

Recruiting Strategies:**Hiring the "A" Team: The Right Ingredients for Recruiting Success**

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MR. LEARY: Shifting demographics are significantly impacting the composition of the talent pool. In today's global economy where the most critical competitive differentiators are derived from a higher performing workforce, HR professionals need to support their organizations with a firm strategy that addresses hiring challenges. To sustain and drive a market leader position, hiring the 'A' team is a necessity, not an option.

Admittedly, the game has changed. Gone are the days when posting to a job board resulted in a flurry of qualified candidates. Even social networking sites, such as LinkedIn and Facebook, aren't fresh ideas anymore when it comes to sourcing candidates. Fortunately, there are new ways of addressing hiring challenges, if you start with three main ingredients: employment branding, creative sourcing and pre-hire assessments.

First, when was the last time that you checked your company's employment brand? While we are all familiar with readily recognizable consumer brands, when a job candidate peers from the outside looking into your organization, what do they see? Is your company the brand, such as Hewlett-Packard or IBM? Or is your company a house of product brands, such as Crest, Tide and Bounty? Is your company socially responsible, a purveyor of environmental and community best practices? Or, has your brand been tarnished by workforce reductions and high profile litigation? Ask yourself, "Is my company an employer-of-choice or one that candidates choose to avoid?"

A positive employment brand must be as carefully crafted as the company's marketing brand. Researchers at McKinsey encourage employers to apply the same "rigor and precision" to their employment branding efforts as they do to brand the overall company. However, establishing an employment brand is not as simplistic as linking the company's brand to HR's efforts. Knowing what motivates your ideal candidate is an important component of creating the brand that will attract, retain and motivate them. It's also worth noting that generational differences drive candidate expectations—so whereas a baby boomer may be more receptive to a "stability" brand, the millennial candidate is more concerned with training opportunities and a company's innovation.

Another important aspect of brand management is to consider which other companies you compete against you for talent. Whether you're sourcing candidates against each other geographically, or within a specific field of expertise, a "win-loss" analysis will help determine why other companies are attracting the candidates you are seeking to hire. This analysis should also include examination of how your brand messages are being delivered to candidates, from radio, TV and newspaper advertising, to the reception that a candidate experienced the first time they step into your lobby, and to how the hiring manager supported the brand messages during the interview process.

Employment branding is a strategic initiative that requires constant nurturing. Creative sourcing of candidates requires the same level of attention, as without a healthy qualified candidate pipeline, HR cannot possibly serve the needs of its internal customers and support overall organizational goals. The time to source candidates is now, proactively; not reactively when the position goes open. This allows your talent acquisition team to maintain a lean, qualified pipeline of “ready talent” to be called on when the needs arise.

Logically (and conveniently) when one thinks of sourcing candidates, job boards are the first place to start. The proliferation of job boards has made it a predominant sourcing tool; however, this must be incorporated with an active recruitment strategy to canvas all potential talent. Casting the net too wide and far will result in an overwhelming deluge of likely non-targeted talent. This “spray and pray” approach also backfires by soiling your employment brand when earnest candidates expect to hear back from the company on their submission.

Many times, the most effective means of sourcing candidates is right in front of you. Your existing workforce and relationships are rich sources of referrals. Implementing a referral program that incents your employees for candidate referrals will also result in more engaged employees, which directly impacts retention and productivity.

Which brings us to the third ingredient in our recipe for success, how do you know a candidate is really the right fit? After making the investments in your employment brand and sourcing programs, make sure that you have the right pre-hire assessments in place to qualify these candidates. For example, are you recruiting for frontline positions that require outstanding customer service skills? Or, is the job requirement to spend hours, if not days, alone and heads down on extremely detailed projects? Taking this scientific approach diminishes variances in hiring and interviewing practices, and also supports other key programs, such as succession planning and building a pipeline of high potentials.

A good example of using pre-hire assessments is Kenexa’s work with McDonald’s. Kenexa has designed a customized assessment for the recruitment of McDonald’s U.K. and Northern Ireland hourly-paid staff. Each year that organization receives more than 400,000 applications for its crew, customer care and maintenance positions and the new assessment is an integral part of its ‘Hire the Smile’ recruitment process for the organization’s 1,225 U.K. and Northern Ireland-based restaurants. The assessment measures candidates against the key competencies necessary for a successful career at McDonald’s, namely—customer engagement, personal interaction, teamwork, speed and accuracy.

“Best fit” candidates become engaged employees and research supports that the more engaged your employees are, the longer they stay with and the more valuable they are to the corporation. The Kenexa Research Institute’s research consistently indicates that engaged employees are more likely to recommend their employer as a place to work and have pride in the organization. Pre-hire assessments enable employers to determine if they’re advancing the right candidates in the hiring pipeline and investing in those candidates that have high probability of staying with the company.

Regardless of economic fluctuations, the recruiting game has changed. Today, even public sector employers are feeling the pinch. A major Canadian city that only 10 years ago had turnover rates of 2.5% is struggling with turnover exceeding 10%. Well-planned and executed recruiting programs are the only means of “seeing around the corners” to make certain that your company’s efforts aren’t casualties. Assembling and mixing the

right ingredients will help you ensure recruiting success.

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