



# GREAT TEAMS

# PLAYBOOK

Insights from the ProcureCon  
Contingent Staffing 2026  
Leadership Roundtable

## Summary

This playbook is the result of a live working session held during ProcureCon Contingent Staffing 2026, where workforce, procurement, HR, and business leaders came together to answer a simple question: How are great teams actually built today?

Attendees participated in a series of small-group discussions guided by prompts on hiring, team dynamics, leadership, and the future of work. Conversations were recorded and synthesized into this playbook. In the spirit of the session, insights were grounded in real experiences. What is working? What isn't? Where are organizations struggling and where are they thriving?

Across every table, a consistent message emerged. The way most organizations build teams today is increasingly misaligned with what actually makes teams successful.

Traditional signals of quality such as degrees, titles, years of experience are losing relevance. New expectations around flexibility, transparency, and purpose are rising.

AI is reshaping how work gets done. And yet, many organizations are still hiring and managing as if nothing has changed.

The result is a growing gap between how teams are built and what actually makes them thrive.

In this playbook, you'll find key themes that emerged and quotes from the workshop that support those themes.

**“Great teams are not people who all think the same. Great teams are people who trust each other enough to think differently.”**

## Great Teams Are Built on Trust, Not Control

Early in the discussion, participants described a “great team” in familiar terms: productive, dependable, easy to manage. But that definition quickly broke down. A great team is not just a group that gets work done. It is a group that makes one another better.

Great teams communicate openly. They challenge each other. They take ownership. They create an environment where people can contribute honestly without fear. Participants repeatedly pointed out that many leaders confuse alignment with sameness.

“If everyone thinks like you, you never unlock the full potential of the team.”

Diversity of thought emerged as a defining trait, but only when paired with psychological safety:

“You can have a diverse team on paper. But if people don’t feel safe speaking up, you lose the value of that diversity.”

Trust is not abstract; it is built through everyday behaviors. Participants felt that explaining decisions, inviting disagreement, and treating people like adults in the process is essential: “You’re not asking for agreement. You’re asking for understanding.”

**“A good team gets the work done. A great team creates the kind of environment where people can disagree, contribute, and still trust each other.”**

## Some of the Best Candidates Are Often Being Screened Out

Hiring practices were the most consistently challenged part of the conversation. Participants described a system still built around degrees, titles, and rigid requirements. In other words, filters that often exclude highly capable people.

“We keep hiring for the person who already did the job somewhere else, instead of the person who could do the job here.”

Job descriptions themselves were called out as a major source of the problem:

“Requirements get embedded that aren’t actually necessary, and then we wonder why we’re not seeing the right candidates.”

Several dynamics surfaced repeatedly:

- Candidates self-selecting out if they don’t meet every requirement
- Managers requiring “four out of five” criteria and missing strong talent in the-gap
- Networks and pedigree acting as informal barriers to entry

“There are a lot of people who don’t even apply because they don’t think they’re qualified to walk in the door.”

The concept of **non-linear talent** came up often defined as people who changed careers, returned to work, or developed skills outside traditional pathways: “I have a degree in one thing and I’m doing something completely different. That’s most people now.”

Participants emphasized that organizations need to rethink what actually predicts success. Across many conversations, the same capabilities emerged:

- Problem-solving
- Communication
- Judgment
- Initiative
- Adaptability
- Ability to learn

**“The people who strengthen a team are not the ones with the best resume. They’re the ones who take ownership and make everyone around them better.”**

## Interviews Are a Weak Signal (and Everyone Knows It)

There was near-universal agreement that interviews are one of the least reliable tools organizations rely on the most. Multiple examples reinforced this point. In one example, an experienced financial planner candidate performed poorly in an interview but excelled in a casual team lunch:

“She got hired because of who showed up at lunch, not who showed up in the interview room.”

Veterans were cited as another example: highly capable individuals who struggle to translate their experience into traditional interview language: “They’ve done incredible things, but they’ve never had to explain it in an interview.”

**“You’re asking people to perform in a moment where they feel like everything is on the line.”**

**“Some people are great at interviewing and terrible at the job. Others are great at the job and terrible at interviewing.”**

Participants also highlighted the emotional reality of interviews. The group challenged the premise of interviews themselves. The conclusion was not that interviews should disappear, but that organizations must stop treating them as definitive.

“What percentage of interviews actually tell you what you need to know about someone?”

“Interviewing is a skill. It’s not the same thing as doing the job.”

