



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

Written by Chris Chambers, Canada

There's no doubt that the well-established race for talent will continue to intensify. Shifting demographics are significantly impacting the composition of the talent pool, to the harsh extent that some companies are even leaving positions unfilled because they cannot locate the "perfect fit" candidates. Yet, in this global economy where the most critical competitive differentiators are derived from a higher performing workforce, this approach simply isn't viable. Plus, when the mandate from the board clearly states that 'our people are our greatest asset,' HR professionals need to support the organization with a firm strategy that addresses hiring challenges. Simply put, 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 when it comes to sourcing candidates. Even when you've sourced properly, how do you determine whether a candidate is a good fit? 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 employment brand? While we're all familiar with readily recognizable consumer brands – such as McDonalds, Tim Horton's and Loblaws – 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 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? Is your company an employer of choice or one that candidates chose 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 isn't 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.

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It's also worth noting that generational differences drive candidate expectations so whereas a baby boomer might be more receptive to a "stability" brand, the millennial candidate is more concerned with training opportunities and company innovation.

Another important aspect of brand management is to consider what other companies 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're 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 tending. Creative sourcing of candidates requires the same level of attention, as without a healthy 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.

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 the predominant sourcing tool; however, with all good things, it has run its course. That's not to say that job boards are dead but, as every HR professional will attest to, they cast the net too wide and far and the resulting deluge overwhelms already busy HR departments. This "spray and pray" approach also backfires by sullying 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. During my recent conversation with the vice president, Human Resources for a Canadian company with 25,000 employees, he mentioned that they're offering \$6,000 per new referral. He added that this approach was previously relegated to salaried positions only and, on top of that, only for those jobs in Alberta, where it's more difficult to recruit. Now, this approach is being used to recruit for the entire organization. While this might sound pricey, consider how expensive it is to have an unfilled seat! Add the unfulfilled potential to the expense of job board postings, recruiter time and meetings with irate hiring managers. Implementing a referral program that incentivizes your employees for candidate referrals will also result in more engaged employees, which directly impacts retention and productivity.

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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 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 comes from a custom designed assessment for the recruitment of McDonald's U.K. and Northern Ireland hourly-paid staff. Each year that organization receives over 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, and 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. Research 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. 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 corners" to make certain that your company's efforts aren't casualties. Assembling and mixing the right ingredients will help ensure recruiting success!

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About the author:

Chris Chambers is a Principal at LC Management Consultants with over 25 years of business experience. He has helped organizations improve everything from the management of their human capital to operations and development of Sales & Marketing teams and strategies. In the spirit of mixing the right ingredients, he is also the president of Les Marmitons' Toronto Chapter, an international men's chefs club.

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