



From a crisis comes a calling.

After spending over a decade in HR, Mike Backus, Associate Director of Talent Acquisition at Verizon, has navigated his fair share of change within the workforce. However, never in his career did he anticipate applying his background and skills to mitigate the largest labor shift since WWII sparked by a global health crisis.

With COVID-19, approximately 22 million jobs in the U.S. have been lost, with over 10 million jobs yet to be recovered. Realizing no one company can address the rising unemployment rate alone, CHROs from Verizon, Accenture, Lincoln Financial Group, and ServiceNow joined forces to launch People +Work Connect, a coalition to connect people to work and work to people.

As soon as Verizon announced the initiative, Mike and several of his teammates raised their hands to help. No matter the size or scale of the challenge, he was on a mission to get people back to work, even if it meant working a second shift while juggling his day-to-day responsibilities.

“The only limitations are our own imaginations,” Mike said. “The pandemic required us all to lean in and think differently about how we remain people-centric as employers in the face of adversity. People +Work Connect is creating a community of leaders and companies that will be better prepared to respond to the challenges of the future.”

As an Enrollment Champion, Mike connects both sides of the job equation by working with companies that are either reducing their workforce or hiring at scale. His team adopted the speed and agility of first responders, standing up an internal microsite in weeks to facilitate the process and exchange information. With 10 companies to date, Talent + Connect serves as a centralized resource to flag job opportunities with unemployed or furloughed employees. Once the system was in place, the next step was building relationships with HR leaders to help them take full advantage of the platform and the constellation of resources in development.

A bright spot of the pandemic is getting leaders to think differently about the future of work. The greatest area of opportunity, according to Mike, is the intersectionality of building bridges across companies that would otherwise not work together. While People +Work Connect was born out of an urgent need, Mike is certain this model of cross-industry collaboration is here to stay.

“My mindset around talent has definitely changed. Building a more resilient workforce requires us to build strong relationships across industries and to think about transferable skills in a different way,” he explained. “The platform highlights flexibility and adaptability in ways that hadn’t been required before the pandemic. That collaboration and talent aperture will become the new norm moving forward.”

With COVID-19 as part of the foreseeable future, Mike's top advice for users is to stay engaged as the platform continues to evolve and grow into a vibrant community. And whatever the future brings, Mike remains steadfast in helping people get back to work so that they can emerge from this challenge stronger and more resilient than ever.

"With People + Work Connect, I am working alongside partners that share our commitment and collective responsibility to make a difference during the greatest test of our time. Showing up was never a question because HR professionals are wired to extend a helping hand no matter the situation. We run towards the crisis, and it's important to remember that help is here whenever you need it."