

How to attract and recruit talent

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Overview

Managers need to improve their ability to recruit in order to select talented staff. This 'expert article' explores how to become a team of choice, the importance of a succinct advert, the value of staying the distance in the recruiting marathon, and the importance of a successful induction.

In every workshop, I ask one question, "Who has made a recruiting decision they have lived to regret?" Every manager puts their hand up. The carnage caused is relived in their facial expressions. Why does this happen so often?

I suspect that many readers will recall instances when the interviewee has arrived, and you realize with a degree of horror that you have not yet reviewed the CV nor prepared enough for the interview. You were on the back foot, and the smart interviewee was now in control, painting a picture that impressed you and hiding any issues that might have caused you concern.

Far too often, managers, when looking at their calendars, throw up their hands when they realize that they have another recruitment interview to do. It is the last thing they need now.

Recruitment should be the most important activity a manager ever does. It should be the most prepared exercise we ever do for the following reasons:

- Recruiting properly is like putting a fence on the top of a cliff—it is better to spend 40 hours recruiting a candidate properly than to spend 400 hours cleaning up after a recruiting mistake.
- You can recruit for technical skills and, through training, improve skill levels, but you cannot change a person's values. If an individual's values are different from those of the organization, you will always have conflict.
- Better recruits will lead to more internal promotions, both saving costs and retaining institutional knowledge.

To have a first-rate team, it is desirable to start with the best resources available. There are still too many staff selections made via an antiquated interview process accompanied by some cursory reference checking; the result is a high failure rate among new staff. Greater effort needs to be injected into the selection process along with the adoption of reliable recruiting techniques.

Management guru Peter Drucker once observed General Motors C-suite spending hours discussing the promotion of one employee. On questioning management about the effectiveness of this, the reply from the CEO was, "If we didn't spend four hours on placing a person and placing them right, we'd spend 400 hours on cleaning up after our mistake."

As one CEO said to me, "I always told my managers to remember that a good vacancy will always be better than a bad recruitment."

I will now talk about comprehensive recruiting practices that will help you "get the right people on the bus," as advised by Jim Collins, of *Good to Great* fame.¹

Ever-Present Danger

Let's recall the last recruitment you did that went radically wrong. Can you recall how impressed you had become with the interviewee who could not put a foot wrong? They, of course, were much more prepared than you by a factor of 5 to 1. You really did not have a chance, for you were dealing with a chameleon. They appeared to be the ideal candidate for the position. They would mirror your sentiments, so before long, you were falling for your own image. Thus, before we start, let's remind ourselves of what you need to avoid:

- Going into an interview process unprepared. If you have not had training in behavioural event interviewing and competency-based questions, make sure you are accompanied by someone who is trained.
- Always filling up the silences. Make sure you let the interviewee complete their answers or ask their questions.

- Missing the clues to possible issues in their employment history—the inability to explain job moves or employment gaps.
- Missing red flags about their personality and working style, for example, if they speak negatively of others, make obviously exaggerated claims about their ability, and appear too self-centered and egotistical rather than being a supportive team player.

The Need to Up-Skill

There is no other area in your field of expertise where training will have a bigger payoff than learning to recruit successfully. You might be recruiting until you retire from full-time work, and even then, it might still come in handy when you become a board member sitting on the executive recruiting panel.

So, what skills do you need?

1. A sound understanding of the differing personality types and your own personal baggage.
2. Be acutely familiar with twenty-first-century recruitment processes outlined in this working guide.
3. Be able to frame behavioural event and competency-based questions—and understand the significance of the answers. No longer will you ask leading questions that make it clear to the candidate how they should respond.
4. Be able to spot behavioural traits that might indicate a divergence between your organization's values and their values.

Law of Attraction

Successful organizations have known for years that to attract the cream to their organization they need to promote how wonderful they are overtly. The public relations team and the CEO must embrace this. I always think of Richard Branson and the way he has branded his empire. He has been so that I suspect many of us would jump at the chance if a head hunter tapped us on the shoulder for a good position in the Virgin Group. A picture has been painted for us, and we have bought it. This branding is a long-term investment, and unfortunately, there are no quick fixes.

Organizations that embrace modern management techniques, such as Google and Netflix, will naturally have an easier job in selecting talent as these organizations are seen as attractive places to work by many applicants. Netflix has even adopted a policy of unlimited holiday entitlement. They tell staff to take what they need so they can deliver at the high end of the spectrum we demand. The executives regularly take six to seven weeks a year.

During the whole process, from the advert to the final offer, we need to maximize the promotion of the organization's and team's brand.

Promote Your Team to the Outside World

With your journey to becoming 'future ready,' you will have achieved some success stories. These will start making the accounting team a preferred team to join, providing you broadcast this message. You can do this by:

- Establishing a relationship with your local universities by offering prizes to the best graduates, delivering guest lectures, and offering paid holiday jobs, not unpaid internments. These activities will increase the profile of the team and enable you and your organization to try before you buy.
- Writing articles/case studies in your accounting institute's journal and delivering presentations for your local institute branch.
- Being active in the local institute branch.

These activities are termed *magnetic marketing initiatives*; they will attract high-calibre candidates who tend to do more research.

The Recruiting Marathon

To have a leading-edge team requires being able to sift the wheat from the chaff in the recruitment process. It is time to revamp the process from the antiquated interview process and accompanying cursory reference checking.

Look for Values and Fit Before Focusing on Expertise

A common recruiting failure is to focus on expertise and experience. If you come across the perfect fit with a candidate, it is all too easy to brush aside all the warning signals and rush into signing them up.

Jim Collins points out the importance of organizations having a core ideology, which he defines very succinctly in the formula:

$$\text{Core ideology} = \text{Core values} + \text{purpose}$$

There are some very good examples of organizational core values and purpose statements (mission statements) in Chapter 3 of his book, *Built to Last*, that are well worth reading.

Recruiting will never be successful if the recruiters do not have a shared understanding of the organization's core values and purpose. The primary objective should always be to weed out candidates who do not share the same values and who will not buy into the organization's purpose.

It is wiser to recruit someone slightly less experienced who is clearly able and has a close fit with the organization's core ideology than to recruit an expert who will not fit from day one.