are plenty of potential candidates who may not want to live in a large metro area. Workers are leaving big cities behind for a variety of reasons: to reduce their cost of living, get away from crowded areas where infection rates are high and live closer to family members. A [recent survey of 4,400 tech workers](#) found that two thirds of employees would leave the Bay Area if they could work remotely, with some opting for nearby lower-cost, more tranquil places, such as [Lake Tahoe, California](#).

With geographical restrictions removed, employers are free to rethink their hiring strategies and focus on finding "the right talent at the right time," Dr. Golden says. "That's tremendously important for gaining a competitive advantage. Now you can really home in on the skill set, cultural fit and experience you need, wherever it may exist in the world. This is truly a turning point for the way we hire and the way we work."



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But when you can hire talent anywhere, the challenge is to narrow your search — or else you can quickly get overwhelmed, notes Tracy Cote, Chief People Officer for HR software firm [Zenefits](#). One option is to consider candidates in locations where you already have business operations, she says.

For instance, if your company is headquartered in Austin, Texas, hiring in Galveston (some 200 miles away) should be straightforward. But if you were to hire someone in Arkansas, and your company has no business operations in that state, Cote explains, there are likely to be tax, legal or other potentially burdensome complications to face.

Cote adds that when narrowing your search, keeping an open mind is important. "We just made an offer to a great candidate in Kentucky who was a referral," she says, "even though we don't have any business operations there."

STRATEGY #6

Make remote work and virtual hiring part of your diversity initiatives

TA and HR professionals are generally optimistic that remote work and **virtual hiring** can lead to more inclusive hiring ([Indeed](#)). Remote work can help your organization appeal to people across a broader spectrum of geographies, genders, generations, races and other backgrounds and help minimize **ableism**, while virtual hiring, with its reliance on digital tools, can help recruiters and hiring managers more easily screen, schedule, interview and engage with talent wherever they are.

The financial services industry provides one example of how remote work — and its by-product, flexible hours — can help with diversity. A 2017 study as reported by [The Wall Street Journal](#) found that women in financial services jobs were 24% less likely than men to make their first promotion. The study also found that senior women worried more than men they'd be penalized for requesting flexible hours. However, the 2020 pandemic has forced many financial services firms to shift to remote work and flexible hours, which could, according to the Journal, make the industry more attractive to women.

In the past, the financial sector's long hours haven't been compelling to many graduates. "But as work has moved to the home, (financial services) workers can enjoy more free time," the Journal reports. The net effect of these and other factors could help all types of companies diversify their workforces by appealing to a broader pool of talent.

In the more wake of the recent civil unrest and BLM protests, some companies are sincerely trying to build a more diverse workforce that reflects the world around them. The combination of remote work and virtual hiring can help you proactively attract minority candidates who may live beyond the commuting distance of your organization's offices, Dr. Golden says.

It's worth noting, however, that remote work and virtual hiring can present challenges to diversity hiring initiatives. Some minority candidates may have the necessary skills or experience but not the required financial or technology resources, such as laptops and stable Wi-Fi connections, to virtually apply for jobs or work from home, and that can potentially limit the diversity of your talent pool.

And while it's tempting to lean on employee referrals when hiring, especially at scale, that strategy may not help your organization's diversity and inclusion efforts, Cote warns. "Too often, people will refer candidates who are similar to them," she adds.

STRATEGY #7

Hire at scale — or one candidate at a time — with virtual hiring technologies

Virtual hiring has benefits that go beyond diversity and inclusion and should, therefore, play a key role in your updated hiring strategies.

At the beginning of the pandemic, many employers moved quickly to virtual hiring technologies. A [March 2020 survey](#) of 200 employers found that 78% of companies that were hiring used virtual tools to conduct the process.

Having experienced virtual hiring, it's unlikely most employers will want to return to the old ways of hiring at scale, according to Tincup. "Once you've driven a Ferrari, you don't want to go back to a horse and buggy," he says. Pre-COVID, many recruiters would never have thought to ask for virtual tools because they'd never conducted virtual interviews before. Then the pandemic and remote work forced the issue. "Now that they've used virtual hiring tools, a lot of recruiters don't want to go back to the old ways," he says.

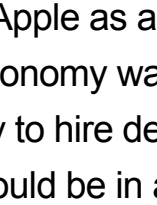


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Conducting job interviews via video conference is much more efficient than in-person interviews, Cote adds. Without the need to travel, candidates can more easily schedule multiple interviews. Recruiters and hiring managers can interview more candidates in less time, speeding up the hiring process and potentially yielding better results. Tools such as virtual job fairs, online assessments and virtual job tryouts can help employers more efficiently handle interviews and candidate screening at scale.

