Juniper Networks, the networking giant, doesn’t have it easy. Located in the heart of Silicon Valley, they’re locked in a ferocious battle for talent against big-brand neighbors like Google, Facebook and Apple. That’s why, says Juniper executive vice president of human resources Steven Rice, they have to offer something different. But it’s not an arms race over who has the best free cafeteria food or pet-sitting services. Instead, it comes down to one question Juniper asks at the beginning of the recruitment process: “Where will you do your best work?”

Says Rice, “We’re able to attract and retain talent because of our belief in how work should be done, and how we interact and collaborate. While there’s a shortage of talent, we can still find the right people for Juniper, even though we’re competing with companies that are in the press a lot, because talent selects itself based on how companies organize and structure work.”

So what’s Juniper’s secret sauce? Rice says it’s a willingness to radically re-examine assumptions about the workplace. “I feel we’re on the cusp of what I call the next generation of work design,” he says. Working with professor Robert Cross of the University of Virginia, Juniper has created “network maps” of its relationship with two major customers, and has plans in the works for several more. The process is intricate—and revealing. “We’ve mapped 900 individuals that surround a particular customer and then we evaluate who the connectors are in terms of how information flows, why people go to them, and if the organizational structure is an inhibitor or an enhancer in getting the work done,” says Rice. “What is the structure and hierarchy we need in place for the next generation of work? What are the implications for how many layers of management you need, and do you organize around your products, or around a customer, or maybe a combination?”

Adopting a “network” outlook—appropriate, given Juniper’s business—can lead to new efficiencies and better ways of serving customers. “A network looks for the easiest path to move information and context at a very fast rate,” says Rice.

“Where will you do your best work?” is the question Juniper asks in the recruitment process. The answer, according to Steven Rice, is based on the belief in how work should be organized and structured. Juniper has created “network maps” to evaluate the relationships with customers and determine the best way to organize around the free flow of information. This approach helps Juniper attract and retain talent in a competitive market.

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