

**Astrix Digital Transformation Podcast Series**


# **How to Find the Best Talent to Drive your Digital Transformation Program**

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# How to Find the Best Talent to Drive your Digital Transformation Program

In this podcast, Baher Rizkalla, Vice President of Scientific and Technical Staffing Services at Astrix, guides you through the benefits of staffing augmentation and how it can help you achieve your digital transformation program goals.



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## About The Astrix Podcast

Astrix Digital Transformation Podcast Productions tackles today's most compelling issues shaping digital transformation in scientific businesses. In this series, interviews with thought leaders from across the industry deliver expert insights for accelerating your digital transformation strategy.

**KEVIN:** I want to welcome everybody to another episode of Astrix Popular Digital Transformation Podcast Series. If you've not listened into these series before, I'll give you a little kind of insight into what they're all about. They're interviews with thought leaders from the industry, and the industry being lab informatics, R&D, pharmaceuticals, biotech etc., Providing their expert insights and actionable advice that are designed to help you develop a successful digital first strategy.

Again, this is really meant as a transformational discussion about how digital first strategy helps transform businesses. My name is Kevin Miller and I'm the host for today's podcast and I want to thank everybody for listening and downloading. So, before we get into it, we'd like to keep these in around the 20-30 minute range. We're going to have some nice Q&A back and forth with our speaker who I'll introduce in just a moment. But let's get into what the topics going to be.

So, our topic for today's discussion is going to be, how to find the best talent to drive your digital transformation program. You know, this is going to really focus on a key component of digital transformation, and that is who are the talent that you're going to source to help you accomplish that goal?

*"How do you go about assembling the winning team of uniquely skilled personnel that will drive your digital transformation program to successful completion, hopefully on time and within budget to realize the future vision of your organization?"*

Joining us today is Baher Rizkalla, he is the Vice President of Scientific Outsourced Services here at Astrix. And Baher has been an influential leader in delivering staffing solutions for over 20 years. He provides expert technical resources to organizations across the scientific spectrum, and to further add to his wealth of experience, he holds a bachelor's degree in Chemistry from the UC Santa Barbara.

So Baher, I want to welcome you to today's session. This is the first podcast we're doing together, I'm excited to chat. I think with that I'd probably say, why don't you improve upon the intro that I just did for you and tell us a little bit about yourself and the work you're doing here at Astrix?

**BAHER:** Yeah, thanks Kevin, excited to be on. Thank you for the invitation, it's a topic I love to talk about and one that I hold dear. But yeah, a little bit about my background as you mentioned.







So, I got my degree in chemistry from UC Santa Barbara. The goal was always to work in the pharmaceutical or biotech world. I really always loved science ever since I was a kid. I was working for a small CRO when I was approached by a recruiter for another opportunity. After speaking to this person for a while I got really interested in the world of staff augmentation, and here I am 20 years later. So, it's really great for me because all day we talk to scientists, we talk to technologists within the life science industry. So, it's been a lot of fun, and yeah excited about our talk today.

**KEVIN:** Great. And certainly, one of the things we're going to be digging into in today's discussion is, how do you find the right people to help you kind of carry these fairly large in scope projects across the finish line?

But before we get into the broader topic of finding the best talent to drive digital transformation programs Baher, I'd like to take a few minutes to outline some of the key principles behind our discussion today. You know, first and foremost, what exactly is staff augmentation? How can it help companies find the talent they need for digital transformation initiatives?

Why are those people hard to find to begin with? And how do you know when you need to go out and tap an expert company like Astrix for help in staff augmentation? Love your thoughts on that?

**BAHER:** Yeah, Kev, it's something that I think is really universal these days. How do you find the best people? Especially in the life sciences industry it has become increasingly difficult over the last couple of years.

*"So, staff augmentation, basically what that means in a nutshell is outsourcing your recruiting function to bring in people. It can be short term, it can be long term, it can be on a permanent basis, it can be through a statement of work."*

There's a lot of different ways to construct this, but basically you need a certain skill set that your company doesn't currently have and you know that it's going to be very, very difficult for you to find it yourself. So that's why staff augmentation exists.

And in the life science industry, it can take on a lot of different types of structures as I mentioned.

You can go through a statement of work, you can go through a contract to hire sort of path, you can go straight contract, you can go through a consultant, and then we also do permanent hires for companies that are looking to bring on full time employees.

