

# Navigating the Talent Shift



*Lisa Hufford*

# Navigating the Talent Shift

How to Build On-Demand Teams  
that Drive Innovation, Control Costs,  
and Get Results

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*For my supportive and loving husband, David, and our beautiful boys, Jack and Ian. You inspire me to live an authentic and purpose-driven life.*



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## Introduction

I wrote *Navigating the Talent Shift* to help companies redefine how to meet their business and workplace objectives, drive innovation, and build flexible teams in a project-based environment that tap into a broader talent pool.

Companies can be more competitive and adapt faster to changing market needs by integrating into their teams the broad and growing base of freelancers and consultants. My vision is that companies will expand their mindset about how they access and acquire the talent they need to achieve the best results in any business climate. And I believe that professionals can find significance by and success by focusing on the work they love to do and adding value to every job.

We're living in an on-demand world and an on-demand economy, ranging from the movies we watch and the groceries we buy to the way we travel. Welcome to the on-demand workplace.

### ***My Passion for Business***

My parents are retired teachers. In fact, my entire family is in education and proud of it. I've always had an interest in business, even from an early age, but my parents were still surprised when I decided to major in business at California Polytechnic State University, where I received my Bachelor's degree.

After earning my degree, I worked for 14 years in the technology sector as well as earning my Technology MBA certificate from the University of Washington. I was in supply-chain management, and then worked for Microsoft—in sales, account management and business development, and running global sales teams while traveling the world. I worked for the dominant players in their industries and was fortunate to work with leading brands such as Apple, IBM, Sony, Toshiba, Sun Microsystems, and Acer, to name a few. I enjoyed finding solutions, scoring win-wins, and executing high-impact projects with large clients.

When I had my second child in 2006 something shifted for me. I wanted to figure out how to leverage my skills so that I could work on my own terms, and I wanted to control my own schedule, spend more time with my family, and cut back on my business travel.

I was in search of both a work and lifestyle change, for sure, but I also wanted more. As anyone who's spent time in corporate America knows, the average day at the office involves many activities that don't have much to do with your core competency or job description: attending superfluous meetings, playing email ping-pong, or being waylaid by chatty coworkers.

When I was a Director at Microsoft, for example, I had a myriad of responsibilities, and while I didn't mind them, they weren't what you'd consider "mission-critical." I realized I also wanted to zero in on doing more high-impact work, using a larger portion of my time on projects that made the biggest difference for companies. To achieve those things, I approached my V.P. at Microsoft and presented him with a plan and a description of how I could, as a consultant, support highly strategic initiatives for the leadership team in the division. He agreed to let me transition into a consultant role, and Microsoft was my first client. Looking back, that was a monumental moment for me.

As a consultant, I found I was able to work on projects in ways that actually delivered more impact than I'd been able to deliver in the role of a corporate director. This is because I was able to give 100% of my focus to mission-critical tasks; I didn't have all of the other, less important responsibilities that go along with being a company director to distract me.

Not long after my transition to consulting, I was approached by others with similar stories—corporate professionals who wanted more control, flexibility, and the chance to use their skills for work that really mattered. I began teaching people how to make the transition from a traditional FTE job to a consultant, and before I knew it, I had a business. My business grew quickly. I identified an emerging trend in the workforce: companies were looking to reduce cost and risk, often by slashing talent and resources vital to the business's success, but they still needed experts to get the work done. I saw an opportunity to provide companies with a cost-effective, low-risk way to tap exceptional talent. I also provided corporate professionals with the opportunity to do what I did—be in control and have a choice in their lives. It was a win-win, and I became committed to helping people find success on their terms with their clients and consultants.

Within its first 18 months, my company, Simplicity Consulting Inc., had 20 consultants. Since 2006, we have successfully completed thousands of projects with a growing community of more than 5,000 professionals. Simplicity was named to the Inc. 5000 list for five years running as one of the fastest-growing private companies in America. This growth is evidence of the workplace and talent shift that's underway.

In my work at Simplicity, I've helped companies such as Amazon, Hewlett Packard, Farmers Insurance, T-Mobile, and Microsoft create flexible teams with the on-demand experts they need to achieve their business objectives. I've worked

with companies as they embraced agility and leveraged the on-demand workforce, enabling these big players to overcome multi-million-dollar challenges, transform company-wide legacy systems to stay relevant, and reinvigorate declining sales channels into \$100 million dollar businesses.

### ***What This Book Covers***

The first two chapters define and describe the talent shift:

**Chapter 1** describes the workforce shift that's driven by a changing global business environment, a highly competitive marketplace that features hyper-specialization, project-based work, and a talent pool that aspires to—and indeed demands—flexibility. A variety of economic, technological, and cultural factors drives this dynamic shift. The chapter examines three major trends that have converged to shape where we are: the coming of age of Millennials,<sup>1</sup> the Baby Boomers' impact on the workforce, and the trend that will impact about 40% of U.S. workers by 2020, the freelance “1099 economy.”<sup>2</sup>

**Chapter 2** delves deeper into the changing face of talent and notes that by 2020, as many as 65 million Americans will be freelancers, independent consultants and solopreneurs, making up 40% of the workforce. The ramifications of those numbers are enormous.

