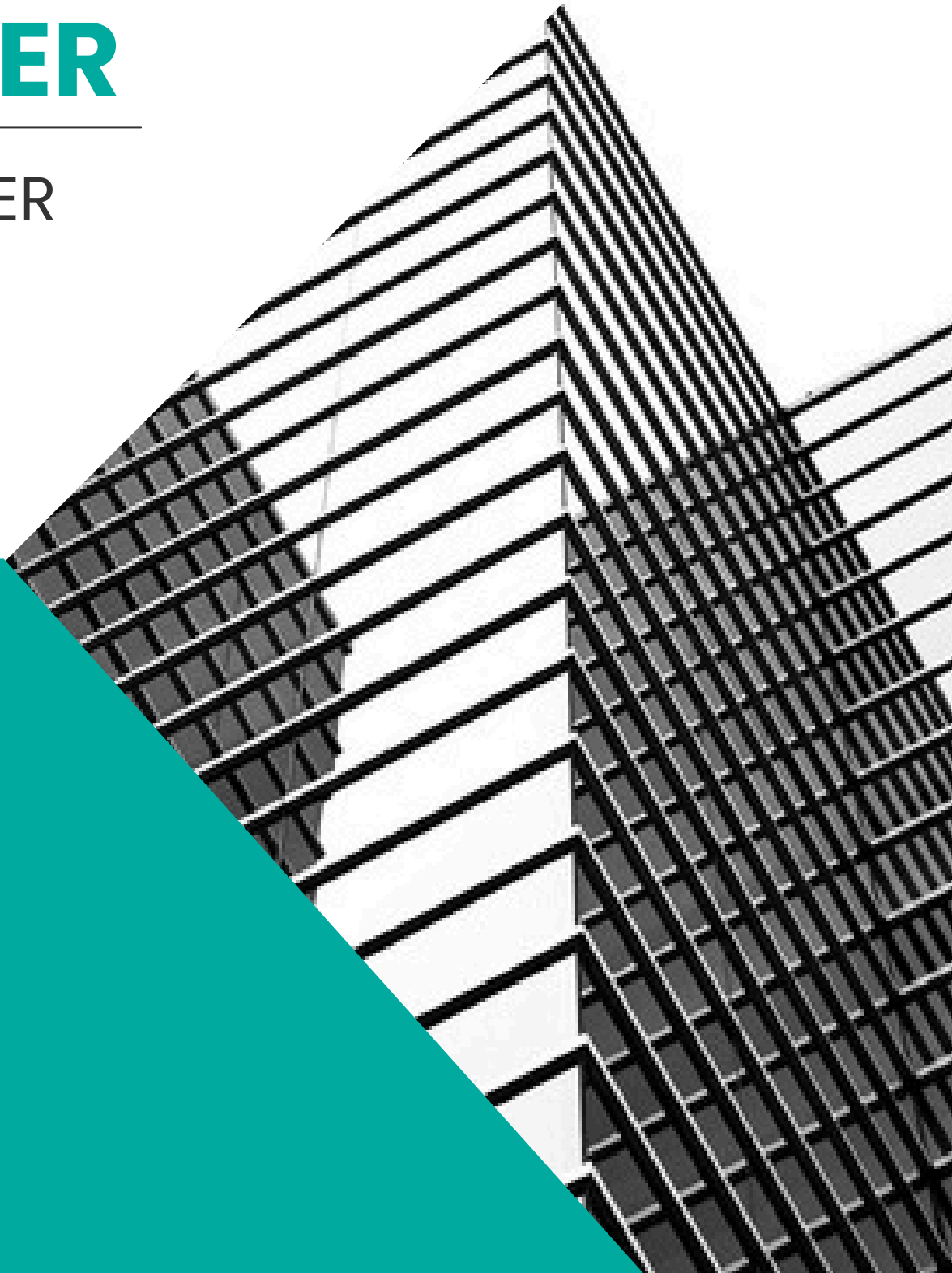




# NEWS LETTER

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OCTOBER  
2025



# Retail is Detail.



We challenge you to look past the word “retail” and see the people.

The lessons here aren’t just about stores and shelves - they’re about hiring, teamwork, and the everyday detail that builds every business.

# Retail & Hiring Snapshot:

## SA 2024 - 2025

# R130bn

## Projected Online Sales by 2025

### Online shopping to make up 10% of all retail

(World Wide Worx et al.)



