

ATC Interview with Liz Waldock

For a start Liz, could you just tell our audience, who are you and what do you do?

My name is Liz Waldock, I work at SportsBet in the role of head of talent. I've been at SportsBet for 4 years, and that follows a career in the HR profession for the last 17 years working across many facets of HR, in generalist roles, and more generally in the talent segment.

You've been working in people/HR related roles for the last 7 years, have you always been passionate about working with talent, and managing direct contact with people? I know a lot of people aren't exactly a fan of those types of roles.

From my many years working in a business partner function and leading teams that help a business manage their people, I can see what happens at the tail end if you get recruitment wrong or don't manage your talent in the right way.

So for me, getting talent in, understanding what's right for an organisation and recruiting for that is key for setting the organisation up for success and understanding what an organisation wants from their talent.

I think many organisations don't spend enough time doing that and therefore as they recruit, they end up seeing that talent fall out the door.

So you've worked in this area a long time, what are some of the challenges you've faced throughout your career, are there any lessons you could possibly share with our audience?

There are many lessons, and I've often joked about writing a bit of a book about it because as an HR business partner and talent leader you see a lot happening day to day.

I guess one of the challenges of the role I'm in at the moment at SportsBet is we're in a market that is actually fierce for the talent we're after. We work in a particular environment and quite a progressive technology space so the talent we're after is most often in short supply and high demand and often there's areas where the actual capability hasn't really been developed yet.

So you're in a space where you're recruiting people with core capabilities but with the intent to keep them and develop them with the experiences they need to deliver what you need them to do. One of the challenges is making sure you have an environment in your organisation that attracts the talent that you want.

You need to be having that culture that aligns to the talent you want to bring in, having a very clear understanding of what it is you want to bring in, and clear about the capabilities and what you're expecting, and I think you also need to have a realistic expectation that you can't hire for experience. You're not going to get the capabilities you need, so your organisation needs to be able to develop people to what they need from a capability point

of view. Therefore when you hire you're hiring for potential, not for the experience of what they have delivered.

In terms of hiring for potential and building up the right culture and environment to sustain the kind of level of performance you want in a company, can you share with the audience some of the talent acquisition and management strategies at SportsBet, what are some of the strategies you use to attract and manage all this talent?

How to attract the right talent to an organisation, unless you have that infrastructure and a proposition that is genuine to the talent you're attracting, I think a lot of organisations focus on their employer brand to try and bring people into an organisation but they can't back it up with the culture they're promising or the experience they're promising.

I think it's really important to understand what those talent segments are that you're going after and what is important to the organisation to do with strategy. You need to understand what is important to that talent segment, why they coming to your organisation, what they want out of it in return for delivering to that organisation, and once you're clear about that you can design your people strategy to enable them to support that.

So build an environment that's supportive of that, have the right structures, processes, ways of working, and culture in place to attract that talent. Once you have all that then you can go out and market your brand and I think that's when you're more successful.

So you talked a lot about building up the culture in your company, can you share an example or two of how you went about doing that?

I think a good discussion that is happening in our organisation at the moment is that we're conscious that culture happens no matter what. So whether you design it or not, it's happening around you.

Smart organisations will design and be very active in building a culture that they want. That culture is made up of many things, being conscious of how you bring people in, of the values and the ways in which you work, being conscious of the systems, of how easy it is to get things done, and how process orientated you make the organisation is all part of how you build a culture. We're very conscious of the culture we have as part of our DNA and how we need to design it to enable us for the future. As an organisation you do need to spend time thinking about it, spend time being proactive to create the initiatives, the systems, and the structures to create that culture you want.

In your opinion, am I right to say that having great marketing and good employer brand is not exactly the key to hiring great talent?

It's the icing on the cake, it's kind of the final touch to bringing talent in.

I think you have to set your organisation up to enable the talent you're bringing in to reach their potential and you can only do that by setting up the right development, right culture, right environment, right systems, then you can go out and tell the world why they should come and work for the company you have and market it away.

I think there's some really great strategies around marketing your employer brand and I'm absolutely supportive and think it's a key part of it, but I think sometimes going out too early, making promises that end up unfulfilled, can actually do damage to your brand.

there's quite a bit of talk regarding diversity these days, is SportsBet doing anything in relation to that?

Yeah, it's a really big topic here at SportsBet as you can imagine, being in an industry that's focused on wagers, sports, and races, it's male dominated. That's coupled with being a tech company, which is a profession that is male dominated.

We're very conscious of that from a gender perspective, we're doing all we can to create an environment where everyone is inclusive and there's a mixed gender in our workforce.

We do have a programme of work which is two pronged and based on our behaviours and is inclusive and how we unlock each individual's potential no matter what sort of style or background they have. I think that's important and a really long process to build that capability in our leaders to lead in that way, and for that to filter down to every team member to be able to work and collaborate with people from different backgrounds and different styles.

We're also doing more work on the front end of our brand to demonstrate to people who we are and the type of culture and that it is open and inclusive and hoping to attract a wider more diverse group of people

We've explored focus groups to understand specifically for women why they joined SportsBet, and why would they stay with us. So we really understand what's important for them and what attracts them to the business.

If you could change one thing or enhance one aspect of talent acquisition at SportsBet what would that be?

There are a couple of things that I think I would like to evolve a little bit more. The first one is we've come a long way as a talent acquisition function at SportsBet. A few years ago it looked very different to the point that most of our recruitment was outsource to other agencies.

We do about 95% of our own recruitment in-house and the role of TA has transitioned to become not a process person, not a director of traffic, of getting people on board, of looking at interviews. The role of TA at SportsBet is the role of a specialist adviser and coach to our leaders and I guess for me over the next couple of years I'd like to see that evolve even more, that's a really important part and in some organisations I think talent and where they position talent acquisition in the organisation is not used to its best ability. I think talent acquisition specialists are very valuable to the organisation if they're leveraged in the right way.

The second thing I'd like to do more at SportsBet is building greater advocacy with our leaders. We have started a program to create leaders as our advocates in the business,

they're the fastest growing talent and we want them to go out and be talent magnets on the market.

Talent that we're looking for look up to the people in their field and we have a number of very talented people in the business. If we can use them to market SportsBet we will definitely have a better outcome in the future, so I think we want more leaders as advocates.

I guess the third thing is whilst we hire for potential, I'd like to find better ways in terms of how we can identify and validate that potential in individuals prior to them coming into the business. So we've implemented a number of ways in which we assess people during the process to really understand what their potential is and I think we can move further on that. That will really be the key to us bringing in some of these capabilities to move our business forward in areas that are undiscovered at the moment.

Could you provide a snapshot of what you'll be sharing at the upcoming ATC?

I have spoken a little bit about it here, but what I am passionate about is that I don't believe you can go out, put a job ad out and expect to get great talent. I believe you need to have the right culture in place, you need to understand what you're after and what you're recruiting for and then you can market your talent brand.

What I'd like to share at the conference is how SportsBet is doing that, specifically in the area of specialist talent. Specialist talent I think is getting more focused now, we have organisations that have very specialist skills required in the analytics space, in digital marketing, for how these products develop. Sportsbet has created some very specific programs to attract, regain and engage that specialist talent.