We’ve all heard time and time again: An organization is only as strong as the people it employs. What’s your company’s capacity for change? Will you make this your resolution for 2012?

While creating a comprehensive and lasting strategy for managing talent is critical, it’s very difficult to change the way organizations historically address these challenges. Organizations must manage their workforce differently in the new normal to position themselves for growth and recovery.
The following are 10 talent management strategies every organization should consider:

1. **Identify your top 5 percent important functions.** Dig deep within your organization to identify the most critical functions. This doesn’t just include your leaders, but also key roles that affect the bottom line. Many firms likely have a safety stock of key inventory items (e.g., raw materials or finished goods) to handle unexpected swings in pricing or customer demand. However, too few firms build any safety stock of talent into their plans. Those firms that don’t, force their human resources group to scramble to find a new employee to replace a departing employee or whenever a new staffing situation arises. Determine where your organization is most vulnerable and make plans to “emergency-proof” your talent supply.

2. **“Backfill” doesn’t equal recruiting.** Use your corporate growth objectives and three-year project portfolio to define your talent requirements. Those requirements and subsequent “talent gap” derived from existing skills inventories should drive your recruiting strategy. Firms that fill open positions with people who exactly match the job specification are selling their firms short. They are hiring for right now instead of the long term. Build a talent pool that’s as nimble and dynamic as your company.

3. **Understand what motivates your team.** If you don’t already know what motivates your team, ask them. Stop making assumptions that a larger office, corporate cell phone, or casual Friday is the answer. Reach out to individual populations to understand how they can be more effective in their roles, or how your organization can help them address their work-life balance challenges. A short survey could save you and your employees wasted dollars or misaligned expectations.

4. **Give them the keys.** A new workforce is demanding ownership in creating a career path that suits their individual preferences. Both Millennials and people who have struggled during the recession have new expectations. Give this new team a “learning management system” that gives them control over their development plans. Provide on-demand content to feed their desire to improve. Create an internal job marketplace within your organization to provide advancement opportunities.

5. **“Social”-Ize HR now. Prospective employees are social animals.** They participate in social networks. They share job leads and information about employers with each other and the world through their online social presence. If you don’t have a major social presence, get one. If you haven’t monitored and enhanced your organization’s social standing and branding, do it now.

6. **Deliver the numbers. Your business is hungry for usable data.** It’s difficult to manage what you can’t measure. Take four steps toward developing a clear reporting plan.
   - Understand the metrics your organization needs to improve.
   - Determine a source system to record the data required to support the metrics.
   - Select an analytics platform to analyze the data collected.
   - Share the numbers, and allow your organization’s leaders to take action.

7. **Provide a reason to stay.** If you want your company to be the best, you need your people to be the best. If you recruit the best, you need to have a solid development plan in place. Allow your employees to build their own individual brands. Help them be an expert within their specialization. Providing a platform to help someone achieve their personal best will motivate them to stay at your company. While blind company loyalty may no longer be a motivator, loyalty to personal growth, colleagues, team success and meaningful career options is.

8. **Recognize your star leaders and invest accordingly.** The cost of employee turnover can be 150 to 300 percent of an employee’s annual compensation. The effectiveness of internal leaders occurs faster than inserting an external candidate into the position. So, why are we treating our leaders any differently? Your internal talent bench (created to support the top 5 percent critical jobs) and your succession plans should be tapping into these new leaders to build and grow them quickly. If that doesn’t seem like enough motivation, consider that one of the top reasons an employee leaves an organization is because of a bad boss or leader. Remember this in 2012 and beyond when determining your development budgets, mentorship candidates, and variable compensation plans.

9. **Integrate.** Modern technology (e.g., cloud, mobile, social and analytics) will be a key enabler for realizing your talent management strategy. Look at your current disjointed tools and manual workarounds. Break down the walls between individual human resources function and information technology to ensure you’re looking at an integrated talent management solution. This integration will allow you to take large steps toward transforming the service delivery model for your organization, put data in the hands of the people that drive your business, provide an on-demand model for employees to manage their careers, and provide a one-stop place for analyzing your workforce data.

10. **Embrace your uniqueness instead of one-size-fits-all. Industry matters.** Generational composition matters. Geography matters. The number and location of your employees changes the game. Sales is different from engineering. Customer service is driven by different outcomes than finance. You get the point. So, don’t treat them the same! Work to create a talent management strategy that centers on recognizing the unique drivers and needs of each group within your organization.

Ann Blakely is senior manager, Human Capital Services at Baker Tilly in Milwaukee. Contact her at 414-777-5313 or ann.blakely@bakertilly.com.