### Retail sales grew

# +7.7%

year-on-year in  
Nov 2024

Biggest surge  
since 2022

(The Post)



### Retail sales grew

# +3.1%

year-on-year in  
Dec 2024



Clothing, footwear,  
textiles, and leather goods.

(Stats SA via BizCommunity)



### Retail sales grew

# +1.6%

year-on-year in  
Jun 2025



Steady year-on-  
year increase

(Stats SA)

By the fourth quarter of the 2024/25 financial year

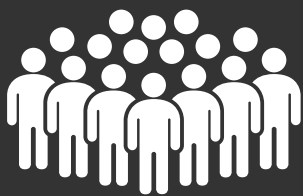
### Formal sector employment increased by

# +12,000 JOBS

Increasing total  
employment to

## 10.64 mil.

(Stats SA)



Between March 2024 and March 2025

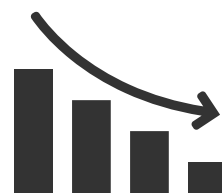
### Trade sector employment decreased by

# -52,000 JOBS

Overall employment  
dropped by

## 95,000.

(Business Report)



### Active retail job postings

# 2,345

April 2025

Down from 2023 highs

(CEIC / Revelio Labs)



### Retail is growing, but hiring is competitive.

### Is your business ready for festive season staffing?



# Festive Season Hiring: The Risks and Quick Wins

## 7 Quick Wins for Retail Employers Before the Festive Season

Christmas shoppers are coming - will your team be ready?

### 1. Forecast demand now:

Map out staffing needs based on last year's sales peaks.

### 2. Open job ads early:

Secure top talent before the December rush.

### 3. Streamline interviews:

Cut delays with quick, structured interview rounds.

### 4. Tap into seasonal talent pools:

Rehire proven temps or student workers.

### 5. Cross-train staff:

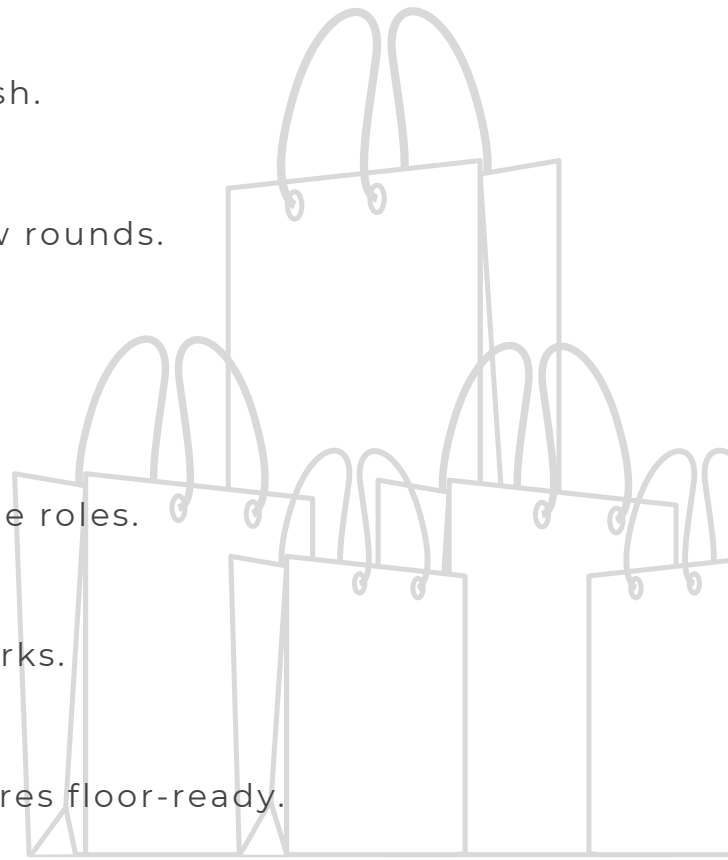
Build flexibility so teams can cover multiple roles.

### 6. Offer short-term incentives:

Boost retention with festive bonuses or perks.

### 7. Plan onboarding fast-tracks:

Prep quick training modules to get new hires floor-ready.