## Potential Counts Over Pedigree

A major shift emerged in how leaders think about talent: from pedigree to potential. Participants described the growing importance of skills-based thinking, identifying what someone can do, not just where they have been:

“It’s not about the degree or the experience. It’s about the skills you’ve built and how you can apply them.”

This includes looking internally as well as externally: “Instead of asking who has done this before, ask who already has the skills to do it somewhere else in the organization.”

AI is accelerating this shift. As routine work becomes automated, the most valuable skills are becoming less technical and more human. Participants also noted the rise of self-directed learners—people who are actively upskilling ahead of job market demand.

“It’s not about running the report anymore. It’s about knowing what to do with it.”

**“We’re seeing people build skills for jobs that don’t even exist yet.”**

## The First 90 Days Define Success

Hiring decisions matter, but what happens next matters more. Participants consistently said that the first 90 days determine whether someone succeeds or fails. The difference is not onboarding materials. It is leadership behavior.

Employees succeed when managers:

- Provide clarity
- Explain the “why” behind decisions
- Create space for questions and mistakes
- Offer direct, honest feedback
- Delegate ownership

**“I wanted you to make the mistake so you could learn how to recover from it.”**

“People don’t need leaders to have every answer. They need leaders who will sit down and work through the problem with them.”

Mistakes, in particular, were reframed as a critical part of growth. Participants noted that fear-based environments actually increase mistakes: “You’re more likely to mess up when you’re scared. That’s when things snowball.”

## Managers Build (or Break) Teams

The strongest throughline across all discussions was the role of the manager. Managers determine whether teams feel safe, supported, and accountable, or disengaged and guarded:

“The people making hiring decisions are often the least supported people in the process.”

The most effective managers share a few consistent behaviors:

- They build trust early
- They create clarity
- They allow autonomy
- They focus on outcomes, not control

“It may not be how I would do it. But if the outcome is right, that’s what matters.”

Participants also emphasized the importance of feedback culture.

Structured feedback sessions, communication preferences, and tools like StrengthsFinder were cited as effective ways to build trust quickly: “The most effective team-building we did was just understanding how each person gives and receives feedback.”

**“I won’t be honest unless I feel safe. And if I’m not honest, the team isn’t getting the best version of me.”**

## Culture Is What You Tolerate

One of the most direct themes was the cost of tolerating the wrong behavior. Participants described the damage caused by high performers who undermine the team: “If someone makes everyone else worse, they cost more than they contribute.”

A phrase that emerged in discussion captured it clearly: Top performer, high toxicity. These individuals often remain in organizations too long.

The takeaway was simple: protecting the team must matter more than protecting individual output.

**“A trail of turnover usually leads back to one person no one wanted to deal with.”**

## The Future of Great Teams

Looking ahead, participants believe great teams will be built differently, but they also acknowledged a tension that many organizations are actively navigating.

Across several conversations, a pattern emerged. Organizations are moving along a spectrum: From contingent staffing, to outsourced or SOW-based models, and increasingly toward AI-driven solutions. This shift is often driven by cost, speed, and efficiency.

Participants expressed real friction with where this is leading: “We’re not managing people anymore. We’re managing problems, and usually short-term ones.”

Several attendees pointed out that while contingent models are not perfect, they still allow for some level of human connection, continuity, and team integration. As organizations move further toward outsourcing or automation, that connection can erode: “At least with contingent, you still have a person you can develop. With outsourcing or AI, you’re optimizing tasks, not building teams.”

Participants also highlighted the unintended consequences of these models. Strict tenure limits, short-term contracts, and constant turnover prevent people from ever fully learning the business, the culture, or the team dynamics.

The concern was not that these models are inherently wrong, but that they are often applied without considering their impact on team quality. This tension reinforces a larger truth that surfaced throughout the luncheon: great teams require time, trust, and investment. Models that prioritize short-term efficiency over long-term capability often undermine the very outcomes organizations are trying to achieve.

Some were clear that AI will continue to play a growing role, particularly in administrative work, coordination, and analysis. But they cautioned against viewing it as a replacement for human judgment and relationships.

The organizations that succeed will be the ones that balance efficiency with intentional team building, using contingent, outsourced, and AI solutions where they make sense, but not at the expense of trust, continuity, and development.

**“We keep making decisions based on cost, and then we’re surprised when the team doesn’t perform.”**

## Final Reflection

Across every conversation, both formal and informal, the same idea continued to circulate: great teams are not built by finding perfect people; they are built by creating the conditions where people can:

- Contribute honestly
- Learn quickly
- Take ownership
- Trust one another
- Grow over time

**“Great teams are built when someone decides to see potential in people before everyone else does.”**

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