

Episode 325: How to Hire from the Global Talent Pool with Confidence with Jonathan Romley

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00:00

Mamie Kanfer Stewart

You may have heard the phrase, talent is everywhere, opportunity is not. But hiring talent from another country, well, it can feel daunting. And that's why I'm speaking with today's guest about how to effectively hire from the global talent pool and grow your thriving team. Today's guest is Jonathan Romley, one of the world's foremost experts on global talent management and the future of work. Recognized as a leading authority in navigating the complexities of international talent acquisition, Jonathan is the founder of Lundi, a global talent firm specializing innovative strategies for attracting, retaining and developing top talent across borders. If you are dedicated to upping your management game, check out Podcast+. As a member, you get access to bonus episodes, which are like professional development lessons, along with the extended interviews with each guest. Learn more and join today at themodernmanager.com/more. Now, here's my conversation with Jonathan.

00:56

Mamie Kanfer Stewart

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01:04

Mamie Kanfer Stewart

Thank you so much for joining me today, Jonathan, we're going to talk about building a global team and recruiting global talent. And I just want to start by saying I think I'm really biased about this because it's really scary to me. And so I really just selfishly wanted to talk to you because I feel like I need to get past my own nerves around the idea of hiring people who are nothing kind of in my geographic space. So thank you for coming on and I'm really excited to learn from you.

01:33

Jonathan Romley

Well, thanks for having me and I'd love to hear about your fears, but I think we'll get there.

01:39

Mamie Kanfer Stewart

We will get there. Well, actually, I think we should start here, which is there's the idea of hiring a freelancer, someone, somewhere, to do a particular project. You can go on Upwork in those places. That doesn't feel scary at all. That feels like, okay, you go online, you find someone, you engage them, you pay the fee to the system, and it happens. And it's great. The idea of recruiting an employee and then having to deal with all the complexities of the labor laws and the international stuff that comes with that just feels so overwhelming and scary. Unless you're like a huge company that I am just at a loss as to how you would even start thinking about that and how you would make progress as a small organization.

02:23

Mamie Kanfer Stewart

And so that's why I say my bias is like, that just feels like too much. Let's just stay in the United States where I know I can just hire someone and it's very easy, and it's not even that easy. But that's part of the problem, right? Is that it's not actually easy to find great talent. So all of that is to say, my very long winded start of why is it worth it to go through all of the hoops and the logistics and the legal stuff and the crazy things. To hire someone in another country, no.

02:52

Jonathan Romley

Matter what country you're starting from, one is for growth. So expanding to a new market, you may have a business, well, in one city, in one state, in one country, just as if you would hire a West coast sales rep, you might want to hire one in, I don't know, Singapore in order to expand your business. The other reason that people do this is for cost efficiency. And that might because, well, cost is something a lot of companies are thinking about, a lot of consumers are thinking about, which means that companies have to think about it. And that doesn't necessarily mean that having a lower cost basis for some of those team members is going to help you lower your prices, but it will have an impact on margin contribution from your business activities. So this is another reason that companies do this.

03:46

Jonathan Romley

They may be growing, they may be trying to save some money. Another challenge is that you might not be able to find what you're looking for on the local labor market. There may be a skills gap, so you might have the money and you might have the budget, but you may not be

successful in recruiting the talent that you need to bring into your organization to grow, even domestically.

04:15

Mamie Kanfer Stewart

What then? I are the first steps. If you're like, okay, I'm bought into this idea, I will consider moving into a global strategy around hiring. What are the other things that you should be considering before you actually even start recruiting or looking for a firm or going through that process? What are the other factors that we should be thinking about?

04:38

Jonathan Romley

The biggest challenge in front of anyone, the biggest problem when you're thinking about doing this is knowing where to start. Because it sounds, even if you're trying to hire one person, this sounds like a pretty big problem, right? Earth in the scheme of things is small, but for us tiny humans, it's quite big. And where do we look? If you think about more than 1 billion knowledge workers in the world, less than 1% are on freelancing websites. So if you're really trying to open up and get the best talent, you definitely have to go beyond freelancing websites. But please remember that the other 99% may have worked remotely. But okay, what are the things that we need to think about if we're going to search for something, what should we search for? What are the things that matter most?