## The Risk of Being Understaffed This Festive Season

If your retail team isn't ready, you could face:

- **Lost Sales:** Shoppers walk away when queues are too long or shelves stay empty.
- **Burnout:** Overworked staff get stressed, tired, and are more likely to quit mid-season.
- **Poor Service:** Rushed employees can't deliver the festive experience customers expect.
- **Stock Issues:** Not enough hands to unpack, restock, or manage inventory flow.
- **Brand Damage:** Negative customer experiences can harm your reputation.

# DID YOU KNOW?

## **Refill Revolution: Smartfill and Skubu Changing the Game**

A quiet but powerful shift is happening in township retail, and it's 50% cheaper than your average big-chain grocery run

Smartfill, a South African innovation backed by DY|DX and the Smollan Group, is rolling out refill dispensers in spaza shops across places like Tembisa. These smart units let shoppers buy trusted brands (like Sunlight, Mielie King, and B-Well) in the exact quantity they can afford - no waste, no plastic, and no full-pack markups.

It's cheaper, more sustainable, and designed to support, not compete with, local spaza owners.

Over 30,000 transactions have already been logged, with nearly 30% of customers coming back daily. Smartfill is now eyeing expansion into Zambia, Bangladesh, and Kenya.

Also in the mix is Skubu, a new automated refill store in Diepsloot backed by the CSIR and Sonke. It uses similar tech to sell essentials like maize, sugar, and detergent at prices up to 50% lower than traditional retail.

Importantly, these innovations are built to strengthen and empower spaza shops, not replace them. By drawing more foot traffic and offering a competitive edge, they help local traders stay relevant, profitable, and better equipped to serve their communities.

Bottom line? The refill model is gaining serious traction, and it's reshaping access, affordability, and sustainability in the informal retail space.

# The Heart of Retail: People, Partnerships & Possibility

## 5 Retail Hiring Myths - Busted!

Getting ready for the festive rush? Let's separate fact from fiction.



**Myth 1: "It's too early to start hiring for the festive season."**

**Fact:** The best candidates are snapped up by October. Waiting means competing for leftovers - or paying more for last-minute hires.



**Myth 2: "Festive staff don't need training - they're only temporary."**

**Fact:** Even temp staff represent your brand. A quick onboarding session can mean fewer mistakes, happier customers, and repeat business.



**Myth 3: "Students are unreliable seasonal hires."**

**Fact:** Many students bring fresh energy, flexibility, and tech-savvy skills - especially in e-commerce and customer service.



**Myth 4: "Online retail doesn't need as many people."**

**Fact:** Behind every online sale are pickers, packers, delivery teams, and customer support staff. The digital shelf is just as demanding.



**Myth 5: "Seasonal hiring only matters in retail."**

**Fact:** Logistics, warehousing, hospitality, and even marketing teams ramp up too - festive demand ripples across every industry.

## Tips for Hiring Top Retail, Wholesale & E-Commerce Talent in a Competitive Market

- Prioritise culture fit to reduce turnover
- Be ready for seasonal & demand spikes
- Close the skills gap with training-ready talent
- Streamline hiring to match the pace of retail
- Hire people who care - because customers notice

▶ [Read the full blog HERE!](#)

# 5 Retail Hiring Headaches - How to Fix Them

## High Staff Turnover

Focus on cultural fit as much as skill fit. People stay where they feel they belong.



1

## Seasonal Demand Spikes

Work closely with a recruiter and build a flexible, pre-screened pool of temps before the rush hits.



2

## Skills Gaps

Hire for growth potential, not just past experience. Train and promote from within.



3

## Slow, Clunky Hiring

Simplify your process - focus on fewer steps, faster feedback, and clearer decision-making.



4

## Finding People Who Care

Look beyond CVs. Passion, attitude, and alignment with your company values drive performance.



5

# From Spazas to Supermarkets: The Story of SA Retail

Retail in South Africa isn't just about shopping, it's a mirror of the country's history, economy, and inequality. From roadside stalls to massive malls, our retail landscape tells a story of hustle, hardship, and constant reinvention.

Let's take a quick journey through where we've come from - and where we're headed.

## 1. It started with trade, not tills

Before cash registers and convenience stores, there was bartering. Long before colonisation, people in Southern Africa traded livestock, beads, food, and crafts. This was the original retail: community-based, local, and face-to-face.

The arrival of the Dutch in the 1600s introduced formal trading posts. Cape Town became a supply stop for ships. Small shops popped up to serve settlers. Over time, trade became more structured, and colonial towns developed what we'd now call high streets.

