

## Q&A with Chris Atiyah, CEO of Engtal Inc. a Recruitment Firm specializing in providing Engineers to Highly Regulated Industries including Automotive, Aerospace, Medical Devices, and Aviation Markets



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**Interview conducted by:**  
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CEOCFO Magazine

**CEOCFO: Mr. Atiyah, would you tell us the focus at Engtal and how you provide engineering talent?**

**Mr. Atiyah:** Engtal is a recruitment firm who specializes in providing engineering recruitment services to industries that are highly regulated, such as companies within the automotive space, aerospace, medical devices, and aviation markets. That is actually placing the engineers that build cars, planes, medical devices and that sort of thing. In terms of how we provide engineering talent, we have consultants that are focused on building networks in specific engineering fields. We pride ourselves on being able to

provide the kind of talent that more generalist recruitment firms are not able to find and we do that by focusing our consultants in specific niches within the engineering field. When some of our clients have a need for a specific skill set they rely on us because we have good networks in the field.

**CEOCFO: Do most companies recognize the need for specialized recruiting and engineering?**

**Mr. Atiyah:** Yes, certainly the ones that we have seen. The types of people that we place are very business critical so they are the ones that are building these products, they are also high in demand with a lot of other engineering companies, so the types of candidates that we place are not going to be applying for jobs, they are not going to be with Indeed and Career Builder and things like. When you are a large organization you have a lot of other stuff to do so those organizations really do have a need for the types of talent that we are able to find which is why they lean on us to find them.

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**CEOCFO: It is always difficult to find good talent and specialized talent and I would venture to say that with the labor market today as it is, it is even more difficult. How do you do it?**

**Mr. Atiyah:** The first thing is you stay as niche and as specific as you can. Each of our consultants work within a very specific geography and a specific area and within a limited type of industries. We would have one person for example that would recruit just quality engineers just within the state of Michigan, just within automotive, aerospace and maybe aviation. We will staff everything from receptionist, CEO, across a wide variety of industries. Our consultants spend all day every day talking to engineers within those target industries. It just means that we are able to build up a network of passive candidates, candidates that are maybe not desperate for something new, we are not going to place them

tomorrow but if an opportunity would come their way they would listen to it. There has never been a better job market to be a candidate. Unemployment is obviously very low and the economy is doing well and talent is high in demand. However you are able to build up a network of passive candidates through meeting with them, taking them out for lunch, attending networking events, getting lots of recommendations and referrals from people within the industry. That is how you are able to generate that kind of talent and subsequently add value to your clients by providing that level of talent.

**CEOCFO: *How do you know when someone is right for a position?***

**Mr. Atiyah:** You need to understand your clients. We have a very big focus around getting to know our clients. We have a meetings approach to our process and every client that we work with, we like to do a facility tour, meet the hiring managers, meet the HR managers, and meet as many people as we can so we are not just recruiting the technical skills but we are really understanding the cultural fit from an organization. You spend a lot of time on the front end getting to know your client and partner with them on not just one or two vacancies but twenty, thirty, or forty vacancies over a good time period, you really get the sense of what type of personality is going to fit in with the company and what is not. You are matching the skills sets to the job spec, that is definitely more straightforward and the more challenging part is getting to know your customers.

**CEOCFO: *What do candidates want today?***

**Mr. Atiyah:** I think that has evolved. I believe that what people are looking for has evolved over time. Obviously it is somewhat dependent on the individual. Things like balance, corporate and social responsibility, being able to work remotely, being able to have flexible working hours, things like that I think are becoming increasingly important in the job market. A lot of the more innovative cutting-edge companies are embracing that, and overtaking some of the companies that do not. Ten years ago when I first entered into this space, money was a very big motivator for a lot of people; if you get me a \$10 thousand raise I am going to move to a new company. Now I would say the finances are actually second to things like work-life balance, company culture and things like that. But again, it very much differs depending on the individual so one of the key things we try to do is to understand what motivates each one of the candidates that we work with.

**CEOCFO: *Do you work with clients over time and lead them in the direction they need to go to be a better employer?***

**Mr. Atiyah:** We try to offer more than just an introductory service. When we first start working with customers it is more transactional in that they will have specific needs and they will come to us and say this is what we are looking for and we will provide that candidate. As things evolve over time, we try to become more of a consulting service to our clients. It is so important now more than ever to stand out as an employer brand, so you are going to be competing with talent with a lot of these large organizations that spend millions of dollars on their employer brand, so it is important as a recruitment service that we are able to educate our clients as to what is the best way to attract talent. As things evolve and as we build on the relationships we have, we will quite often go to our clients and say when we speak to candidates on your behalf, this is the good stuff we are hearing and you do X, Y, and Z very well, however there are some negative connotations that your brand has where we can work together to try and remedy. We see ourselves as an extension of the companies that we are working with and we can educate them on the feedback we receive to try and help build their employer brand.

