

No Degree, No Experience, No Job? Tap Into Non-Traditional Talent

Description: Now is your time to start tapping into non-traditional candidates! We sat down with a non-traditional candidate herself, MRA Recruiting Business Partner, Amanda Derks, as she gave complete insight into how nontraditional candidates can be your greatest company assets, develop and improve business processes, and build a community of inclusion.

Listen to Discover:

- With the right candidate, anything can be taught. The top goals to finding the best candidate are their willingness to learn; be loyal to your company, customers, and goals; and most of all, fit within your team in the group that they'll be working with.
- According to Business North, an estimated one in three Americans have a criminal record. That's approximately 70 million people. These individuals of the 70 million have a 27 percent unemployment rate. That's a huge portion of the potential workforce that isn't even tapped into yet.
- Top five skills any successful candidate needs: confidence, positive attitude, communication skills, adaptability, and dependability.

Transcript:

Transcripts are computer generated -- not 100% accurate word-for-word.

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Intro

Hello hello, everybody, and welcome to 30 minute THRIVE, your go-to podcast for anything and everything HR, powered by MRA - The Management Association. Looking to stay on top of the ever-changing world of HR? MRA has got you covered. We'll be the first to tell you what's hot and what's not. I'm your host, Sophie Boler, and we are so glad you're here. Now it's time to THRIVE.

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Sophie Boler

Today, we're really going to chat all about the nontraditional candidate and the benefit of tapping into them as true talent. So luckily, I am here with an expert on that topic because she's a nontraditional candidate herself.

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Sophie Boler

She's had just about every diverse experience you could think of from working in the Department of Corrections to an admissions counselor to a teaching position, to now working as a recruiter. Amanda's broad experience really fits the description of a nontraditional candidate, and she's here to tell you more about it. So thanks, Amanda, for joining us today. I'm excited to learn more from you and chat with you today.

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Amanda Derks

Thanks for having me. I'm excited to talk about my experiences as well.

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Sophie Boler

Absolutely. Well, before we get started, let's start with a couple fun questions first. So I guess I want to know what you're currently binge-watching on TV or Netflix.

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Amanda Derks

Well, I'm constantly searching for the next great thing, right? So I recently just finished binge-watching "The Handmaid's Tale" on Hulu, and that was really dramatic, really a lot of twists and turns in the story and I can't wait for the next season to come out.

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Sophie Boler

Oh, good. I'll have to try that one out. What's that one about or what like genre does that fit under?

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Amanda Derks

I would say drama and kind of like a maybe sci-fi, but a little bit different than that because it's not like aliens or exploration of space, but more of a nonfiction, governmental, huge change.

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Sophie Boler

Oh, well sounds interesting! I'll have to check it out. My second question for you is a this-or-that question. So and that is: coffee or soda? How do you, how do you get yourself caffeinated in the morning or throughout the day?

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Amanda Derks

In the morning, I definitely prefer coffee and I have a specific coffee that I like. It's only sold at Costco. So that's the reason for my Costco membership, so that I can purchase my silver Colombian Kirkland brand coffee.

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Sophie Boler

That's funny. Let's dive into our topic for today, and that's nontraditional candidates. So we know that you are currently working as a recruiting business partner here at MRA, but you have a lengthy background of diverse experience prior to this position. So can you talk a little bit about your background?

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Amanda Derks

Sure. So I've always really had a great passion for working with people and making a difference in people's lives and working to improve the communities that I'm involved in. After high school, I went to college. I got a bachelor's degree in administration of justice from Marian University in all disciplines at the institution. I've always been an advocate for attitude and work ethic

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Amanda Derks

over time, in a seat or a role. And, you know, when I found myself in the position where I'm like I am like a subject matter expert in like everything I'm doing with the Department of Corrections. I feel like I know this from back, and I just was like really wanting more. And I started looking into my past and I realized that I've really kind of always been all over the place, like a jack of all trades.

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Amanda Derks

And I think that really puts me in a position where I can highlight that I'm adaptable and I'm able to move and transition and be successful in any position that I'm in. And recruiting seemed like a natural fit for me to transition to because of my personality, my positive attitude, my ability to build relationships with people from all backgrounds and all positions, and my take-no-prisoners attitude, pun intended.