There are other subtle, but powerful, advantages. Virtual hiring levels the playing field between employer and candidate, says [Scott Bonneau](#), Indeed's VP of Global Talent Acquisition. "You can't walk a candidate through your awesome offices or entice them with free lunches. So the conversation shifts to what matters most: the needs you have as an employer, the skills your candidate has, and the interpersonal dynamic between you."



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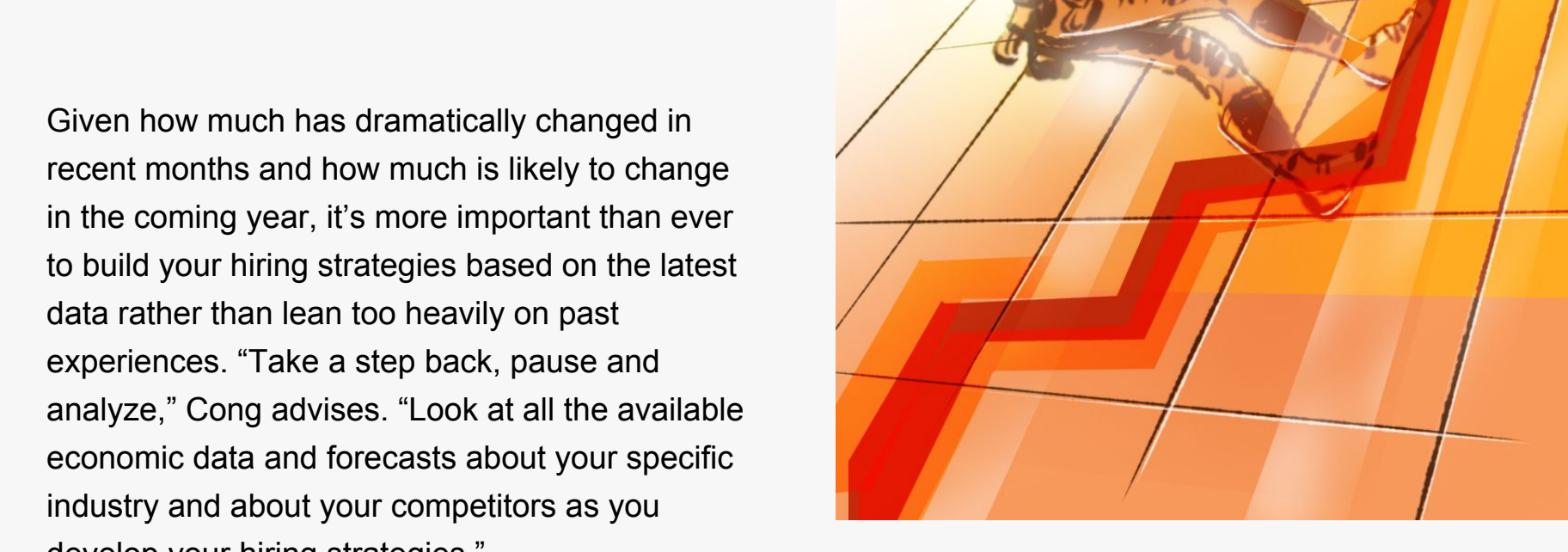
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In virtual interviews, good storytelling is essential. "Because you can't meet in person or walk the candidate around and introduce them to your team, your recruiter and hiring managers need to be able to tell good stories about what it's like to work for your company," Tincup explains. "They need to be as transparent as possible, so the candidate gets a good picture of your company and you get a good picture of the candidate."

Some employers have relied on virtual job fairs, virtual assessments and virtual job tryouts to enable volume hiring. For example, CVS Health conducted more than 200 interviews virtually with [Indeed Hiring Events](#) and set up screener questions to ensure that every candidate met their basic qualifications. In turn, CVS Health was able to efficiently identify and make offers to the most promising talent out of an avalanche and quickly thank all candidates — which improved the all-important **candidate experience**.

Conclusion:

Innovate in the face of uncertainty



For the foreseeable future, we can no longer do many things we used to take for granted — from simple actions, such as shaking a job candidate's hand, to bigger endeavors, like traveling to another city (or country) on business. The world is forcing everyone to make calculated risks. Trying to predict what might happen next and how you should respond, even in the short-term, can feel impossible.

But in reality, unpredictability is always with us. "The future was uncertain before, and it's uncertain now," Tincup says. "You can't control it. The only things you can control are your behaviors and your mindset. The best high-level hiring strategy going forward is to use this time to experiment. Try different things. Tap into new talent pools. Encourage your teams to innovate and don't be afraid to fail."



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"By doing these things, we make ourselves better at dealing with ambiguity. And the future," Tincup adds, "is nothing *but* ambiguity."