So as far as how we can help companies, you know, really, it allows you to kind of temporarily integrate these experts. You know, these people have specialized tools that they can focus on change management, learning and development. Any organization looking to improve its performance and acquiring new skill sets that are really in demand, that's a great way to view staff augmentation. Most companies that we talk to, they have limited resources, you know, their people are busy. They have a lot of work, existing tasks, operations and they're kind of left wondering, how are we going to take on these very necessary, but very complex digital transformation tasks on top of their existing work.

*"Staff augmentation really gives companies access to bring in that talent, and you have a team of experts that you can tap in whenever you need them to really help you do that."*

And if I can give you just a little story here, Kev. A current client, so they are engaged with our laboratory informatics group on a very large multi-site, multi country software deployment. So, as it tends to happen, there's been delays, go live has been pushed back several times. You know, the sponsors are getting frustrated.

The main reason for this bottleneck is the sites, they can't dedicate the required local resources to handle these specific items that only their internal personnel can address. So, what we suggested was, hey, let's take some of this work off of their hands.





*"We brought in people like lab scientists, engineers, and lab managers to take their day-to-day duties off of their plate so these subject matter experts can focus on that digital transformation project. And lo and behold, everything starts moving again, and you're getting back on track."*

So just a little story on how staff augmentation can help with some of these implementations and deployments.

**KEVIN:** That's great. Yeah, makes a lot of sense too, and one thing I do want to circle back on, you touched on in the beginning of your statement a little bit about shortage of qualified workers. I think most of us understand if you drive through any suburban area that goes past a strip mall and you see that there's a help wanted sign on virtually every store and restaurant, the same holds true in business, right?

There's a huge shortage right now of qualified workers in many different industries.

So many of our listeners I think would agree that finding talent is hard for all companies right now. But even more so when you get into these real specialized industries like IT and healthcare, and of course other scientific industry.

So relative to that, tell us about how staff augmentation can help in that case, where the benefits of using it or this outsource model when you're dealing with the labor shortage?

**BAHER:** Yeah, we see that everywhere Kevin, I mean like you said, it's not specific to the life science industry, I think it's really pronounced within life science and especially with some of these technical roles, scientific and on the technology side.



And that's when you really know that you need the staff augmentation, immediate access to expertise, your team may lack it, but you know you need it. It can be lab related, it can be within Clin Dev and regulatory or pharmacovigilance, quality, QMS, bioinformatics, I'm just kind of rattling off some of the things that we do that we see all the time.

So, you can kind of build your own recruiting function to find these people, which can take a lot of time, it can cost a lot of money, and you're not sure if you're ever going to get that result, or you can outsource it. So, that's really where we come in, that's where staff augmentation comes in. It can also be, if you're finding it a problem to hire permanent people, as you said, everybody's looking for staff, and specifically within some skills that are really impacted in the market.

And I think if you do it right, you can absolutely save costs, and it makes a lot of sense. And the way that you can do this from a time perspective is really unmatched.

**KEVIN:** That makes a lot of sense. And I'm sure, you know, there's dynamics obviously with the work from home, versus working in an office space. I mean, I think you're starting to see some companies use it as a selling point, hey, you don't have to come into the office, where other companies are like, we want you in the office, we want you collaborating etc., Etc. So yeah, there's competition and people are addressing that competition in a number of ways. So excellent points you made there.

Do you think the competition for talented individuals is going to only increase in the future, or is it going to kind of slow down a little bit? If it does increase, how can companies leverage these type of services to help them meet some of the goals that they're trying to accomplish?

**BAHER:** Yeah. You know, you bring up a really good point Kev, I mean, I think remote work has been around for a really long time.



I think we all know that, but the pandemic just, it turned everything on its head and it just became more of the norm rather than the exception. My personal opinion and you're going to get opinions all over the board on this, is that if you want somebody to come into a brick and mortar corporate office for a job that can be done remotely, you're really at a competitive disadvantage, for a number of reasons. A lot of these folks have gotten used to the work from home lifestyle.

They see the benefits of it, and that's what they are looking for their next career move. And again, these are typically people that have very in demand skills, so they have some choices.

The other thing is, you can open up the search, you don't have to look just within a commutable radius of where your office is. It can be nationwide, and we have a lot of these folks, they don't really care about the time zone, they like the job, they like the company, they like the mission, then they'll make it work.