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Amanda Derks

And so, you know, when I'm reaching out, I found this opportunity with MRA, and I just decided I was going to go for it. And I really sold my transferable skills. And luckily for me, the manager at MRA that hired me saw my sparkle and recognized the value that I would bring to the recruiting team and MRA as a whole.

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Amanda Derks

And I'll forever be grateful for her, for believing in me and giving me a chance to prove myself as a HR professional and being able to shine for all MRA members. And that being said, when I look at filling vacancies in any company that I'm working with, it's essential for me to convey to them to focus on those transferable skills—attitude and the drive and passion and ambition—as opposed to a specific number of years of experience or time in a role.

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Amanda Derks

Because with the right candidate, anything can be taught. The top goals to finding the best candidate is their willingness to learn; be loyal to your company, customers, and goals; and most of all, fit within your team in the group that they'll be working with.

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Sophie Boler

Absolutely. I like what you just said at the end where it's like skills can be taught but positive attitude and drive is, that can't be taught. That's like an inside motivation thing, so I really like that. But how has being a nontraditional candidate really helped or hindered you in the workplace?

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Amanda Derks

Most of all, I believe it really humbled me. I've learned so much and gained so much confidence in myself and the value that I have to offer as a professional. And I have to admit that I have more knowledge and expertise in recruiting than I even thought that I had before I started working in this field. Look at me now—I'm doing a podcast! I do have a little bit of imposter syndrome sitting here, but when I think about it, I really am a subject matter expert in the area of working with nontraditional candidates

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Amanda Derks

and second-chance work force, as I have 13½ years with that population and working to rehabilitate them, supporting them through programing to gain skills and knowledge and become better, more productive citizens when they release from incarceration. And ultimately, that helps promote and reduce recidivism.

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Sophie Boler

Absolutely. And we're hearing more and more that employers should really consider and turn to nontraditional candidates. So why is this?

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Amanda Derks

I mean, bottom line, nontraditional candidates offer new perspectives, a diversity of thought, skill, experience, and ideas. This is one of the greatest assets any company can tap into for development and improvement of business processes and for building a community of inclusion. I just worked with another recruiting business partner, Maddie Davis, and we just wrote an article on DEI and the benefits of internal and external motivation for companies, and that was just published in the November issue of MRA Edge.

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Amanda Derks

So go check that out for more information on DEI.

No Degree, No Experience, No Job? Tap Into Non-Traditional Talent

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Sophie Boler

Oh yes, I will. But kind of going along with that, as we've been saying and we've mentioned this in past podcasts, but we're in a "Great Sansdemic" time, where employers are really struggling to find candidates. So they need to be kind of extra creative in the way that they're recruiting. So do you have anything to comment about this as a recruiter yourself and being in a Great Sansdemic era?

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Amanda Derks

Yeah. So a nontraditional candidate is somebody that is not going to fit into a traditional job description or something that you would be searching for typically, based on education and experience. These candidates could be from backgrounds in other fields, like in the industrial production setting, somebody with welding or fabrication experience, they might be looking to transition to a CNC career. Also, a nontraditional candidate could fall into the category of somebody that is looking for a career change like I was, taking transferable skills and refocusing them into a new industry.

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Amanda Derks

Or it could be somebody that's returning to the workforce after some time away, like a stay-at-home mom or somebody that was recently incarcerated and looking to build their life back up in a more positive way.

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Sophie Boler

Mm hmm. So you definitely recommend that employers should start tapping into this group of people?

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Amanda Derks

Oh, absolutely. Especially in these times where it's so hard to find candidates that check every box that you're looking for. That would have been typically very easy in the past where you would have, you know, tens, hundreds of applicants that are overqualified for a position applying, across the board that's not the case right now. So opening up to looking at candidates that might have a different background than you would traditionally look for is absolutely a great way to start to find some qualified people for the position.

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Sophie Boler

And you just tapped a little bit into this now, but do you have any other advice that you can give to employers who are really struggling to find candidates, maybe they've considered nontraditional candidates, but are still, you know, struggling with that?

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Amanda Derks

Absolutely. My best advice would be just to really think big picture. So you want to be at 10,000 feet. It's really easy to get hyperfocus just because you're getting questions and a lot of pressure from all areas of business, from managers, from teams looking to field roles, emails for updates, you know, comments and the need for more labor is never ending.

