

FOR TALENT ACQUISITION LEADERS

# The Bandwidth Problem No One Talks About in TA

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A practical guide for TA leaders navigating the gap between hiring plans and team capacity — and what to do about it.

## THE PROBLEM

# The Elephant in the Room

Every TA leader knows the feeling. The hiring plan comes down from the business. It's ambitious. Your team is lean. And nobody wants to have the honest conversation about whether your team is actually resourced to deliver it.

So instead of having that conversation, you absorb the load. Recruiters run hot. Quality suffers. Roles stay open longer than they should. And eventually someone asks why time-to-fill is trending in the wrong direction — even though the real answer is that the team was never sized for this volume.

**The bandwidth problem isn't a performance problem. It's a **planning problem** — and it's more common than anyone lets on.**

This guide is for TA leaders who recognize the pattern and want a clearer framework for talking about it, quantifying it, and doing something about it.

**10-15**

OPEN REQS THE  
AVERAGE RECRUITER  
CAN WORK AT FULL  
QUALITY

**\$500-  
\$2K+**

ESTIMATED DAILY COST  
OF A SINGLE OPEN ROLE,  
DEPENDING ON THE  
POSITION

**42 days**

AVERAGE TIME-TO-FILL  
ACROSS INDUSTRIES,  
PER SHRM DATA

These numbers compound fast. Three open senior roles at \$1,000/day, sitting open six weeks: that's over \$125,000 in lost productivity before you touch a single recruiting cost. The bandwidth problem is expensive — it's just rarely visible where it needs to be.

## ROOT CAUSE

# Why TA Teams Are Always a Beat Behind

TA capacity gaps aren't accidents. They're the predictable result of how organizations think about — and budget for — recruiting.

### **Headcount is sized for steady state, not growth.**

Most companies size their TA team based on last year's hiring volume. When the business accelerates — after a funding round, an acquisition, a market shift — the hiring plan outgrows the team. That gap isn't a failure. It's math.

### **Hiring forecasts are almost always wrong.**

Business leaders submit headcount plans with confidence. In practice, roles get added mid-quarter, priorities change, new functions emerge. TA teams are left chasing a moving target with a static team.

### **Reductions leave a lasting mark.**

After layoffs or freezes, TA teams shrink to match lower activity. When the business turns back on, it's rarely gradual — it's an immediate surge that the smaller team has to absorb.

#### A COMMON PATTERN

*"We just came out of a freeze. Our team is 30% smaller than it was 18 months ago, but we're being asked to close more reqs than we ever have."*

### **Adding full-time recruiters is slow and costly.**

You're looking at 90–120 days before a new hire is productive. If the surge is temporary, you've added permanent headcount to solve a temporary problem.

**The honest version of the conversation no one wants to have:**  
**"We can hire X people with this team. You're asking for Y.**  
**What do you want us to do?"**

# The Three Coping Mechanisms (And Why They Fall Short)

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When bandwidth runs out, most TA teams reach for one of three responses. Each has real costs that often go unaccounted for.

## 1. Stretch the existing team

The most common response: carry more reqs. It avoids difficult conversations — until quality degrades. Pipeline slows, screening gets shallow, candidate experience drops. Burnout follows. And losing a strong recruiter mid-surge is one of the most expensive TA outcomes possible.

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## 2. Hire more full-time recruiters

The cleaner long-term answer, but rarely right short-term. You're looking at 90-120 days before a new hire is productive. By then, the surge may be over. You've added permanent cost to solve a temporary problem.

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## 3. Send roles to an agency

Agencies provide speed — at a cost. Traditional fees run 18-25% of first-year salary. For a \$120,000 role, that's up to \$30,000 per placement. Beyond the price, TA leaders consistently flag inconsistent quality, limited transparency, and poor cultural alignment.

### THE PATTERN ACROSS ALL THREE

*Each of these approaches treats the capacity problem as a volume problem. The real issue is a shape problem: the demand isn't uniform, and the response needs to match the shape of the need — not just the size of it.*

# Thinking About TA Capacity in Tiers

Before you can solve a bandwidth problem, you need to name it clearly — mapping actual hiring demand against actual team capacity, and being honest about where the gaps are.

