As the industry adapts to changing dynamics, the 4A's continues to prioritize talent development with a focus on equipping member agencies with tailored guidance and solutions. From nurturing non-traditional talent to empowering experienced professionals, the 4A's Talent, Equity & Learning Solutions team is dedicated to fostering growth and career pathways.

The Advancing Talent virtual conference, hosted on March 28, 2024, addressed critical topics impacting today's agency workforce ranging from return-to-office policies, accessibility, mental health, AI implications, DEIB initiatives, leadership strategies and nurturing multigenerational teams. The conversations explored strategies to unleash human potential with actionable insights to break the barriers to excellence. Empathy, inclusivity and innovation emerged as common threads.

Thanks to our amazing speakers, enthusiastic attendees and collaborative sponsors for helping us drive the talent transformation. **Here are the key takeaways for your handy reference.**
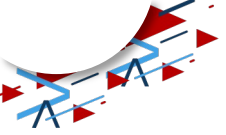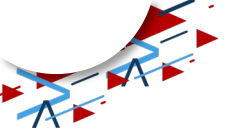
Investing in talent is crucial to stay competitive. As skill requirements have become more complex, the ever-changing nature of advertising and marketing demands strategies that stretch and strengthen talent. Being responsive to your teams' needs can create real opportunity. The panelists explored strategies for unlocking your organization's talent potential through unique learning and development paths, and a heightened focus on performance management where both the organization and the employee gain a competitive edge.

> We're looking to shift to a world where we're less about programs and more about solutions to business problems. And that means we have to be a little more agile."
>
> - Katherine Marchiano

> We view learning and development as a tool to become a better agency and a better partner."
>
> - Alex Cuevas

Key Insights

- **Responsiveness Is Vital:** A constantly evolving learning culture that fits purpose, is aligned with overarching business needs and is tailored for individual needs is key.

- **Driven By Data:** Client feedback and performance assessments must determine learning priorities.

- **Collective Intelligence to Scale:** Employees' expertise can be harnessed to scale learning initiatives effectively.

Agency Takeaways

**Cultivate an Adaptive, Diverse, Learning Culture:**
- Foster an adaptive culture that accommodates different learning needs and approaches and puts the learner at the center. Apply feedback from client pitches.
- Separate learning and development goals from performance reviews and compensation. Tie learning and development goals back to client requirements.

Let Data Drive:
- Apply data insights to inform learning strategies and resource allocation.

Encourage Knowledge Sharing:
- Facilitate peer-to-peer learning to leverage collective expertise across the organization.
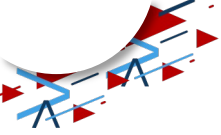
The Evolving Workforce: Does it Take a Building to Build a Team?
Speakers: Tarik West, SVP, People, WONGDOODY
Michelle Edelman, CEO & CSO, PETERMAYER
Cathy Chan Butler, EVP Talent, Equity and Learning Solutions, 4A's (Moderator)

This panel discussed return-to-office policies and the evolving best practices for managing a hybrid workforce. Empathy, flexibility and an open-minded, experience-centered approach remained front and center.

Key Insights

- **Flexibility Is Paramount:** One size does not fit all, be it organizations or employees.
- **RTO Reframed:** View it as the future of work, not just physical return to offices. Emerging work preferences and what people are passionate about reinvent work culture.
- **Values-Driven Leadership:** Leaders face a choice—evolve with changing dynamics and lead agency transformation or cling to familiar practices.
- **Redefine the "Office":** Workplaces, whether in-person or virtual, are not just containers to hold people. They serve as tools and resources that carry the organization's culture and enable employees to do their best work.
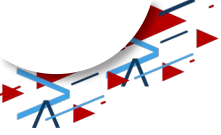
Agency Takeaways

- **Embrace Flexibility:** Embrace insights on employee preferences to shape a dynamic and engaging work environment. Be open to an evolving culture and proactive in adapting to change.
- **Foster Trust and Transparency:** Cultivate an environment of trust through open communication and transparent decision-making processes.
- **Leverage Technology:** Use tools to bring people together and foster closer, collaborative connections be it virtually or in person.
- **Lead with Values:** Align organizational values with workplace practices to guide decision-making and promote a positive work culture where the values are lived and experienced, not merely stated.

