



Hiring:

A Two-way Street

By **Michael Woodward**

About ten years ago, I was in the market for a management consulting position. Being the diligent job seeker, I did my homework and applied to a number of high quality firms. One particular firm piqued my interest. The firm had a good reputation and a very high international profile. Naturally, I was excited at the prospect of being a part of the organization. Then came the interview... and my fantasy was shattered.

To make a long story short, the interview process consisted of three separate interviews with potential colleagues of varying levels of seniority. My first interview was with a woman whom my clinical friends would likely refer to as “depressed.” About ten minutes into the interview she stated, “I feel so overwhelmed and tired, I’m just not sure how to handle it anymore.” That’s when I realized I had been unwittingly drawn into a therapy session. In my own attempt to cope, I remained fairly quiet, holding out hope for interviewer number two. Unfortunately, it didn’t get any better. The second interviewer had me sit in the corner while he typed e-mails, never once making eye contact. I asked a number of questions and he gave very curt answers. I recall a nice photo of a Porsche hanging over his desk—the only glimpse I received into his personality. Then came number three and he didn’t disappoint—he was the icing on the cake. As a former military man, his

first concern was whether or not I had combat experience. Considering the fact that my resume didn’t list any military experience, I found this question a bit odd—clearly he had not reviewed my resume, and quite frankly, if I had accumulated combat experience somewhere other than the military, the question would be extremely odd. Throughout the rest of the interview he proceeded to relay a mixture of his combat stories and consulting gigs that became so intertwined I couldn’t tell one from the other—it almost seemed that consulting and combat were being classified in the same category.

As you might expect, when I left the firm I felt disappointed. The impressions I had of the organization had been shattered and the prospect of being hired was grim. Then came the big kicker, the recruiter called me the following day and extended a generous offer! Apparently, they all rated me very high and were excited about bringing me on board. I immediately rejected the

offer informing the recruiter of my experience. Needless to say, she was horrified and very apologetic. She even called me back with a second offer, which I also turned down.

The mistake the firm made is one that is elementary, but all too common—they selected me but failed to sell me!

The fact that hiring is a two-way street is often overlooked! Now, more than ever, candidates are being selective—they hold the cards. And, with any contractual relationship, there are differing needs among the parties that must be addressed in order to achieve a successful outcome. Candidates want to select good employers, just as employers want to select good candidates. This means that as an HR practitioner you need to be attentive to candidate needs, especially considering the current job market. The key to a good fit between organization and employee is ensuring the needs of both sides are met.

Hiring Synergy:

A Model and a Philosophy

To illustrate this critical interplay between candidate and employer, I have devised a very simple model which I refer to as “Hiring Synergy.” The model has three basic elements: Candidate Needs (blue), Employer Needs (yellow), and Culture Fit. Satisfying each of these elements will ultimately lead to a successful match between candidate and employer (green).



Candidate Needs:

Value Proposition: “What’s in it for Me?”

Before making any kind of substantial commitment, any diligent individual will ask this simple question... and reasonably so! As an employer of choice it is up to you to market the value of membership in your organization! Market and brand strategy shouldn’t just be targeted towards customers, but also towards prospective employees! If those within your organization aren’t believers, how are you going to convince the world at large!

A friend of mine who has had a very successful career in marketing once told me that one of the keys to a successful brand is creating “brandvangelists,” individuals who willingly preach your brand because they truly embrace it. The three interviewers I mentioned at the

opening of this article certainly do not fit this description!

Opportunity & Career Growth:

Top level candidates are ambitious and thrive on learning! To successfully attract dedicated learners, your organization must provide a clearly defined path for growth and a means for employees to manage this journey. Opportunity is the path to success and strong candidates are looking for success.

Employer Needs:

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs):

Every position requires a certain level of competence. In order to determine specific talent needs, organizations must be diligent in assessing (through job analysis) the level of competence necessary to successfully fulfill the requirements of the position. This can be accomplished through the use of such techniques as:

- Skills Tests
- