

M3 Placement and Partnership + Strategic Financial Services

For nearly 15 years, M3 has served as a long-term talent advisor to Strategic Financial Services: a registered investment advisor based in Utica, NY managing nearly \$3 billion in assets. As Strategic has grown, so has M3, offering ever-expanding talent solutions to best support Strategic's needs.

Such a successful long-term partnership, of course, does not happen by accident. Together, Strategic and M3 built a strong foundation for growth on our shared belief that people-first values and honest, two-way communication are the cornerstones of sustainable success.

Strategic Financial Services: Local Impact with National Renown

Strategic Financial Services manages nearly three billion dollars in assets and has achieved national attention for their approach to financial management. Despite their wide-ranging success, however, Strategic remains proudly local in focus, serving cities across Upstate New York and recruiting talent largely from the communities they serve.

As an employee-owned firm, Strategic has built its reputation on a simple but powerful principle: true success is only possible by investing in good people, not just great workers. Finding, retaining, and developing such talent, however, especially in markets outside major metropolitan hubs, requires more than posting a job listing and hoping for the best. It requires true partnership with a dedicated, passionate talent advisory firm like M3.

"M3 takes the daunting and impossible legwork of recruiting employees off of our plate without losing our core values and philosophy, and the results are extraordinary. We'd be nowhere without the people we have, and we wouldn't have the people without M3"

Alan Leist III
CEO

A Partnership Built for Long-Term Success

M3 and Strategic share the belief that a focus on serving one's community, hiring and developing great local talent, and leveraging the immense benefits Upstate New York has to offer is not just a footnote to Strategic's success, but the foundation of it. In the last four years alone, M3 has helped recruit nearly one-third of Strategic's employees as the firm opened new branches across Upstate New York, including a new office in Syracuse. But one of the oft-neglected truths about successful talent strategies is that hiring someone with the "perfect resume" doesn't matter if the candidate is a poor fit for the office.

Retention strategies can be just as crucial as recruitment strategies. Research consistently shows that companies with thriving cultures tend to outperform their peers by 1.5 to 2 times, and that cultural alignment is one of the strongest predictors of long-term employee retention. As a full-service talent advisory firm, we think well beyond traditional recruitment firms, and the results speak for themselves: over 95% of candidates sourced by M3 have remained at Strategic long-term—a testament to the power of values-aligned hiring.

A Unique Interview Strategy for a Unique Company

Strategic's combination of local focus and national scale works primarily because of their deep commitment to fostering genuine relationships with clients—and that requires recruiting not just good employees, but good people. Finding high-caliber, community-minded talent in Upstate New York, an area some mistakenly believe to be a "geographic dead zone" for talent, necessitates a similar approach: local focus with national reach.

Together with Holly Cafalone at Strategic, M3 overhauled the interview process to prioritize relationship-building from the very first phone call through the final group interview session. The process unfolds in three stages:

- First, M3 conducts preliminary interviews with interested candidates to ensure they are a strong fit for Strategic's culture and mission—not just their technical qualifications.
- Successful candidates then complete a meet and greet with Strategic to assess overall compatibility, setting the tone for a relationship-first hiring approach.
- Finally, in-person interviews are conducted with multiple interviewers, aided by a custom rubric tracking the candidate's alignment with Strategic's core values, capability with the Strategic's use of the Entrepreneurial Operating System of management, and professional qualifications.

"Since implementing this new interview process, the conversations around our candidates have been much more specific and constructive—and that allows us to get to the heart of the matter with deeper, more impactful insights."

Holly Cafalone
Operations Manager

Forward-Thinking Talent Strategies Lead to Sustainable Success

CEO Alan Leist III describes Strategic and M3's talent strategy as "proactive, not reactive"—and that level of forward-thinking requires an immense amount of trust and consistent communication about the market and business strategy. But staying ahead in the competition for top talent is an enormously labor-intensive process, especially in the middle of a growth period. M3 stepped in to help find and develop strong candidates on our client's behalf without losing the personal touch that makes the organization unique.

M3 deeply understands Strategic's long-term business vision and appetite for growth. As a result, we do not simply wait for an opening to show up at Strategic—we actively pass along incredible candidates who we believe can help Strategic continue to grow, even if it requires creating a new role on the spot. Such a proactive partnership, however, is only possible by viewing talent strategies as a crucial facet of the overall corporate strategy, rather than a recruitment numbers game.

M3: A Talent-Partner for the Long-Term

For financial services organizations like Strategic—especially employee-owned firms deeply rooted in their communities—having the right people in place makes all the difference between “good” and “great.” As Leist notes, that difference is how companies can create the sort of self-perpetuating positive momentum that leads to long-term growth.

As our nearly 15-year partnership with Strategic Financial Services demonstrates, when you share the same values around people and relationships, when you communicate constantly and honestly, and when you tailor your approach to the unique needs of the organization, extraordinary results follow. A 95% long-term retention rate. Nearly one-third of a firm's workforce recruited by a single partner. Unanimous recommendations from hiring managers on every candidate. By rooting our work in the company's unique growth trajectory, company culture, and needs, we crafted a talent strategy built to support Strategic Financial Services for not just the last fifteen years, but the next fifteen to come.