> It's not about humans coming back to the office. It's about who we are as leaders. Leaders must do the work to self-motivate and self-activate the workplace based on the road they choose."
>
> - Michelle Edelman

As the intensity of social and global events build around us, the line of delineation between the world and work is becoming increasingly faint. Leaders and managers face difficult decisions on communicating around sensitive topics. This panel explored insights and perspectives on effectively employing empathy in leadership during challenging times.

Key Insights

- **The Human Aspect:** Leading with humanity, empathy and grace is crucial in navigating complex issues.
- **Getting the Why, Who and When Right:** Considering stakeholder expectations and timing is essential in communication.
- **Communication Is a Two-Way Street:** Active listening and engagement are key to ensuring stakeholders feel heard and respected.
- **Embracing Diverse Views:** De-escalation techniques and providing space for civil discourse are increasingly important in crisis management.

Agency Takeaways

- **Demonstrate Empathy and Humanity:** Leaders need to practice grace in all communications and actions.
- **Focus on Audience Needs:** Approach communications from the perspective of why it matters to your constituents and what they need to hear at that moment, not your personal beliefs.
- **Be Open to Conversation, Listen, De-Escalate:** Foster understanding and trust, even in challenging situations by keeping channels of communication open, listening actively to diverse views and de-escalate effectively. Engage when appropriate; walk away when needed.
- **Prioritize Self Care:** Leaders need to equip themselves to manage tough situations. Find strategies and tools that work for you.

> You can't always be neutral if you're human. Sometimes, it's not a communications problem. It's a reality problem."
>
> - Peter Duda
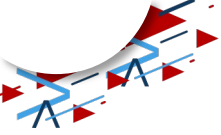
"Leaders need to consider what people expect and why. Often leaders focus on what we need to say rather than what people need to *hear*."

- Charles Bakaly

Resources

Weber Shandwick Crisis & Issue Newsletter: Compass for the Chaos

(1) Responsible AI use requires organizational commitment. (substack.com)

Weber Shandwick Pulse on America Survey in Axios

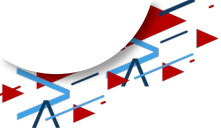https://www.axios.com/2024/03/07/weber-shandwick-politics-report

Article: Developing the leaders we need today: high-performing leaders with heart

Developing the leaders we need today: high-performing leaders with heart - United Minds (unitedmindsglobal.com)

Article: Why we need to pay close attention to emotions at work

https://unitedmindsglobal.com/news/why-we-need-to-pay-closer-attention-to-emotions-at-work/

The continued stress and angst amidst a divided America contribute to the mental health challenges today, particularly within the advertising & marketing industry — long characterized by the high stress of a dynamic client-service business. This candid conversation examined how organizations are supporting talent and addressing the mental health needs of their teams.

Key Insights

- **Human Connection in Leadership:** It's important to acknowledge the mental toll of working in our industry and cultivate empathetic leadership in addressing it.
- **Human Care Over Human Hustle:** While we continue to adopt strategies and technology for greater efficiency, it's critical we prioritize wellness.
- **Adding W to DEIB:** Leaders must prioritize employee well-being through personalized care plans, mental health training and fostering a supportive culture.
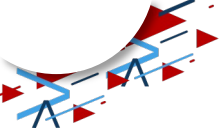
Agency Takeaways

- **Empathetic Leadership:** Build personal connections with employees and foster empathy, acknowledging the rigor and mental tax inherent to our industry.
- **Proactive Support:** Implement programs such as mental health training. Create support groups and utilize well-being platforms.
- **Cultural Shift:** Establish a culture of openness where mental health discussions are normalized, and well-being is integrated into the company's core values.
- **Family Support:** Extend support beyond employees to their families, recognizing that external factors can impact mental health and productivity.
- **Walk the Walk:** Demonstrate self-care so your team feels encouraged to follow suit.

" We need to shift the attention from human hustle to human care."

- Darla Price

Can AI-powered hiring decisions eventually replace traditional interviewing and selection processes? Does AI have a potential for bias? This lively conversation delved into the advantages, disadvantages and effects of using AI on the future of talent.

The Verdict is Still Out

38%

of HR leaders have already explored or implemented AI solutions to improve their process or become more efficient
(Gartner Study)

According to a study by Pew Research Center

71%

of Americans oppose the use of AI in the final decision-making process.

