

**THE NEW
TALENT
PLAYBOOK**
Podcast

Action Kit

**Steady Leadership
in an AI-Driven
World**

Featuring Ryan Paugh

Episode 5 - Season 5

By Rob Levin, Creator of [Thenewtalentplaybookpodcast.com](https://thenewtalentplaybookpodcast.com)
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You just listened to Ryan Paugh, publisher of Senior Executive and co-founder of community.co, reveal how forward-thinking leaders are navigating AI adoption, building hybrid teams, and creating cultures where curiosity drives growth. **Ryan's message is clear: the truth lies in the middle.** This playbook will help you apply Ryan's principles to build a more resilient, adaptable, and human-centered organization.

1. Find the Middle Ground with AI

Ryan emphasizes that SMBs should resist both extremes: going "crazy off the deep end" with AI or ignoring it entirely. Both are "tragic missteps." Instead, adopt slowly and safely, helping your team experiment within clear boundaries.

Your AI Adoption Stance:

- We're racing to adopt every AI tool we read about on social media
- We're heads down, ignoring AI completely
- We're experimenting in small, calculated ways
- We're encouraging teams to adopt slowly within safeguardrails
- We haven't started thinking about AI at all

Myth-Busting Exercise:

Common Myth in Your Team	How You Will Address It
<i>Example: "Using AI is cutting corners"</i>	<i>Clarify that AI is a tool, like Excel</i>

What is one bite-sized AI experiment you can encourage this month? (e.g., use AI to draft meeting summaries, generate first-draft emails, or analyze data patterns)

2. Over-Communicate to Win

As a remote and distributed company across 35 states and multiple continents, Ryan's team has learned that communication is more important than anything. What feels like over-communicating is actually exactly what's needed. Transparency, alignment, and reinforcing vision across departments keep everyone rowing in the same direction.

Communication Health Check:

Rate your organization on these statements. (1 = Rarely, 5 = Consistently):

Connection Metric	Score (1-5)
Our team knows how their role impacts other departments	
We clearly communicate company vision and goals regularly	
Remote/distributed team members feel as informed as in-office staff	
Our leadership team is aligned and "singing the same tune"	
People don't get mad about lack of information—they feel heard	

Total Score (out of 25): _____

If you scored below 15: Pick one area and commit to communicating about it twice this week.

What will you communicate, and how?

3. Build Your Hybrid Talent Model

Ryan's team includes full-time employees, part-time contributors, contractors, and nearshore talent. This isn't chaos—it's strategic. Different people contribute in different ways, and their compensation and work-life blend match their goals and lifestyles. The result? Better talent, better satisfaction, and longer retention.

Design Your Hybrid Talent Mix:

Think about the roles in your business. For each, identify what type of contributor would be the best fit and why.

Role/Function	Best Contributor Type	Why This Works
<i>Example: Content Creation</i>	<i>Part-time/Contract</i>	<i>High-quality output in spurts</i>

Work-Life Blend Reality Check:

Ryan says work-life balance "means something different for different people in your business. And that's okay." Are you being flexible enough?

- We offer flexible schedules to accommodate different lifestyles
- We have a mix of full-time, part-time, and contract contributors
- We partner with agencies/nearshore teams for specialized work
- We tailor benefits and compensation to different contributor types
- Our middle management layer is strong enough to coordinate this diversity

What's one change you can make to better support diverse work-life blends?

4. Integrate, Don't Just Outsource

Ryan has worked with nearshore talent for over a dozen years. His key to success? Making them feel like part of the team, not a separate vendor. The moment you create "layers of project management" between you and the people doing the work, you've lost.

Integration Scorecard: If you work with nearshore, offshore, or contract talent, rate how well they're integrated. (1 = Not at all, 5 = Fully integrated)

Statement	Score (1-5)
They are included in team meetings and updates	
They feel connected to our company mission and values	
There are no unnecessary "layers" between us and them	
They receive recognition and appreciation like in-house staff	
We can scale them up or down as our needs evolve	

Total Score (out of 25): _____

If below 15: Your nearshore team may feel like outsiders. What's one action you can take this week to make them feel more like insiders?

Strategic Benefits of Nearshore Talent: Ryan highlights these key benefits. Which matters most to your business right now?

- Scale up or down more quickly with less risk
- Access specialized skills without long-term hiring commitments
- Focus full-time staff on generalist/strategic roles
- Partner with firms that handle recruiting, benefits, and HR
- Reduce recruiting costs and time-to-hire

"You literally just became my favorite person. Let's figure out how to get you all of that information, just feed that curiosity."

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