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Amanda Derks

So, you know, when we're hearing things like, where has everyone gone? And there used to be people lining up for these jobs. You know, overall, it appears that there is a workplace shortage. There's a labor shortage, and there are people out there that are people looking for jobs. There are people in positions looking to accelerate their career or change careers, or reenter the workforce.

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Amanda Derks

And those categories of candidates just really, I find, are not being tapped into like they could be.

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Sophie Boler

Absolutely.

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Amanda Derks

And also, when employers are considering, you know, tapping into candidates who are currently in or recently released from the custody of the Department of Corrections, there are tons of factors to consider, especially if you've never employed people from this category before, okay? So really have a discussion with, you know, a top-level, your team hiring managers and decide will this population of candidates add value to the company and why? What's the reason?

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Amanda Derks

Why do we need this? Is this the direction where we want to go? Because when you when you do that, you might have to revisit policies that you have in place, SOPs, training programs. You may need to develop new training programs because you'll be accepting people that might not have the exact skills, check every box that you're looking for.

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Amanda Derks

You know, and you have to think about flexibility in the options because people from the second-chance workforce are going to often have commitments to the Department of Corrections still, whether if they're on probation or parole. So they would have treatment groups, meeting with their probation/parole officer, you know, other types of requirements and guidelines that part of their, you know, their probation and parole rules and agreement.

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Amanda Derks

And how are you going to support that? Are you going to offer, you know, flexible scheduling? Are they going to be able to make up hours that they would miss because they have these appointments and are then is that going to entail extra steps in the hiring process? Are you going to require extra references, creating a contact and starting a relationship with probation officers or staff in the community corrections offices?

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Amanda Derks

And how is this going to affect your current workforce? What types of support, what type of information are you going to share with them? Obviously, when you would hire somebody with a criminal history, they don't come in with a sign on their back. But as people start to talk, they might see a trend. And, you know, sometimes concerns might come up and you need to preplan and be ready to respond, to be consistent with your response, to communicate down to, at all levels, to know what expectations are in those situations.

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Amanda Derks

You know, and with that being said, in order to tap into this workforce, you could start building relationships with local community corrections offices, staff and employees, also with local jails that are close to your facility. You know, build that relationship. You could even start to employ workers through Huber program before they're released from county jail or work-release programs,

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Amanda Derks

before they were released from prison. You know, and there are a couple of resources that we can share with any listeners that might require that through the Wisconsin Department of Corrections page, there's a resource of a list of all the probation/parole offices and also the Wisconsin Center System Information and contacts, where you can look at people to start promoting and building those relationships.

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Amanda Derks

Also, there is a federal income tax credit that is available for companies that do employ people from nontraditional candidates. So, you know, if they're convicted of a felony and released from prison for that felony within 1 year, the data hire, you're eligible for this tax credit. Then there's a long list of categories for the nontraditional second-chance workforces, you know, such as families that are receiving temporary and long-term assistance, veterans, people in a vocational rehabilitation program, food stamp recipients, SSI recipients, and people that are on long-term unemployment benefits.

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Amanda Derks

So it's really just, it's really important for employers to be connected to these resources as well as the candidate so that there is a way for them to meet in the middle and get connected to increase employment.

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Sophie Boler

That's some great information and great advice for employers. And here at MRA, we do have volunteer opportunities through our DEI group I lead to volunteer on doing mock interviews with incarcerated individuals, which I think is just a great opportunity and great volunteer opportunity. And you kind of mentioned some of those. But we did talk about advice for employers.

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Sophie Boler

But now I want to move to any advice you have for the nontraditional candidates themselves. So do you have any motivation or words of advice for nontraditional candidates to really boost their chances of getting the job they want?

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Amanda Derks

Absolutely. You know, like I just mentioned, take advantage of all the resources that are available to you. Make connections with local job centers, search for programs and grants for a second-chance workforce, nontraditional workers. Look at the employers that are in your target or demographic that are part of these programs and reach out to them. Look into tech college programs and grants. There are bountiful amounts of trades careers right now that are just begging for people.