05:32

Jonathan Romley

Well, the first thing we have to know who we're hiring or what skillset we're looking for. And just in the back of our mind, we need to remember that if we're looking abroad, people may not have the same credentials or certifications or, I mean, they'll probably have a university degree, but it might have a different name than the one that you would usually think about. So it's important really to try to get down to a particular place or places where you want to look. Because if we just say we're hiring anywhere. Okay, well, anywhere is actually not a country. Remote is not a place. So if you go and you type like hire remote, this is not going to be very helpful. We also want to understand what role will this person play in your organization?

06:33

Jonathan Romley

What is the team that they're going to work in look like today, for example, you know, is everybody based in Seattle and you're thinking about hiring in South Africa? There's a pretty big time difference. Or, you know, what is the style of our team? How do we work? Are we going to work asynchronously with someone? Meaning that we do our work, they do our work, and we collaborate, kind of more like in documentation than in face to face meetings or online. So you want to think about many things that will help you actually start to zero in on where maybe

geographically you might be able to look. How many people do you need? Now this is obvious, I understand, but also how many people could you need in the future?

07:29

Jonathan Romley

Because you can pretty much find like one person anywhere in the world to do something. But depending on how you're going to work in that new place, one person might be the answer. Or you might be thinking, I need 100 or 1000 over the next three or four years. And where we see a lot of companies get stuck is they thought some country was a great location to hire for whatever reason, like they liked the weather, or their CEO enjoys vacationing in Costa Rica, or the founder wants to move to Croatia. Heard a lot of these stories. The reality is, though, you may enjoy that from a lifestyle perspective, but there may not be the talent pool that you need to really scale your organization in that location.

08:21

Mamie Kanfer Stewart

I love this. What I'm hearing is that there's like three different components. The first piece is actually just around the logistics of what is it going to look like with our team when someone is in a different time zone, when we're having to collaborate in different ways than maybe we're used to and getting really clear about our team style, our team values, and just understanding from a logistics perspective what is going to make the most sense here then. Secondly, it's the, what is needed for the job? What are the skill sets and where are those skill sets going to be found? And that might mean, as you said, knowledge of gap accounting, but it could also just mean, like, we need someone because we're not going to collaborate. We're going to collaborate asynchronously. We need people who are really good writers.

09:10

Mamie Kanfer Stewart

And are there places where we can find really good writers? Is that a different skill set than really good math and science? So you can go again, like, to what the job needs and what it looks like. And then thirdly is what you're saying about the future. I hadn't even thought about that. That you don't have to look at this as a one off. It could actually be part of a longer term strategy. Maybe you could tell us a story about a company, preferably a smaller company, that made that shift from being singularly home based in one country to expanding into a global workforce.

09:42

Jonathan Romley

I can give you an example, my own company, and of course, a lot of companies that we work with as well. But. But I can certainly share our story at Lundy because before we were a global talent firm, we were pretty localized in what we were doing. And I've actually started this company in

Ukraine. So I started this company in Ukraine. I was living in Ukraine. What kind of. In and out for about a decade. And we started Lundy with a physical office, right. With people working inside that office. And virtually everyone that worked for us was from the city where we were. And, you know, every day they came to an office and they tappy tapped their little card on the way in and, you know, they did their job. And for us, well, really, the pandemic changed everything.

10:34

Jonathan Romley

And we thought, okay, well, that was the first thing that changed because, of course, then there was a war. You know, we realized, okay, well, most people are now working remotely for us, so can we look first at lower cost regions in the country that we're in? Where can we go right, if we're, you know, if we're in California? Well, we've seen this, you know, California, let's hire in Texas, right? So if we're, you know, in the capital city of Ukraine, can we go out a little bit further and find cities where there's a lower cost basis because people have lower living expenses that was the first thing that we did. So we started to expand within the country.