So, my personal opinion is that if you can give people that flexibility to work from home, you're going to be able to find a lot more candidates, and frankly higher quality. Now there are certain jobs of course within life sciences that can't be done remotely, you have to always be there. That's never going to change.

These are the folks in the lab, these are people on the manufacturing floor, that's a little bit different and I think they know that, but there are aspects of their job that sometimes you can allow them some flexibility.

So, I think that the name of the game here is to understand what your candidate pool wants, understand what your employees want, and see how you can kind of fit that into your approach with hiring and also retaining your staff.

**KEVIN:** That makes perfect sense, certainly some good points there for sure. I think you could make the case that we're in a fairly dynamic environment right now, dynamic business landscape over the last couple of years. Many organizations are concerned about how to pivot in one direction or another, either stay competitive, or they're struggling to manage this talent resource gap.

They're struggling with external factors, increasing costs in time, consuming process of hiring, training and onboarding personnel etc. There's a lot going on. Probably one of the more challenging times in our lifetimes for people who are trying to build teams.

*"What key strategies can you recommend to our listeners for bridging this gap, and for finding the highly specialized talent that can drive these digital transformation projects?"*





And I'm not saying we're completely insulated from some of these things that are going on in the market, but you know, no signs currently of anything slowing down. If anything, we continue to pick up the pace.

So, I just wanted to mention that Kevin, because I get that question quite often recently, like, hey, what's going on with all these layoffs? Well, nothing's really changed, companies are still hiring at an unprecedented rate, especially for these key skill sets.

**KEVIN:** Yeah, and I think a lot of folks tend to look at the health of a business sector through the lens of news and stock snippets, and the reality of the situation, you've got a very robust industry that's going through pretty significant transformational era in its time with moving away from disconnected on premise, paper based in certain ways, processes and moving towards this whole digital transformation, which has been a long time coming.

You know, somebody who's been involved in tech myself for a good 25 years or so, we've been talking about going this route for a long time, and definitely, we're knee deep in it certainly within this space. And that presents a lot of opportunities, and it presents a lot of challenges for organizations, but it's good to know that there's services and companies out there that HR can tap when a CIO comes knocking for someone that's got some very specialized technical skills or scientific skills.

**BAHER:** You used the word dynamic before, and yes, the job market is extremely dynamic, and the funny thing is, as it kind of ebbs and flows and demand is still super high, even for those companies that unfortunately have to make some cuts, and we've seen this with a lot of our clients here over the last couple of months, sometimes they cut too deep. Sometimes for cost savings purposes, it makes more sense for them to bring on a contractor or a consultant because that work is still there.

So, from a staff augmentation perspective, there's business cases to be made, whether the market is absolutely booming, or if it's even on a downtrend, because the work doesn't really stop. The way that the work is completed can kind of change if you get my meaning there Kevin. And even for candidates that are affected by some of these layoffs, we would love to be able to help them because we have so many clients that are looking for these in demand skills, sometimes, for whatever reason, it's not working at their current firm, and consulting really becomes a really attractive proposition.







**KEVIN:** Yeah, that's great, and we appreciate your insights as always. And to kind of recap our discussion for today, we're really talked about how specialized staff augmentation solutions like those from Astrix can help companies react to a very dynamic hiring environment much more quickly, and allow you to bend, not break, so to speak, when you're filling out your teams, and that's key.

So we talk a lot about digital transformation here at Astrix. It is kind of the world in which we live, day in and day out. That's what this podcast is about.

Today's topic was a little sidebar on that and how to get the people in to help these projects get across the finish line. And obviously, to stay tuned for our upcoming podcasts as they come out. The podcast is growing exponentially in popularity.

It can be found on all the major podcast platforms now, as well as on the Astrix website. So again, I want to thank everybody for downloading this and listening to this session today.

Stay tuned for more, they're coming soon, and we thank you on behalf of the entire Astrix team. We are now wrapped up.

For over 25 years, Astrix has been a market-leader in delivering innovative solutions through world class people, process, and technology that fundamentally improves scientific outcomes and quality of life everywhere. Founded by scientists to solve the unique challenges life sciences and other science-based business face, Astrix offers a growing array of strategic, technical, and staffing services designed to deliver value to clients across their organizations.

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