## 2. Old-school retail: from corner stores to chain giants

By the 1800s, formal shops were on the rise. In 1858, Stuttafords opened in Cape Town - one of the first major department stores. By the 20th century, others followed: *OK Bazaars*, *CNA*, and *Woolworths*.

These stores mostly served white urban areas. They had physical locations, printed ads, and later, till slips and plastic bags. It was traditional retail: bricks, mortar, and mass-produced goods.

## 3. Informal retail: born out of need

While the cities had malls and chain stores, rural and township communities built their own retail networks - out of necessity.

Enter the spaza shop.

Usually run out of someone's home, garage, or shack, spazas sold everyday essentials: maize meal, bread, soap. They were local, affordable, and accessible - especially in places where formal retail hadn't bothered to go.

During apartheid, spaza shops weren't just shops. They were community hubs and survival tools. They also created jobs and income in areas where formal employment was limited or non-existent.

Even on commercial farms, tuck shops provided basics for farm workers. Often informal, these were stocked with limited goods but became critical to rural living.



## 4. Post-1994: The mall boom and beyond

After democracy, South Africa saw a retail explosion.

Shopping centres popped up across the country. Malls weren't just for shopping anymore, they became hangouts, status symbols, and signs of development. Think *Maponya Mall* in Soweto or *Gateway* in Durban.

Major chains like *Pick n Pay*, *Shoprite*, *Mr Price*, and *Checkers* expanded rapidly, especially into underserved markets. Retail became a major employer - and a big player in the economy.

But while formal retail grew, informal retail didn't disappear. In fact, it adapted.

Many spaza shops became more organised. Some joined buying groups, got access to better stock, and started using mobile banking. Even delivery apps began tapping into township areas. Some spazas now double as pickup points for online orders or offer basic financial services.

## 5. Retail today: formal and informal are blending

Right now, retail in South Africa is a mixed bag:

- Formal chains dominate malls, suburbs, and online shopping.
- Informal shops still rule in many townships, farms, and rural areas.
- Hybrid models are emerging: big brands supplying spazas, or tech startups helping informal traders go digital.

And while e-commerce is growing fast, especially since COVID, it's still a small part of the market. Barriers like delivery costs, internet access, and trust slow down the shift.

Still, platforms like *Takealot*, *Amazon* (launched in SA in 2024), and *Checkers Sixty60* are changing the game. They're fast, digital, and data-driven.

## 6. Real talk: challenges ahead

Retail isn't all sunshine and special offers. The industry faces real hurdles:

- Load shedding and crime: Both hurt small and big retailers alike.
- High unemployment: Limits buying power across much of the country.
- Global competition: Online giants put pressure on local businesses.
- Tensions: Competition between local spaza owners and foreign traders has created friction in some areas.

But there's good news too: retail still drives a huge chunk of jobs and small business growth. It's one of the few sectors where informal entrepreneurs can still break through without massive capital.

## 7. Where we're going

Here's what the future of retail in SA might look like:

1. Smarter spazas: More digital tools, better stock management, and tighter links with wholesalers.
2. Tech-powered convenience: Think delivery apps, online ordering, and mobile payments even in deep rural areas.
3. Small-format stores: Not every area needs a giant mall. Expect to see more convenience centres and compact stores popping up closer to where people live.
4. Support for informal traders: If government and big business invest in infrastructure, training, and partnerships, the informal sector could grow even more.
5. Green retail: More eco-conscious packaging, local sourcing, and waste reduction across the supply chain.

## 8. Final thought

Retail in South Africa is a tale of two systems - but the lines are blurring.

What started as simple trade between neighbours has grown into a dynamic, complex, and competitive industry. From family-run spaza shops in rural villages to robot-driven warehouses delivering groceries in under an hour, South African retail is constantly shifting.

No matter where it happens, under a zinc roof or inside a high-end mall, retail is about meeting people where they are. And in a country as diverse as ours, that's both the biggest challenge and the biggest opportunity.

## Hiring is Not Just Filling Space

Behind the shelves, behind the screens,  
Are people shaping daily scenes.  
Not just a role, not just a name,  
But hearts and hands that fuel the game.

The right hire brings more than skill,  
They bring the patience, the care, the will.  
Partnerships built on trust and time,  
Turn fleeting moments into lifelines.