11:16

Jonathan Romley

So went to western Ukraine, went to some parts that were east of Kiev and we started bringing people on that didn't have to come into the office. We expanded our business to Poland, which was, it's the country to the left of Ukraine. This job, really, you have to be like a geography expert. But anyway, yeah, so it's like Germany and then Poland and then Ukraine. As we move east, we expanded into Poland, you know, and again started with an office. But as the business expanded out in the country, it wasn't really practical to have an office in every, well, in every city. We were really focused for some time on eastern Europe. And as we were expanding out of beyond those two countries, we continued to look remote first. Look remote first.

12:05

Jonathan Romley

And that often meant around the area that we were in, because we were focused on working with customers initially in central and eastern Europe. So we were kind of saying, okay, how can we expand here? How can we expand there? We've learned really the hard way that job titles can be different in every country. So when we were expanding our sales team, well, we face the challenge that almost every business knows what an SDR is. In the US, at least, any b to b business, any business to business sales business knows what an SDR is. But this is like a junior sales rep just at a university.

12:47

Jonathan Romley

First couple of years on the job and they have to do the most difficult work in sales, which is cold calling, cold emailing manually, like one email at a time, one phone call at a time, one sales

letter at a time. And when we set out to recruit for those roles in Poland, we actually started working with a recruitment agency because you kind of tend to do that when you're in this business. You think like, okay, I'm in a new place. So I trust in recruitment agencies and staffing firms and they can help us. And boy, we really struggled. This was really eye opening for us. We were always aware in new countries whether it was. I mean, I ran a business in China and we understood that the job title needs to be changed and were doing a business.

13:35

Jonathan Romley

In Ukraine, everybody is a manager. So like a junior salesperson is a sales manager. And of course in the US, a sales manager is a manager. Like, there's a manager, they have staff, they have employees, people report to them. And in other countries, this is just like an employee. Or in the UK, you'll hear something like executive. And if I hear advertising executive or marketing executive, I'm not thinking that this is a junior employee. I'm thinking this is an executive employee. But in the UK, this can mean this is their first job. They just got here, don't know anything. I mean, they know something, I'm sure, but these were little nuances that we dealt with as we expanded out. I'm going to fast forward this story, because today we're in 77 countries.

14:22

Jonathan Romley

So it really accelerated as we started to spread out when the war started in Ukraine, that required all of us to move. Well, then we thought, okay, if we're all out of here, let's just hire anywhere. And, yeah, we've expanded really a lot since then, where every hire that we've made in the business has been one where we have gone through, we've dog fooded our own process. We've said, okay, well, what do we need, and what's our budget, by the way? How much can we afford? And is this a customer facing role? Is it not a customer facing role? Is this someone that needs to work in some specific time zone, or are they going to work with some specific partners or clients that are in some region? How does this all look?

15:14

Jonathan Romley

And then we've gone out and said, okay, well, we think these two or three countries are a right fit for this. And we've gone into those markets, brought people onto our team, which has also added this kind of very diverse global perspective.

15:31

Mamie Kanfer Stewart

Well, first, I want to just say that I think this strategy that you described of learning how to be a remote team in your own country could be a really good first step for folks.

15:41

Jonathan Romley

I think there's a quote that I saw once from Scott Galloway that was, you know, what can be done remotely in Boston, can be done remotely in Bangalore. From my perspective, I wouldn't recommend to any company that's just getting started with international hiring to dive, like, headfirst into hiring India. So, I don't know, let's say what can be done remotely in Boston, can be done remotely in Buenos Aires, which is maybe a little bit easier. This is certainly a way to get started within any organization. And I think this is very often when we speak to companies that are kind of on this path, they have already implemented a kind of remote work policy with some. It might be their professional services team, for example. I mean, their service business might be their professional services team.

