



BE AUTHENTIC, BE CONFIDENT AND BE YOURSELF

with USTA's
Henry Lescaille

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How do you hire thousands in a week without diluting culture? **USTA's Henry Lescaille** uses human logistics and strict onboarding to keep the brand's hospitality DNA

AT 145 years old, the United States Tennis Association (USTA), which this year celebrates its 145th anniversary, is the national governing body for the sport in the US. It is an institution that has managed to balance a long and storied history with cutting-edge innovation and unparalleled forward thinking to establish itself as a globally respected entity. The USTA has become a model – not just for other sporting associations but for all businesses with its singular fusion of culture and people. Maintaining and strengthening that delicate blend is a challenge that sits squarely on the desk of Henry Lescaille, the USTA's Chief People & Culture Officer.

The USTA functions as a non-profit but possesses the commercial power of a global sports brand. Lescaille describes this synergy as a “profitable engine” that exists to fuel a “noble mission.” As he explains: “The USTA has this very noble mission, which is growing tennis to inspire healthier communities and people everywhere. It isn't just growing tennis for revenue or simply for the viral popularity of a sport, but to truly improve the communities that we live in and enhance the lives of those who make up those communities.”



Henry Lescaille
Chief People &
Culture Officer
USTA

Since joining the USTA, Henry's primary objective has been to "add the why to the what." While the organisation's core focus is to facilitate the growth of the sport, Henry has worked to ensure that the workforce is aligned under a singular North Star.

As Henry explained to HR Chief Magazine: "The notion that we are a not-for-profit, but still have this very profitable engine that allows us to do this great work was also very compelling to me. Marrying a personal passion – tennis – with a role that allows me to explore purpose and mission was too exciting to pass up."

Scaling quickly at mass

With more than 500 year-round employees, the USTA is required to undergo a massive, temporary expansion of that employee base each year as it stages the US Open – one of professional tennis' four major events. Henry likens the tournament to an "enormous bake sale" – or a high-stakes commercial engine that funds the organisation's mission-driven work for the rest of the year. Executing this spectacular event requires increasing the USTA workforce by thousands in a matter of weeks to fill the enormous number of roles required to stage one of the world's largest sports and entertainment events.

The process is a high-precision recruitment cycle that begins months before the first serve. As Henry explains: "We've got an incredible operations and talent acquisition team. They will scale leveraging the seasonal recruiting team – led by David Konecky – and several partners in the marketplace.



They come together generally six months before the US Open and with this incredible team that, again, maintains that USTA premium service standard."

To manage this scale, the USTA leverages data-driven systems to handle the "logistical coordination of thousands of interviews", ensuring that every seasonal hire is properly vetted and aligned with the event's high expectations.

"We need to make sure we can get the right folks onboarded, background checked and that we can provide critical orientation because we want to make sure they understand the US Open isn't just an event; it's an experience," Henry says.

"It's everyone's job to make sure each guest, vendor and business partner enjoys themselves and feels well taken care of."

A human-centred digital pivot

As the USTA navigates the complexities of the modern sports landscape, Henry is focused on redefining the intersection of human capital and technology. Rather than viewing automation as a threat to the workforce, Henry views it as a strategic tool to refine precision and employee satisfaction. This "digital and data-first pivot" is less about replacing roles and more about utilising data to make the massive scale of the US Open manageable

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for the people running it, and supporting the incredible work happening in areas of the organisation focused on growing participation. However, Henry is clear that data analytics and AI integration are an educational process for the organisation, not just a technical one. “AI and data analytics are a core part of how that process is educated,” he explains.

By leveraging real-time insights, the USTA can optimise everything from crowd flow to resource allocation during the tournament, providing a greater experience for its customers. The most profound shift, however, is cultural, as the organisation views the adoption of AI – both at the US Open and in the everyday operations of the USTA – as a major change management initiative.

“I don’t see AI simply as a technology. It’s impacting the flow of work. It’s so much broader than just a technology,” Henry says. To demystify AI, the USTA launched internal learning campaigns centred on a core message from Natalia Pedroza, Head of L&D: “Learning and AI can make your job easier, better and more impactful.” It’s a small effort for a massive return.

By encouraging the workforce to understand “how AI could be incorporated into the day-to-day to make jobs better,” Henry and the People and Culture team are fostering a culture that embraces innovation as a means to “introduce greater joy and inspiration into your day-to-day.”

How People Results helps HR teams build data-driven insights



Dr. Fiona Jamison, Vice President of Research and People Analytics at People Results shares how the company develops evidence-based people strategies



Data-driven insights can transform the way HR operates, but many companies struggle to understand how to effectively deploy this data in a way that can lead to tangible results for employees.