47%

say that AI would do a better job than humans at evaluating all job applicants in the same way.

53%

say AI will address ethnic bias in the hiring process.

❝ Talent Management is about discerning what we know to be true. Algorithms can deliver deep levels of understanding that we can't have access to as humans. It is said hiring is about guessing, and firing is about knowing. AI can bridge that gap. It can help you decide where to place the next bet."

- Albert Thompson
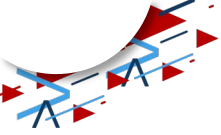
4A's | ADVANCING TALENT >

Getting Clients On Board to Adopt AI

- Move past the jargon to outcomes.
- Break down acronyms into simple, clear language.
- Explain how the tool will give them a line of sight.

Key Insights

- **Bias Mitigation:** AI can be used to evaluate applicants consistently, but careful consideration of data inputs is crucial to avoid perpetuating biases.
- **Human Element:** While AI can streamline hiring, it cannot replace the human role in reading the room: assessing cultural nuances, interpersonal dynamics and non-verbal cues.

> We're creating a source of truth. Use it as a barometer, a point of reference."
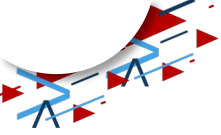>
> - Kobi Wu

Agency Takeaways

- **Use AI to Augment Decision-Making:** Recognize AI limitations and supplement insights with human judgment.
- **Client Education:** Show clients what is possible in the hiring process with AI: enhanced efficiency, reduced bias and risk mitigation.
- **Be Intentional About Incorporating Diversity:** Build diverse datasets to train AI algorithms accurately, representing a wide range of human experiences and identities.
- **Ongoing Optimization:** Continuously refine AI algorithms based on feedback, new data and evolving cultural shifts to improve accuracy.

How Cache AI Works

The AI/ML model assesses a candidate's profile combining self input, perspectives from trusted co-authors and contributors and publicly available online information, and generates a value using a standard set of KPIs. The value generated provides hiring managers key insights on the candidate they may not otherwise find on a resume or are likely to overlook during the interview process.

The Paper Ceiling is a barrier that limits companies to finding talent with a 4-year degree and walls off millions of talented, hard working Americans. Business leaders and Talent Acquisition teams who embrace a growth mindset, technology, AI and partnerships will achieve sustained advantage by unlocking net-new talent supply. This strategy helps control costs, increase retention, bill more hours and deliver diversity done right. One resource for agencies to consider is Catalyte's apprenticeship program.

Key Insights

- **Catalyte Solutions:** Unlike traditional hiring processes that prioritize pedigree over aptitude, Catalyte focuses on skills and ability to learn. They partner with companies to expand access to diverse talent pools by using technology-driven assessments to identify high performers. Customized training ensures candidates are day-one ready, reducing onboarding time and increasing productivity.
- **Outcomes:** Clients have achieved cost savings, faster hiring and high conversion rates with a focus on diversity and inclusion.
- **Beta Program:** Catalyte's beta program leverages AI and company data to predict high performers, offering a competitive advantage in talent acquisition.

Agency Takeaways

- **Rethink Hiring:** Consider prioritizing aptitude over pedigree when assessing candidates. Leverage technology-driven assessments to gain access to diverse talent pools and identify candidates who are day-one ready. Customize training to equip new hires for success.
- **Explore Predictive AI Solutions:** Investigate innovative approaches that leverage data to enhance talent acquisition and identify high performers with greater accuracy.
- **Prioritize Talent Development:** Invest in ongoing training and development to upskill existing employees and prepare them for evolving roles within the organization.
- **Stay Competitive:** Continuously evaluate and evolve talent acquisition strategies to remain competitive in the market and attract top talent.

" Talent is everywhere, but access isn't. Technology is the greatest leveler. Leverage machine learning to break down talent barriers and expand access for all."
- Matthew Derella
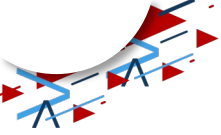
The Asset of Accessibility
Speakers: Nathan Friedman, Co-President and Chief Marketing Officer, Understood.org
Dana Randall, Head of Accessible Design, Level Access
Olivia Morley, Senior Reporter, AdWeek (Moderator)

A's | ADVANCING TALENT

Understanding accessibility engages your workforce, supports employees with disabilities and can enhance your business operations and work productivity. Do you have the necessary tools and knowledge to drive accessibility across your organization? This panel discussion focused on amplifying accessibility as an employee and business asset.