A simple tiering model helps. Most open roles fall into one of three categories:

TIER	CHARACTERISTICS	RIGHT SOURCE
<b>Steady-State</b>	Predictable volume, recurring roles, your team knows the profile well	INTERNAL TEAM
<b>Hard-to-Fill</b>	Niche skill sets, competitive talent pools, roles where sourcing depth matters	INTERNAL + TOOLING
<b>Surge</b>	Temporary spikes, new market entry, post-acquisition growth, post-freeze reactivation	FLEXIBLE CAPACITY

Flexible capacity makes the most sense for the Surge tier specifically — matching external support to a scoped, time-limited need. Not replacing your team. Just filling the shape of the gap.

## Four questions to run the honest assessment

- 1 What is our realistic team capacity in reqs?** Not what people carry — what they can work with quality.
- 2 How many of our open reqs are in the Surge tier?** Time-sensitive, high-volume, or in areas where the team lacks depth.
- 3 What is the business cost of those roles sitting open?** Even a rough estimate changes the conversation.
- 4 How long will this surge last?** A 90-day sprint vs. a structural shift requires a different response.

**The goal isn't to have an answer for every capacity challenge. The goal is to stop pretending there isn't a capacity challenge in the first place.**

# When Flexible Capacity Makes the Most Sense

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Flexible recruiting capacity — whether through contract recruiters, embedded support, or AI-assisted recruiting services — isn't the right answer for every situation. Here's where it earns its keep.

## Post-funding growth

You've closed a round. The board wants headcount fast. Your team is sized for where you were, not where you're going. Flexible capacity bridges the gap while you build the right internal structure.

## Acquisition integration

M&A creates immediate, concentrated hiring needs — often in unfamiliar functions or geographies. Targeted support keeps the integration on track without permanently overbuilding your team.

## Seasonal or cyclical surges

If your peaks are predictable, your capacity planning should be too — including a flexible layer for the high-water mark.

**Signs it's time:** Roles aging past 60 days without quality pipeline. Recruiter desks consistently above 15–18 reqs. Hiring managers escalating. Time-to-fill trending up quarter over quarter. None of these mean your team is failing — they mean it's past its effective capacity threshold.

## New market or function launch

When you're hiring for profiles your team hasn't recruited before, specialized support that already understands those talent pools shortens time-to-quality dramatically.

## Post-freeze reactivation

Freezes compress TA teams. Reactivations accelerate demand. The gap is widest in the first 60–90 days after a freeze lifts — exactly when targeted external support pays off most.

## Roles where bandwidth is thin

Sometimes it's not overall volume — it's that specific role types require sourcing depth the team hasn't built. Technical, executive, or niche roles benefit from dedicated focus.

# Start With the Honest Conversation

The bandwidth problem doesn't fix itself. But it also doesn't require a dramatic overhaul. Most TA leaders who work through this framework find the real need is more targeted — and more solvable — than they expected.

Here's a simple starting point for the conversation with your leadership team:

- > **Name the gap.** How many reqs are in your Surge tier? What's your team's realistic capacity against those specifically?
- > **Quantify the cost.** A rough daily cost-per-open-role estimate changes how leadership thinks about TA investment.
- > **Separate temporary from permanent.** Not every capacity gap needs a permanent solution. Matching the response to the duration of the need is where most teams leave money on the table.
- > **Evaluate your options honestly.** Stretch, hire, or flex. Each has a real cost. The question is which one you're willing to absorb — and for how long.

## SEEKOUT SPOT

# Don't Want to Absorb the Surge Yourself?

SeekOut Spot is an AI recruiting service — not an agency, not an RPO — that sources, engages, and screens candidates on your behalf. It delivers interview-ready pipeline in 4-14 days, typically at least 50% lower cost than a traditional agency. No retainer lock-in. No opacity.

If your team is carrying more reqs than it can realistically close, it's worth a conversation.

Learn more at [seekout.com/spot](https://seekout.com/spot)