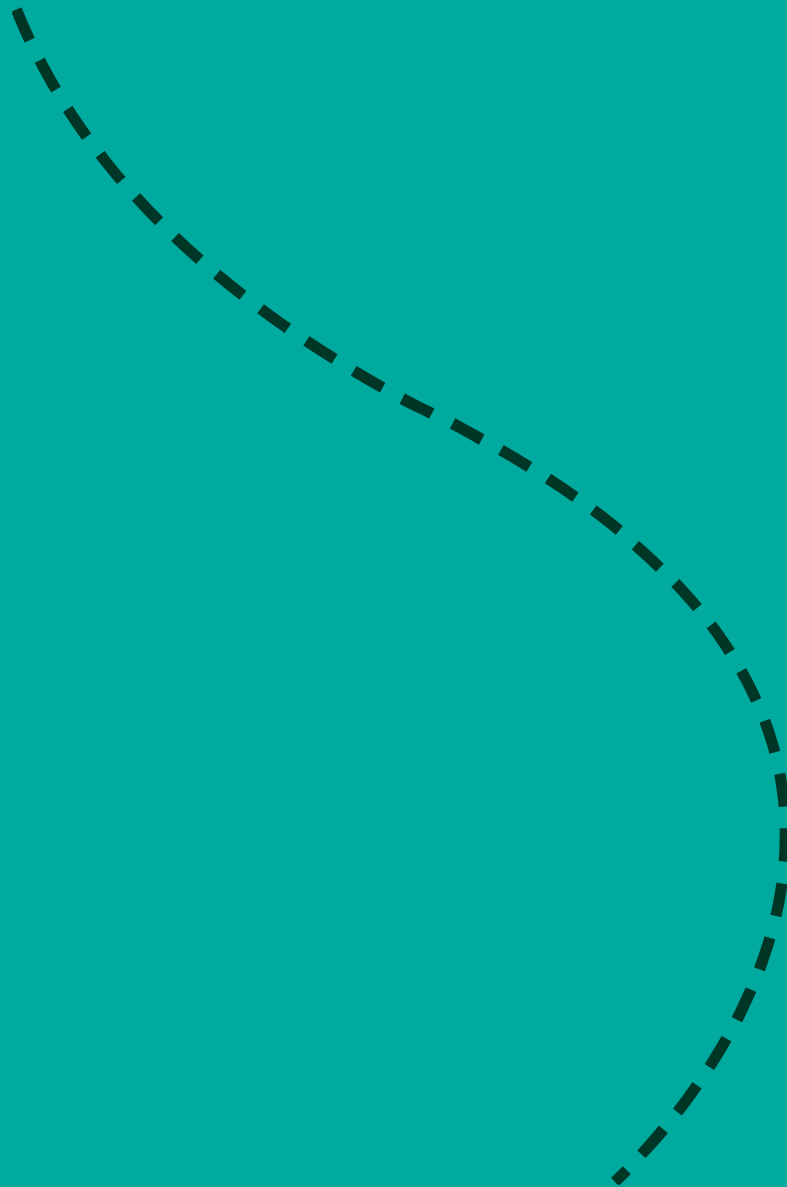
So hiring's not just filling space,  
It's finding the soul that fits the place.  
Because every business, big or small,  
Is only as strong as the people who call it home.

## How We Help Employers Hire Top Retail, Wholesale & E-Commerce Talent:

- We pair candidates not only with roles, but with environments where they'll thrive - helping clients build lasting partnerships with their people.
- We understand how critical timing is in retail, working closely with clients to anticipate demand and scale with confidence when pressure peaks.
- We specialise in finding candidates with the right skills and transferable experience from related sectors - adaptable, well-rounded hires who add long-term value.
- Our refined recruitment process prioritises efficiency and accuracy, helping clients make intentional hires faster without compromising on quality.
- We believe in passion-driven, people-first hiring - because when your team cares, your business grows.



**Small Wins**



**BIG IMPACT**

# Watercooler Wisdom: From Our Desk to Yours

## Gill's Note on New Beginnings

Don't be afraid to do something new!

Forget the naysayers.

On a daily basis I heard how old I was (when I started doing recruitment).

When I started Vital Element, we were still in COVID lockdown.

There will always be challenges, and you may have to take a financial knock (starting a new career/endeavour).

However, if you have been retrenched or are in an unstable sector, you are facing so much uncertainty anyway!