**Chapters 3 and 4** introduce and describe the centerpiece of this book: the SPEED™ talent strategy that enables managers to build flexible, project-based teams that get results. SPEED provides an agile and flexible framework for building on-demand teams, and it also provides the ability to adapt to unanticipated business changes. It encompasses the best practices that I have learned, observed, and implemented in hundreds of projects with every type of cost, management, and operational situation.

**Chapter 5** outlines some common roadblocks companies may encounter when integrating SPEED within their organizations and how to overcome them. I see roadblocks every day—whether it is mindset, organizational, structural, procedural, or political—and they can all be resolved.

**Chapters 6, 7, and 8** feature real-world stories that show how companies have creatively used on-demand talent to drive innovation, control costs, and get results.

The Resource Guide provides you with additional resources, research, and information about the talent shift and places where you can find that talent. It also lists elements you can use to evaluate a talent agency.

### *Terms and Definitions*

As I note in Chap. 1, there is a great workforce shift underway, driven by a constantly changing global business environment, a highly competitive marketplace that features hyper-specialization, project-based work, and a talent pool that aspires to—and indeed demands—flexibility.

I define the **talent shift** as the emerging and broad talent pool that's driving a massive change to an on-demand workforce that comprises specialists, independent professionals, and experts—however they are called—doing project-based work.

In this book, I use the term **consultant** most often, but I also use the terms “experts” and “specialists” interchangeably throughout. **Talent** as referred to in this book includes those consultants, freelancers, experts, and specialists who are all in non-FTE (full-time employee) roles.

However, the name or term for talent that are not an FTE varies depending on the publication, the industry, company policies, and even how a person refers to their own professional

classification. For example, in their 2015 study, “Freelancing in America,” Upwork and the Freelancers Union identified five types of freelancers, which that year composed more than one-third of the U.S. workforce.

### The Five Types of Freelancers<sup>3</sup>

#### 1. Independent Contractors

(36% of the independent workforce/19.3 million professionals)—These “traditional” freelancers don’t have an employer and instead do freelance, temporary, or supplemental work on a project-to-project basis.

#### 2. Moonlighters

(25%/13.2 million)—Moonlighters are individuals with a primary, traditional job with an employer who also moonlight doing freelance work. For example, a corporate-employed web developer who does projects for nonprofits in the evening is a moonlighter.

#### 3. Diversified workers

(26%/14.1 million)—Diversified workers are people with multiple sources of income from a mix of traditional employers and freelance work. For example, someone who works the front desk at a dentist’s office 20 hours a week and fills out the rest of his income driving for Uber and doing freelance writing is a diversified worker.

#### 4. Temporary Workers

(9%/4.6 million)—Temporary workers are individuals with a single employer, client, job, or contract project where their employment status is temporary. For example, a data entry worker employed by a staff-

ing agency and working on a three-month assignment is a temporary worker.

#### 5. Freelance Business Owners

(5%/2.5 million)—Freelancer business owners have one or more employees and consider themselves both a freelancer and a business owner. For example, a social marketing guru who hires a team of other social marketers to build a small agency but still identifies as a freelancer is a freelance business owner.

In some large companies a consultant is referred to as a **vendor**. This is often because they are employees of an approved supplier/provider a company uses.

Large corporations typically have formal supplier programs that manage a list of **approved suppliers and/or providers**. The providers must meet contractual obligations to be approved and maintain a working relationship with the corporation.

I use **agency** in the book as a catch-all term, but qualify it depending on whether I'm referring to large executive management or consulting agencies; marketing, advertising, or public relations agencies; or most often, talent and specialized talent agencies.

**SPEED** (see Chaps. 3 and 4) is a talent strategy that enables managers to build flexible, project-based teams that get results. It provides a flexible framework for on-demand teams and the ability to adapt to unanticipated business changes by employing five elements: **S**uccess, **P**lan, **E**xecute, **E**valuate, and **D**ecide.

**Note:** Company names and the people mentioned have been changed in this book.

## ***Don't Have a Kodak Moment***

By 2020, 40% of the workforce won't want to be a full-time employee. You can avoid having the infamous "Kodak moment"—when Kodak failed to see the impending disruption to the photography industry by the rise of digital technology—by understanding what the workplace and talent shift means for your business.

Forget the old recruit-and-search-for-months methods for acquiring talent and the perception that "talent" is only full-time employees.

This is why I wrote this book. To show you how to successfully navigate the talent shift that's underway.

### ***Notes***

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