

INSIDE THE TALENT CIRCLE

FALL 2026



Talent Strategy Is Moving Closer to the Operating Core of the Firm

Talent leaders are navigating more than people programs. They're helping firms work through partner alignment, redesign the HR function for greater strategic impact and build compensation systems that reinforce where the firm is headed next. The common thread is clear: HR is increasingly being asked to help turn firm strategy into behaviors, structures and decisions people can actually execute.

SIGNALS FROM THE ROOM

SIGNAL 1 Partner alignment is becoming a Talent priority

Firm transformation depends on more than leadership agreeing with a decision. Partners also need to understand what changes for them, commit to the new direction and lead their teams consistently. As firms rethink AI, service models and how work gets done, Talent leaders are playing a bigger role in preparing partners to lead through change.

SIGNAL 2 The HR operating model is being redesigned

There is no universal formula for the “right” HR team. Firm size is only one factor. Scope, complexity, work model, learning and development responsibilities, payroll ownership and the strategic expectations placed on HR all change what the function needs to look like. The focus is shifting from headcount ratios toward building the structure the firm actually needs.

SIGNAL 3 Compensation is becoming a strategic system

Compensation decisions increasingly connect market data, performance, transparency, manager capability and firm strategy. Firms are moving beyond simply setting ranges or annual increases and building more deliberate systems for how pay decisions are made, communicated and refined over time.

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3 THINGS TALENT LEADERS ARE TESTING

- ✓ **Partner training built around real challenges**
Using live firm issues to help partners debate decisions, build alignment and leave with clear implementation steps.
- ✓ **More strategic HR team structures**
Rethinking roles, responsibilities and where work sits so Talent leaders have greater capacity to focus on strategic priorities.
- ✓ **More intentional compensation systems**
Connecting market data, performance and incentives with clearer manager guidance and communication around pay decisions.

WHAT WE'RE HEARING

Agreement is not alignment

A partner saying "I can live with this" is different from being prepared to champion the decision. Firms need mechanisms that surface concerns before implementation, not after.

Structure should follow the work

The question is becoming less about the ideal HR-to-employee ratio and more about what the Talent team owns, what capabilities the firm needs and where capacity is constrained.

Pay communication matters as much as pay design

Market data and ranges matter, but employees experience compensation personally. Transparency, fairness and the quality of manager conversations can either strengthen trust or create more confusion.

TAKE IT BACK TO YOUR FIRM



Where are your partners agreeing to change, but not yet aligned on what it means in practice?



Which responsibilities truly require your Talent team's expertise, and which could be handled differently to create more capacity for strategic work?



Where could AI take routine work off your Talent team's plate, and where is human judgment still essential?

CONNECT THE DOTS

The Talent function is increasingly sitting at the intersection of people and firm execution. Partner behavior affects whether change sticks. HR structure affects whether Talent leaders have the capacity to operate strategically. Compensation affects whether the behaviors the firm says it values are actually reinforced.

Inside the Talent Circle, leaders can compare how other firms are approaching those decisions, pressure-test what they're building and learn from peers working through many of the same challenges.

The next question isn't simply what HR should own. It's where Talent leadership can have the greatest impact on where the firm is going. Schedule a discovery call to join the conversation.

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