**CEOCFO: *How does it stay fresh and exciting for the recruiters who are doing the same thing for a long time?***

**Mr. Atiyah:** As an organization we have an experience and a good amount of growth. We typically hire and promote internally. I have always been a big believer that very few people can stay in the same job doing the same thing for too long of a sustained period of time. I think that once you have been doing the same job for two to three years you typically get burnt out, especially if it is a sales oriented position like our recruiters are. Our philosophy has always been to move people on to do new exciting things every couple of years and one of the ways to do that is to grow the organization and promote people internally so some of the people that we first hired are now moving into managerial positions and things like that so it keeps things fresh and exiting. I think having a business model geared toward partnering with your clients is very important if your job is constantly transactional, so you are starting from scratch every time you work on a position; that can be challenging. A year down the road you are no longer just searching for new clients, you are partnering closely with a lot of the big organizations that you on-boarded and working with them in different ways. I think that keeps things fresh and exciting. Finally, a lot of it is the internal culture that you have within your organization and we invest a lot of money in engagements and making sure people are happy and enjoy working for our organization whether that be team trips after work, lunches, social events or just spending a lot of time with people talking about their personal development and things like that. If you can keep people engaged in the bigger picture and thank them for the work that they are doing for your organization and keep them really engaged, I think that stops things from getting mundane and boring.

**CEOCFO: *What has changed in the Engtal approach over time?***

**Mr. Atiyah:** I think our approach has changed in that we are a lot more client and customer oriented. I started my career in London and it is a very transactional market, customers do not particularly want to hear you or see you, they will give you a requirement, so you will need to provide a candidate and then move on. In the US in my opinion, particularly the Midwest where we operate is a very relationship oriented place. One of the areas I think we evolved in is to put our customers and clients first and build long-term relationships with them so it is not that the second deal we do with a client is more important than the first, it is not just about matching a set of skills to a set of requirements, it is about building long-term relationships with the customers we work with.

**CEOCFO: *How is business?***

**Mr. Atiyah:** Business is going very well. We were only founded last year and we are very much ahead of schedule and revenue wise we are about double where we expected to be. Our head count will probably have grown from zero to 20 people within our first year of trading which is almost double where we expected to be. It is still early days and we are conscious of the fact that there are going to be ups and downs in startup organizations, but so far things have gone well and business is ahead of what we expected it to be.

**CEOCFO: *Would you tell us about being recognized as one of the best and brightest companies in Chicago?***

**Mr. Atiyah:** Employee engagement has been a very important thing for me, it has always been at the top of my agenda. When we launched Engtal, my business partner and I said that we wanted to build a company that the world wants to work for and we want to build a company that we are proud of and the people that work for us are proud to work for our organization. I have always been a big believer that you can hire the right talent and keep them by engaging them and getting them excited to work for your organization, that is 90% of what business is. You maybe do not need the best strategy in the world and you might not need the best product but if you have the best people and they work for your organization, that is what is going to drive you forward. Staff engagement is something that has always been very important to me. We invest a lot of money in making sure that our employees are very well looked after, our compensation is 10% to 20% higher than the market average. We spend a lot of money on learning, training, staff engagement, diversity and inclusion initiatives and things like that. I think our staff recognizes that, in fact somebody within the organization came to me and said that this was an award that they had heard of and that they thought we should apply for. Therefore, we did, and thankfully everyone at the organization jumped on the bandwagon and voted for us. We were incredibly proud to win the award especially because it is a good branding and marketing opportunity and more importantly it shows the initiatives that we have put in place are working and the people who work for our organization enjoy being here which is one of the key reasons that we launched the organization in the first place.

**CEOCFO: *What is next for Engtal?***

**Mr. Atiyah:** Our goal is to grow to twenty people by the end of the first year of trading. Our eventual goal is to grow the company to five hundred people so we are in the process of launching three or four non-engineering brands in IT, data science, banking and finance, and life sciences. The eventual goal is to replicate what we have done with Engtal across a number of different business units and hopefully grow each of those units up to one hundred people so the entire organization will be five hundred so that is a long-term goal. In terms of the next steps for us, we have grown and now it is about growing more rapidly and on-boarding more clients. We are moving to a new office the first of October which will allow us to take the next growth steps.