16:30

Jonathan Romley

Okay, accounting firms, it can be the actual accountants. Well, there's no reason for you to come into the office so you can work remotely. And they've looked around in a nearby or around the US, and you're already kind of doing this. This is most often a reason that companies start thinking about cost savings. So if you think, okay, I'm already doing this remotely, why am I doing this remotely in the US, when I can get people that work the same way and have the same experience and have the same or higher level of education, and I can reduce my costs. Bye. It depends where you go and what you do. And I think that the most commonly this is when companies start thinking about like, oh, well, how can I save money this way?

17:19

Jonathan Romley

But if you think about how can you expand the business or fill a gap where you're not able to find that talent locally, you're kind of, you know, you could try to look in another part of the US. But I mean, for some roles, it doesn't matter, right? For some reason, it's going to be hard no matter what. I know I've been in that position where I had built a research lab in Kiev, different business another time, ten years ago. But if I had tried to do the same thing in California, in San Francisco, where I moved from, I don't think that I would have had the same success in bringing professors from universities master's thesis level students to work in a machine learning research lab that I had a crazy idea to throw together.

18:06

Jonathan Romley

Granted, I had some history in that market and was involved in an exit that was a pretty big data point foreign direct investment into technology in Ukraine. At the time, just more than a decade ago, there was a possibility there to do something that even if I had an unlimited budget, money wasn't necessarily the lever that would have controlled if I could achieve that outcome that I wanted or not.

18:33

Mamie Kanfer Stewart

Yeah, I mean, that's such a good point that sometimes it's actually not necessarily about what you can do, but it's about the environment that you're in. Right? Who are you competing with in the other businesses? What is this region really known for and other regions that are better known for something else? And what does that allow you to do or not do in the local geography that you are? So I love that, putting it in context that the same business could thrive in one location and really struggle in a different location just from terms of finding talent and being able to compete on the talent market if you're constrained to that geography.

19:08

Jonathan Romley

So if this doesn't solve a problem for your company, then you probably don't need to do it, actually. Right? So if you're not having a difficulty to find the talent that you need with the resources, the locations, the geographies that you have. So you don't need to do this. If you're not trying to reduce costs compared to roles that you already have, you probably don't need to do this. And if you're not thinking about expanding your business internationally, you probably don't need to do this.

19:36

Mamie Kanfer Stewart

It's a good reminder that global strategies are available when we need them, but it's not actually yet a requirement to succeed in business and to build a strong, healthy team. So we should use it when it's the right time for our team, for our organization.

19:52

Jonathan Romley

Make sure that you're looking for talent where talent actually is, and try to avoid these kind of preconceptions or biases like that. Math and engineering comes from eastern Europe because there are educated people all over the world and talent is everywhere and opportunity is nothing.

20:09

Mamie Kanfer Stewart

I think this is the perfect place for us to wrap up. So Jonathan, can you tell us where people can learn more about you? Remind us of the name of your book and where people can find it and all that jazz.

20:18

Jonathan Romley

Sure. Wow. The book is [Winning the Global Talent War](#): How to Find the World's Best Employees and Thrive in a Competitive World. Well, you can go to globaltalentwar.com. It's probably the easiest place as a launching pad to learn. Well, more about the book. Also, you can subscribe to my newsletter and of course, if you need some help with navigating the world of international talent, well, you can also go to [Hello Lundi](#). That's like L U N D I.com.

20:46

Mamie Kanfer Stewart

Well, thank you so much. I feel a little better about the idea of hiring remotely and really just appreciate you sharing all of your stories and your strategies with us today. So thanks again.

20:59

Jonathan Romley

Thanks man.

21:00

Mamie Kanfer Stewart

Jonathan is giving away five copies of his book winning the Global Talent War. This book is your ultimate guide to mastering global talent acquisition and employee management. This compelling leadership development guide intertwines meticulous analysis, poignant case studies, and expert perspectives, empowering you to seamlessly traverse the intricate terrain of today's workforce dynamics. To enter the drawing for this guest bonus, and to get the extended interview where Jonathan shares what you need to consider before hiring a global team member, become a member at themodernmanager.com/more. All the links are in the show notes, and they can be delivered to your inbox when you subscribe to my newsletter. Find that at themodernmanager.com. Thanks again for listening. Until next time.