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Amanda Derks

So if you could get in and get some education to learn some of some skills that would benefit employers, that's going to make you more valuable in the market. And as you mentioned, participating in mock interviews—that is so important. I mean, being able to be confident in what your strengths are, what you would need to work on, and knowing specifics about your employment history and being able to talk about what you've done and what you can do and what you want to do.

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Amanda Derks

I can't tell you how many people that I talk to that they can't remember where they worked or when or what they you know, they might remember a little bit about what they did there. But before you're going to actually participate in an interview, practice, practice, practice. Know what you're going to say because people are going to ask you the same thing.

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Amanda Derks

If they want to hire you for a job, they want to know what have you done and what can you do for us. So at minimum, be able to be confident in your response to that? Put yourself in a position to be successful, Be honest, be candid with interviewers and employers. Most employers do background checks. So if you're coming from a previous incarceration or you have a criminal history, just be comfortable talking about that because— and know that that's okay.

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Amanda Derks

There is, there was an article posted by Business North in October of 2022, and it stated that an estimated one in three Americans have a criminal record. So that's approximately 70 million people. These individuals of the 70 million have a 27 percent unemployment rate. So that is a huge portion of the potential workforce that isn't even tapped into yet.

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Amanda Derks

So if we can get word out to this workforce and get them ready and eager and wanting to work and put forth effort to be a good employee and maintain stable employment, that's going to be a great asset to this, the vanishing labor force that we're in right now. And with that, you know, you can, like I said, look for programs.

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Amanda Derks

So there's a Pathway Home 2 grant. And this program starts working with incarcerated individuals that have 20 to 180 days left to serve in home, incarceration, jail or Huber. So that's just another example of a program that employers can look into and candidates can look into to get connected.

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Sophie Boler

It sounds like there's a lot of great resources that they can really get connected to, like you said, and take advantage of. That fact that you said, by the way, it's very shocking. It's like a very, I don't know, eye opening.

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Amanda Derks

It is, it is.

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Sophie Boler

But as we wrap up here, I guess just kind of looking at nontraditional or not, what are the top five skills that any successful candidate needs today? I mean, we see the recruiting world changing every other month.

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Sophie Boler

So what is your top five skills that you think are the most important?

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Amanda Derks

So these top five skills, attributes that I'm going to share I think are important for anybody, whether you're interviewing for a production line position or the CEO of Fortune 500 company, right? You need to have confidence—confidence in yourself, confidence in your ability, and confidence to do a job and make a difference. Positive attitude. Being positive, smiling, and having people feel welcomed when you're around.

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Amanda Derks

It speaks volumes and that's what employers are looking for. They want somebody that is going to create a culture of inclusion and positivity. Communication skills, being able to communicate day-to-day functions, being able to communicate issues and problems that you may be having that would affect your ability to come to work or do work, changes in your situation, and being able to communicate with coworkers, supervisors, everybody.

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Amanda Derks

So important. Adaptability and flexibility. So the only constant in this world is change. So being able to embrace that, see the positive in things, and move forward is absolutely a necessary trait. And strong work ethic and dependability go hand in hand, in my opinion. If you show up for work and you work hard and you produce results and you're being productive and helping out your employer, that's always going to be noticed and it's hopefully appreciated.

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Sophie Boler

That's a great list of five. I feel like we need to like, pin that on the wall. But we're running out of time for today, unfortunately. I wish we could talk about this for hours, but thank you so much for joining us today and really sharing your story, your expertise, and your advice to employers out there, and nontraditional candidates when it comes to nontraditional candidates.

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Sophie Boler

So if you liked our chat and topic today, make sure to share this episode, like, comment, or leave a review. We really appreciate that. Amanda's email and her LinkedIn profile are in the show notes, so if you'd like to connect with her, I really encourage you to do so. I'm sure she'd be happy to chat with you.

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Sophie Boler

Otherwise, thanks for tuning in today and we will see you next week. Thank you again, Amanda, for joining us today.

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Amanda Derks

Thank you for having me.

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Outro

And that wraps up our content for this episode. Be sure to reference the show notes, where you can sign up to connect for more podcast updates. Check out other MRA episodes on your favorite podcast platform. And as always, make sure to follow MRA's 30 minute THRIVE so you don't miss out. Thanks for tuning in and we'll see you next Wednesday to carry on the HR conversation.