

Get Back to Basics in Recruiting Practices

By Louise Kursmark, Monster Contributing Writer

It's surprising to learn how many companies commit fundamental mistakes in the recruitment process -- mistakes that drive away good candidates.

In a recent survey I conducted of more than 200 professionals (primarily managers and executives), 50 percent reported that something during the hiring process made them decide not to work at a company. These negative experiences included rude treatment, long waits, little follow-up, an overly long hiring process and unprofessional behavior in the interview.

"Companies should never take an arrogant tone when they interview candidates, because they will lose people," says Neil McNulty, president of McNulty Management Group, a placement firm in Virginia Beach. "Nothing makes a recruiter angrier than to hear a good candidate say, 'They treated me poorly.'"

While no company deliberately creates a poor hiring environment, it makes sense to review the fundamentals from time to time and make sure you have the right processes, people and culture in place to avoid wasting recruitment dollars.

Respond to Resumes

Simply confirming receipt of a resume is a smart strategy that will elevate you above the majority of employers.

If you use an automated system for accepting applications and storing resumes, you can create an auto-responder. If your system isn't fully automated, consider creating a simple postcard with check-box options that you or the hiring manager can quickly check off and send. This will, at the very least, let candidates know you have received their materials.

Prepare for Interviews

Organizations create a bad impression when interviewers are poorly prepared, in a rush or clueless about the candidate or the position. An arrogant, superior attitude is a real turn-off. While it's not always possible to create a perfect interview environment, you can ensure the best possible results with some simple practices:

- Brief hiring managers and supply candidate resumes well in advance of the interview.
- Be certain HR and hiring managers schedule ample time for each interview.
- Make interviewing easier by creating a library of sample questions from which interviewers can pick and choose.
- Whether your company uses a formal interview process or allows managers to create their own, you can add value by providing training, sharing best practices and serving as a resource.

Be certain that everyone -- from the HR screener up through top executives -- understands what it costs to recruit a candidate and how essential good employees are to the company's success. This must be more than lip service or a slogan on your employment Web site. If it is not truly ingrained into the company culture, it's easy for busy executives to conduct cursory interviews or seem dismissive.

Follow Up After Interviews

The survey revealed that 28 percent of candidates received no follow-up whatsoever after an interview. And when they did, 62 percent of respondents said the wait averaged two weeks or longer.

Again, it's simple but profoundly important: Follow up with candidates after every interview, even if it's to tell them they are not being considered. By neglecting to follow up, you squander the chance to create a positive impression with this candidate (and friends). You might lose a candidate who could fill another open position, and you create enormous ill will that harms your employment brand.

It's particularly important to stay in touch with candidates who are still under consideration. Even if you can't make the process go faster, be sure to let candidates know what's going on and what they can expect.

Communicate Throughout the Process

Does your organization have a clear, consistent procedure for communicating with candidates at every step of the process? Do candidates know what to expect when they arrive for interviews? Is the follow-up procedure clear and closely followed?

If not, it's likely your candidates are experiencing frustration that can lead to disgust with your organization.

McNulty puts it succinctly: "Expectations up front prevent problems down the road." Establish expectations, and you reduce candidates' frustration. You'll also reduce or eliminate repeated follow-up calls.

Shape Candidate Perceptions

Not surprisingly, candidates are frustrated by the process of looking for a job, and they use their experiences to form opinions and make decisions about hiring organizations. Half of the survey respondents responded "yes" to the question: Has a company ever done something in the interview/selection process that made you decide not to work there?"

Of this group, half indicated it had something to do with "fit" in regard to culture, organization, boss or position. But the other half -- fully 25 percent of job applicants surveyed -- indicated it was the hiring process itself that caused them to form a bad opinion about the company and decide not to work there.

This should be a wake-up call to hiring organizations. In view of the promised talent shortage that is predicted to affect most professions and industries, companies that do a poor job of cultivating candidates will not be able to attract top talent.

The good news is that it doesn't take much to improve the process -- simply treat people with respect, establish expectations, maintain clear communication and follow up promptly.