"A lot of people get overwhelmed with the amount of data they have," says Dr. Fiona Jamison, Vice President of Research and People Analytics at People Results.

The management and labour consulting firm works with organisations such as the USTA to move away from what Fiona refers to as "gut-based decision-making" and towards more evidence-based people strategies.

"A big part of our work is ensuring the data we collect is translated into data storytelling, so that clients can make progress towards taking action" she says.

A decision-making accelerator

According to Fiona, consultants at People Results work side-by-side with the company's clients to deliver solutions tailored to their individual workforce needs.

To achieve this, she says the company treats data as a "decision-making accelerator," rather than an endpoint.

This involves developing employee listening ecosystems and asking the right questions so clients can gather information from different areas of their workforce to better understand the employee experience – this is the approach we used to help audit and enhance the United States Tennis Association's (USTA) DEI initiatives.

People Results first started working with the USTA "several years ago," says Fiona. Leadership came to us, and they were very committed to improving the employee experience.

"They wanted to understand, with more precision, what they were doing well in terms of employee experience and where there were opportunities for improvement."

To achieve this, the company partnered with the USTA to design and implement targeted employee engagement surveys for different areas of the organisation. These surveys asked employees about their experiences at the USTA to understand what they valued.

"Creating that survey framework allowed us to start beginning to measure the experience that employees were having, and developed a shared language and structure for action for the USTA," says Fiona "It enabled them to talk about the employee experience in a digestible way, which makes it easier to consume specific employee data and insights."

Over time, Fiona says, this approach has allowed the USTA to move towards better utilising data-driven insights in its people strategy.

"That's really part of the role we play with the USTA and other clients," says Fiona. "How do we take the information you have and really use it for decision making?"

Working under operational pressure

"A lot of our clients are coming to us when they're going through major change," says Fiona. **"This may be a company experiencing growth, implementing a new system, or a company that is having labour issues or external scrutiny. I think that's exactly when employee listening matters the most."**

For Fiona, working under operational pressure means helping to reduce the burden on internal HR teams as much as possible.

"They need to be focusing on their employees, responding to comments and taking action," says Fiona. **"We're really taking a lot of the heavy lifting off of them in terms of gathering data, analysing it, creating the insights and delivering reports and insights for them as they make decisions. Our role is really to take that off their hands, so they can focus on more of the employee-facing decisions."**

Summary

1. Problem: Data overload & HR paralysis
2. Philosophy: Data as an accelerator, not an endpoint
3. Proof: USTA case example
4. Application: Supporting HR under pressure
5. Outcome: Better decisions, less burden, more action

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DEI as a growth engine

DEI can often be a secondary metric or a compliance requirement for organisations, but for the USTA, it is the primary driver of market expansion. This focus is encapsulated in the US Open's "Be Open" campaign, which is a movement that begins as a public-facing celebration of diversity during the tournament and translates into an internal mandate for long-term growth of the association and the sport it oversees.

The USTA's primary goal is to grow tennis by removing barriers to entry – thus, making it inclusive and accessible to all. "Be Open is really the celebration of our aspiration of inclusion," Henry explains. "We want every single person to feel that tennis is for them. We want every single person to feel these outstretched arms that bring them into the sport."

To bring this to life during the US Open, the USTA offers dedicated programmatic activities, including Asian American Pacific Islanders (AAPI) Day, Pride and Latine culture celebrations, and events honouring Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and those with disabilities.

However, Henry is quick to point out that these are not merely "viral moments" for social media; they are the front end of a data-backed strategy to diversify the sport. "How do we know whether we're successful? Well, the proof is in the pudding," he asserts. "The Annual Tennis Participation Report, based on data from the Physical Activity Council (PAC), shows participation growth in each of these communities."

A portrait of Henry Lescaille, Chief People & Culture Officer at USTA. He is a middle-aged man with dark hair, smiling warmly. He is wearing a dark blue suit jacket over a light blue and white striped dress shirt. The background is a dark, neutral color.

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When it comes to purpose, *Practice makes perfect*



How the USTA put its purpose-driven mission into play.

When the United States Tennis Association (USTA) aspired to grow tennis to 35 million players by 2035, its leaders knew they'd require backing by all 1,700 staff and Section members, and countless volunteers.

Bringing tennis to anyone who's dreamt of picking up a racquet meant motivating that team so they felt connected and recognized for doing their best work.

The USTA started by establishing a purpose-driven mission statement—Growing tennis to inspire healthier people and communities everywhere—and core values (Community, Inclusion, Wellness). This required rigorous approvals with the USTA Board of Directors and executive stakeholders. The resulting culture code was destined to be much more than words on a wall—it informed the way the organization structured, resourced and measured business impact.