Key Insights

- **Accessibility Awareness Challenges:** Agencies must recognize the unintentional biases in talent recruitment processes, such as job descriptions and hiring practices, that hinder diversity and inclusion efforts.
- **Personal Experiences Inform Solutions:** Hearing first-hand experiences, like Dana's struggle with undiagnosed neurodiversity in the workplace, sheds light on the need for flexible practices and accommodations.

Agency Takeaways

- **Prioritize Accessibility Awareness:** Build cognizance around accessibility challenges in talent recruitment and workplace practices. Seek and incorporate input from neurodiverse employees.
- **Implement Actionable Steps:** Revise job descriptions, offer flexible accommodations to create a more inclusive environment and provide organization-wide employee training.
- **Utilize Resources:** Explore resources such as those available on Understood.org and engage in continuous education to drive progress in accessibility and inclusion initiatives. Tap into ERGs and other internal groups to support individuals with disabilities.
- **Foster Industry Collaboration:** Encourage open dialogue, share insights and best practices for creating accessible and equitable workplaces.

"Embracing neurodiversity for your staff means creating a culture where engaging in neurotypical interactions isn't a requirement."

- Dana Randall
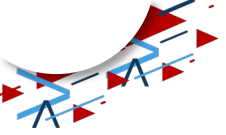
> **"** Neuro-equity and inclusion should be a major imperative for any organization looking to attract and retain its most critical asset – its talent. Embracing diverse thinking sparks creative excellence and generates a sense of belonging, while also building a stronger business."
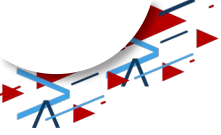>
> - Nathan Friedman

Resources

| Understood's Employee Resources Toolkit (Hub) | 5 ways you can help your workplace be more inclusive | Download: Inclusive Management Tip Sheet | 7 workplace etiquette tips for disability inclusion |

The DEIB Imperative
Speakers: Vita Harris, Global Chief Strategy Officer, FCB Global
Sara Porritt, Chief Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Officer, Omnicom Media Group
Janis Middleton, Chief Inclusion Officer, Guided By Good: 22Squared/Trade School
Bailey Calfee, Campaign (Moderator)

A's | ADVANCING TALENT>

The industry is still struggling to come to terms with the consequences of neglecting Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) as an urgent business imperative, which has had a negative impact on talent. Although some agencies have decreased their commitments and investments in DEIB, many have made significant efforts and progress, which often goes unnoticed. This session explored ongoing challenges to DEIB progress, and highlighted solutions to help prioritize, drive and sustain DEIB as a business imperative.

Key Insights

- **Challenges and Consensus:** DEI efforts in the advertising industry have faced challenges and scrutiny, especially amidst economic uncertainty and shifting social attitudes. Despite these challenges, the panelists agreed that DEI is essential for business success and cultural relevance.
- **Embedding DEI:** Embedding DEI principles into organizational culture, processes, and client interactions is crucial for sustainable progress and meaningful change.

Agency Takeaways

- **Integrate DEI:** Prioritize embedding DEI across all aspects of the organization, from workforce to workplace to the work itself. This includes upstream inclusion, fostering cultural fluency and reframing the idea of the marketplace as a diverse mass audience.
- **Lean Into Change:** Embrace change fearlessly, recognizing it as an opportunity for growth and relevance. Bring clients along **on the journey.**
- **Stay Committed:** Maintain focus on long-term goals and objectives, avoiding distractions like false narratives.

" Don't lose sight of the horizon. Neither fly too high, nor too low."
- Janis Middleton

" Don't be afraid to lean into change. See it as an opportunity."
- Sara Porritt
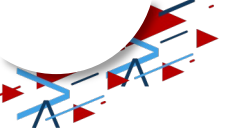
For many agencies, hiring creative, freelance talent has been a disjointed, decentralized process. The associated compliance risks further complicate matters. Worksome helps organizations find, hire and pay a freelance workforce and simplifies the process of hiring 1099s.
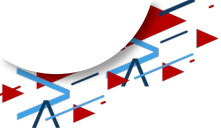
Key Insights

- **Challenges in Hiring Freelancers:** Manual hiring tasks are time-consuming and costly, affecting project timelines and onboarding efficiency. Organizations hesitate or avoid hiring and contracting 1099 workers, and lose out on benefits like cost savings and flexibility.

