

TALENT BRAND ARCHITECTURE OVERVIEW

ARCH ITEC TURE

TOOLKIT

- ✓ What Talent Brand Architecture Is
- ✓ The Three Layers Framework
- ✓ How to Build Each Layer
- ✓ The 5 Tests Every Architecture Must Pass

*You can't build a brand that holds
without building it on truth.*

Most companies skip the structure.

“Employer branding isn’t marketing. It’s the alignment between promise and experience.”

They write an EVP, launch a careers page, run a campaign, and call it done. Six months later the recruiting team is frustrated, new hires are confused, and the gap between what was promised and what people experience on Tuesday afternoon is eroding trust faster than any campaign can rebuild it.

The problem isn’t the brand. It’s the missing architecture beneath it.

Architecture, not marketing

1

Talent Brand Architecture is the structural foundation beneath your employer brand — built from truth, not aspiration.

Bottom-up, not top-down

2

Vision first. Pillars second. EVP last. Most companies do it backward — which is why it falls apart.

Consistent from promise to experience

3

What you tell candidates must match what new hires find in week three. Architecture is what makes that hold.

Three layers. One direction. Built from the bottom up.

Most companies start with the EVP and work backward. That's why it doesn't hold.

01 · TOP

EMPLOYER VALUE PROPOSITION

The single-minded expression of why someone would choose you — and stay. Crafted last, not first.

02 · MIDDLE

BRAND PILLARS (3–5)

The 3–5 themes that are specifically and provably true about your culture. From research, not brainstorming.

03 · FOUNDATION

EMPLOYER BRAND VISION

What you're all doing here and why. Your most attainable ideal culture. Build this first — everything cascades from it.

↑ Build from here

Start with Vision.

Your vision is not your mission statement. It is not your values wall. It is the answer to the question no one asks but everyone feels: What are we all doing here, and why does it matter?

What is your highest aspirational yet genuinely attainable culture?

Not a destination — a direction. The kind of place you're actively building, not just describing.

What do leaders believe about work that employees can actually feel?

Leadership values only become cultural truth when they show up in decisions, not decks.

If a new hire fully lived this vision after one year — what would be different?

Concrete and behavioral, not abstract. 'They'd feel trusted to make decisions without approval chains.'

Discover Your Brand Pillars.

Pillars are not values. They are the 3–5 themes that are specifically and provably true about your culture. They come from research — not brainstorming.

HOW TO FIND YOUR REAL PILLARS

- 1 Run external employee focus groups — not internal surveys. An outside facilitator gets the truth employees adapt out of sharing.
- 2 Ask: ‘What would you tell a friend considering working here that wouldn’t be in the job posting?’ That question bypasses the corporate script.
- 3 Look for the ‘but.’ Every company value is followed by a ‘but.’ That ‘but’ is where your real culture lives.
- 4 Test: Could our competitor claim this exact thing? If yes, keep digging until you find what only you can say.

GENERIC vs. SPECIFIC

✗ Innovation

✓ We ship MVPs in weeks, not months

✗ Collaboration

✓ Anyone can veto a decision if they see risk

✗ Work-life balance

✓ No meetings before 10am or after 4pm

✗ Growth

✓ We promote internally before hiring outside

Craft Your Employer Value Proposition.

Most EVPs die in PowerPoint. Beautiful slides. Clear pillars. Perfect messaging. Then nothing changes — because they were aspirational, not architectural.

THE CORE QUESTION

“What do I get in exchange for my talent, time, and energy — that I couldn’t get somewhere else?”

True today

Not aspirational. Grounded in what employees actually experience on a Wednesday — not what leadership hopes will be true.

Specific to you

Pass the competitor test: could they claim this exact thing? If yes, rewrite it. Generic language makes generic impressions.

Credible to employees

Show it to 15 employees before publishing. If they roll their eyes — even slightly — it’s not ready.

Activatable daily

If your managers can’t use it to make decisions, it’s decoration. Not infrastructure.

5 Tests Every Architecture Must Pass.

Before you publish anything — run your architecture against these. If any answer is 'not yet,' you're not done.

	TEST · WHAT IT CHECKS	PASSES?
01	Is it TRUE? Evidence-based from employee research. Would employees say this is accurate right now — not aspirational?	<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N
02	Is it DISTINCT? Could this only be said about your organization? Or could three competitors say the exact same thing?	<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N
03	Is it MEANINGFUL? Does this resonate with the talent you most need — not just those already comfortable here?	<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N
04	Does it HOLD? Does it survive the first Monday? First month? End of year one, when the shine wears off?	<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N
05	Can you DELIVER? Can you operationalize every element across every touchpoint — job posting to manager conversation?	<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N

Signs Your Architecture Isn't Holding.

If you can skip your employer brand in daily manager conversations without anyone noticing, you don't have architecture. You have a document.

Your EVP lives only on the careers page



If it's not in job postings, onboarding, manager conversations, and internal comms — it's a marketing asset, not a brand.

New hires are surprised by the culture



Early turnover and 90-day confusion are almost always a promise/reality gap. Architecture didn't connect recruitment to experience.

Employees wouldn't recognize themselves in your brand content



If current employees look at your careers page and think 'that's not us,' candidates will find out. Usually on their first Monday.

Your pillars sound like everyone else's



'Innovation. Collaboration. Excellence.' These words appear on thousands of careers pages and differentiate no one. Specificity is architecture.

Leadership and employees describe the culture differently



This is a gap between vision and reality. Until you close it — by changing the promise or changing the reality — your brand can't hold.

Five Moves. In Order. Don't Skip Ahead.

Assemble the right room

Cross-functional team confirmed:

1

HR, Marketing, Communications, and at least two business leaders. Employer branding fails when it lives in one function.

Define the business problem you're solving

Primary challenge:

2

Losing candidates? New hires leaving in year one? Name the specific problem — architecture is built to solve it.

Plan your research before your brand

Research plan:

3

Who do you need to hear from? Current employees. Recent hires. People who left. External research reveals what surveys miss.

Build bottom up: Vision → Pillars → EVP

Target launch date:

4

Resist starting with the EVP. It's the most visible element — and the most likely to fail if not built on solid vision and real pillars.

Test before you publish anything

Testing group:

5

Show it to 15 employees: 'Does this sound like us?' Show recent hires: 'Does this match what you found?' If not — revise.

Your talent brand is only as strong as its weakest touchpoint.

Architecture is what makes the whole thing hold.

We help companies build Talent Brand Architecture — employer brands that align promise with experience across recruitment, culture, and retention.

Get a Free Brand Audit →

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