The USTA debuted its culture code on stage at the USTA Annual Meeting & Conference, and in a personalized engagement exercise

where thousands of team members were inspired for the year ahead.

USTA leaders were provided with Purpose & Values Playbooks and strategic storytelling guides to turn the mission and values into muscle memory.

The USTA also took its mission to the US Open, where 100,000+ fans from around the world stepped into an annual immersive booth experience celebrating accessibility and inclusion.

The USTA later conceived a story-driven employer brand and Employee Value Proposition (EVP)—Champion What Matters—to attract talent and empower staff to grow their careers alongside the sport. The EVP transcends the USTA's career sites and recruitment campaigns, and is also integrated into its HR practices, from Leadership & Development to Total Rewards.

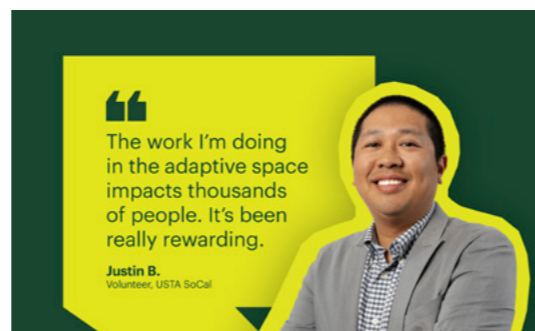
To pull it off, the USTA partnered with Orlando- and Kansas City-based Knight Agency, who helped make its 2035 ambition feel less like a target and more like a movement—proof of what happens when business is built through human connection.



Team members personalized their purpose at the USTA's Annual Meeting & Conference.



Guests activate the USTA's purpose-driven mission at the US Open Equity Experience.



Real team member purpose stories are at the heart of the USTA's employer brand.

To learn more, visit knightagency.com.



The USTA is **145 YEARS OLD**

Sustaining performance under pressure

While the “spectacular” of the US Open lasts three weeks, the “heavy lift” requires care and attention throughout the year. In a high-performance environment where the pressure can be 24/7, maintaining workforce resilience is a strategic priority.

To achieve this, the USTA's People and Culture team has moved beyond traditional benefits to look at “holistic employee health.” They have implemented a framework centred on

The results are tangible. “The fact that there are more Latinos playing tennis than ever before, the fact that there's more Asian Americans playing tennis than ever before – that's something that Marisa Grimes, our Chief Diversity Officer, and the entire Diversity, Equity & Inclusion team have worked on, which we're incredibly proud of.”

“And while the work that happens at the US Open (“Be Open”) is impactful, it's all the work the team does throughout the year that makes an even greater impact.”



“Be you, be authentic,
and be confident
but don't be cocky.
Confidence is attractive,
cockiness is not

Henry Lescaille
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four distinct quadrants: physical, emotional, psychological and financial wellbeing. “We’ve now looked at the four quadrants of health and have optimised these offerings so that our employees are able to enjoy a more holistic wellbeing experience while at the USTA,” he explains.

“We also have a comprehensive health wellness, and specifically mental wellness programme that provides proactive support. So before individuals are in the ‘crunch’ period event, we provide tools and resources

that could help them prepare and to take some of the pressure off.”

Outside of the US Open each year, the innovation continues with “Refresh Weeks,” where the entire organisation shuts down for select weeks to ensure employees can truly disconnect and recharge.

The future of sports leadership: From policy to culture

As the USTA looks toward its next decade, Henry is redefining the CPO role by shifting the focus from

“HR and policy” to “people and culture.” This evolution is a strategic necessity when competing for top-tier talent against tech, sports and entertainment giants.

“Changing the title from HR to People and Culture speaks to the fact that there’s been an evolution where we look to optimise and automate our day-to-day practices, such that we can focus more on what really matters – finding ways to engage people through the richness of the work, our mission and the culture of our organisation,” Henry notes.

Be humble in terms of recognising what you do not know

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He acknowledges that while the USTA pays competitively, its “secret weapon” is the cultural experience it offers. “If I can’t compete with you on a salary, I can absolutely compete with you on leadership, cultural and work experience,” he says. “At the end of the day, every research study I’ve read and considered in my work establishes that that’s ultimately what keeps employees with a company. It’s what keeps them happy and engaged.”

By leveraging the USTA’s 145-year legacy while maintaining the agility of a modern organisation, Henry has turned “culture” into a measurable business metric, citing that organisations with good engagement practices are “two times more profitable.”

Ultimately, by “adding the why to the what,” Henry and his team ensure that whether someone is an elite coach or a community volunteer, they are united by a singular purpose: building a healthier, more inclusive future through the power of sport. [🔗](#)

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