So don't be frightened of the unknown - you will grow!

**- GILLIAN**

## A Few Sips of Wisdom (and a Sprinkle of Sarcasm)

☕ Hiring is like coffee - you get better results when it's done with care.

☕ The real MVPs? People who 'reply-all' with restraint.

☕ Reminder: your to-do list is not the boss of you (but it does have strong opinions).

☕ A five-minute break can save a five-hour headache. Try it.

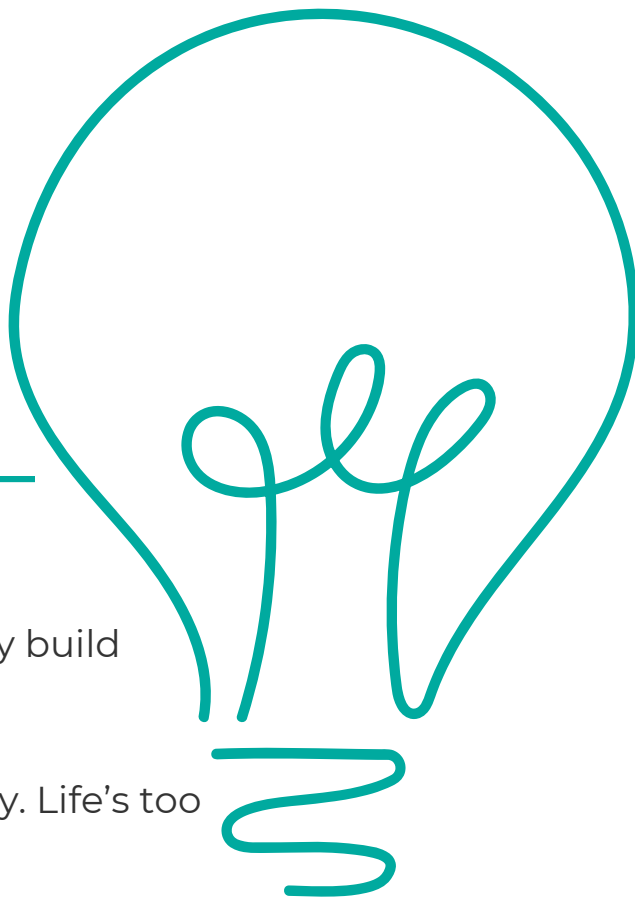
☕ Some interviews feel like conversations. Those are usually the ones that turn into partnerships for life.

☕ Some days are for strategy. Others are for snacks. Balance is everything.

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## Quick Tips Corner

- Keep small promises to yourself. They build confidence faster than big wins.
- Wear your favourite outfit on Tuesday. Life's too short to wait for "occasions."
- Revisit things you loved as a kid. Joy doesn't expire; it just hides under routine.
- Laugh in serious meetings (quietly). It keeps your soul from drying out
- Don't confuse rest with doing nothing. Sometimes "nothing" is the smartest thing to do.



## The Element Edit

This month, we've been thinking about energy - the kind that shows up when people enjoy what they do and who they do it with.

You can feel it in a team that laughs together, in a manager who listens, or in that one coworker who always says, "We've got this."

It's a good reminder that work doesn't have to just be work. When people bring energy, kindness, and care, even tricky days feel a little lighter.

Here's to showing up with heart - and passing that energy on.



### QUOTE OF THE MONTH

When you're working with good people, it brings out the good things in you!

- Martha Plimpton



# Fathima Shaik

## RECRUITMENT OFFICER

From the moment Isabel at Vital Element reached out to me about the Recruitment Officer role, the entire process was seamless.

Her professionalism, clear communication, and genuine insight into the company culture made a lasting impression. Everything she described about the company turned out to be true. I've now been with the company for two years and continue to feel valued and fulfilled in my role.

I'm grateful to Isabel and the Vital Element team for making what can often be a stressful experience feel effortless and encouraging, and I would definitely recommend Vital Element to anyone seeking a new opportunity or a company looking for good candidates.





As we continuously strive to bring you the most relevant and insightful content, your feedback and suggestions are invaluable to us.

If you have any thoughts, ideas, or suggestions that you'd like to share, we encourage you to reach out to us. Whether it's a topic you'd like us to cover, a trend you've noticed, or simply your thoughts on our newsletter, we're all ears.

Please feel free to send your input to  
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and engagement.

We look forward to hearing from you!

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