

Attract the best talent

Enhancing your hiring practices can help your firm attract and keep the best job candidates.

By Jon Picoult



Reserved parking leaves a positive impression on a job candidate.



If you've ever flown Southwest Airlines, you know the difference employee interactions can make with customers. With service-focused employees, Southwest reduces the stress associated with traveling and has earned a loyal customer following.

Behind the scenes, the company has a recruiting process that enables them to attract the most customer-oriented people in the airline industry. They get the best people, and it shows in their interactions with consumers and, ultimately, in their bottom line (*see Page 50*).

Take a cue from Southwest and examine your hiring process to see if you're doing all you can to attract the right staff to serve your clients.

Understand and relate

The essential foundation for successful recruitment is to understand and relate to your candidate. This sounds simple, but it trips up many business owners who tend to be inwardly focused, losing sight of what is most important to the people they're trying to influence and impress. To establish this foundation within your recruiting activities, consider doing the following:

Put yourself in the candidate's shoes. Evaluate every interaction with job seekers — face-to-face, written or electronic — from the candidate's perspective. Try to capture their mindset at key points in the recruiting process, and then consider what kind of impression you're leaving at each touch point. When you're looking to make changes to your recruiting process, perhaps by creating new job description templates, run the idea past actual job candidates. Just as a consumer goods firm would test a new product idea, solicit feedback from your target market.

Set up listening posts. Research has shown that businesspeople can completely misread the impression their company is leaving on people. How do you know what kind of impression you're leaving? You've got to set up listening posts that will alert you when your recruiting experience isn't eliciting the right response. Examples of

such feedback mechanisms include online post-application surveys, focus groups with recently hired employees, monitoring of social media posts and mystery shopping of your recruitment process.

With a keen understanding of job candidates' needs, wants and aspirations, your organization will be much better positioned to satisfy these individuals' expectations.

Nail the basics

Once you understand job candidates' expectations, the next step is to flawlessly execute on those fundamental requirements. If you want to create a positive, memorable recruiting experience, many basic touch points need to be nailed. They include the following:

Job titles and descriptions. A job title can bore (personnel recruiter) or inspire (talent scout). Similarly, a job description can make all the difference in positioning something as an appealing, intriguing opportunity versus a dreary, inconsequential one. First and foremost, job titles and descriptions must accurately portray the role. But by injecting a more creative marketing angle into these instruments, you've got a better chance of capturing the attention of talented people.

Candidate communications. Candidates are perpetually frustrated by the black hole into which they lob résumés, emails and phone calls — never hearing anything back in return. Particularly with today's technology, candidate communications can be generated relatively easily at key milestones in the recruiting process. If you clearly communicate expectations to your candidates, and stay in touch as you promise, it's far more likely they'll

be impressed with your company — even if they don't get the job.

Given that many companies' recruiting processes are devoid of simple professional courtesies and hospitality, don't underestimate the power that nailing the basics will have in setting your employer brand apart from the competition.

Deliver pleasant surprises

The next step in creating a competitively differentiating customer experience is to deliver pleasant surprises — things that your job candidate would never expect or anticipate.

Brand your communications. Simple communications, such as a résumé receipt notice, can be taken to an entirely new level when they exude your brand attributes. This isn't about logos and letterhead; it's about communications with a tone and personality that reflect your firm's culture. This conveys a message about your company's values — giving those with the same values another compelling reason to work for you, and those with different values an opportunity to deselect from the process.

Capitalize on the shift from on-

line to off-line. For the most promising candidates, your interactions will move from online to off-line interactions. Face-to-face meetings present even more opportunity to create positive, lasting impressions. Consider, for example, how you invite a candidate to visit your office for an interview. Imagine if the candidate, upon following your detailed directions to your office parking lot, came across a reserved parking space with his or her name on it. That costs hardly anything (you can easily personalize an existing "reserved parking" sign with a laser-printed temporary nameplate), but it leaves a positive, indelible impression on that candidate.

In the recruiting arena, these surprises can endear your company to candidates, intensifying their interest in your firm, and helping you draw new talent into the fold. ■

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Jon Picoult doing a great session on attracting talent and client experience
#MDRT2011



Favorable impression for future business

It's not far-fetched to consider that your job candidates could influence others who might consider doing business with your firm.

Every employment candidate who interacts with your firm, at one time or another, will need direction in financial matters — or know someone who does.

With each candidate interaction, you are shaping impressions — not just of your employer brand, but your consumer brand, as well. Treat a candidate unprofessionally, and just imagine what they'll think, say or tweet about your financial services practice.

Conversely, treat them with exceptional respect, courtesy and consideration, and they're much more likely to walk away with positive feelings toward your firm, even if they don't get a job. Think about the value of that outcome in terms of earning the future recommendation (if not paying business) from your job candidates or others in their circle of influence.