- **Worksome's Solution:** Worksome streamlines the freelancer hiring process with centralized tasks, automated, two-stage approvals and classification tools that mitigate compliance risks for agencies.

Agency Takeaways

- **Optimize the Hiring Process:** Consider Worksome and similar tools to automate and centralize freelancer hiring tasks, improving efficiency and reducing manual workload.

- **Expand Talent Pool:** Access a broader talent pool, leveraging benefits like tax savings and flexibility.

- **Ensure Compliance, Mitigate Risk:** Prioritize compliance with state and federal regulations when hiring freelancers, leveraging tools like Worksome's fully insured classification feature.

Perception Versus Reality: Surprising Commonalities between Generations in the Workplace
Speakers: Michael Clinton, Founder & CEO, ROAR Forward
Timanni Walker, Founder, Always in Pursuit

4's | ADVANCING TALENT

Five different generations are part of today's workforce. Organizations that recognize and embrace generational differences understand that creating opportunities for all talent to thrive, regardless of age, ultimately benefits everyone. This engaging closing conversation explored the challenges and opportunities presented by a multigenerational workplace.

Key Insights

- **Shun Stereotypes, Build Bridges:** Generational misunderstandings in the workplace can be navigated by embracing inclusivity. Empathy, respect and open communication are essential for bridging generational gaps and creating a supportive work environment.
- **Representation Is Important:** Prioritizing representation of all generations in advertising and workplace decision-making is crucial for authenticity and understanding.

Agency Takeaways

Foster Inclusivity and Embrace Diversity:
- Address stereotypes and biases in advertising and workplace culture. Create an inclusive environment for all generations. Integrate diverse perspectives into decision-making.
- Recognize the value of reverse mentoring and diverse perspectives to drive innovation and problem-solving.
- Create platforms for continuous learning and development to support employees at all stages of their careers.
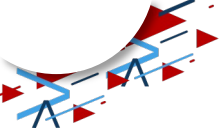
Prioritize Empathy and Communication:
- Navigate conflicts by cultivating empathy and understanding among employees of different generations. Encourage open communication channels and mutual respect.

" Different generations have a lot more in common than we have differences. Every generation needs a seat at the table. Research shows intergenerational projects deliver great results."

- Michael Clinton

Timanni's Take on Gen Z

Friendship Over Romance: Gen Z values friendships over romantic relationships. Friendships influence their behaviors, shopping patterns, and interests.

Digital Connectivity: Gen Z utilizes platforms like TikTok and Twitch to maintain friendships and celebrate "micro milestones," reflecting their strong digital connectivity.

Authentic Representation: Gen Z seeks authentic representation in advertising and media, rejecting stereotypical portrayals and advocating for diverse and inclusive narratives.

Desire for Empathetic Leadership: Gen Z craves empathetic managers who understand their emotional needs and provide guidance and support in navigating the complexities of the modern workplace.

Resilience Amidst Challenges: Despite facing economic and social challenges, Gen Z demonstrates resilience and a desire to make sense of their world, seeking opportunities for growth and development.

"This generation entering the workforce includes people made resilient by the circumstances handed to them, who are simply craving leadership and guidance. We are asking for a seat at the table with a voice to influence decisions."

- Timanni Walker

In Their Words...

Darla Price (she / her / hers) • 2nd
AdAge Leading Woman 2022. Creative Accelerator. DE&I Champion. Do...
1w • 🌐

Such a fun session! Thank you Marla Kaplowitz Ted Alcarez and Joe Conrad for a great conversation around the importance of supporting mental health initiatives.

Rachel Yancius, CCWP • 2nd   1w •••
Global Demand Generation | Community Lead @ Worksome

Great presentation - equally as great to see it resonate within the agent talent community! 👏

The Sway Effect
1,434 followers
1w • Edited • 🌐

We enjoyed attending the 4A's Advancing Talent event today. It was great hearing from our Founder Jennifer Risi along with our clients Understood.org's Nathan Friedman and FIG's Ted Alcarez.

4A's Resources

4A's Foundation

A Guide to the 4A's Membership for Emerging Professionals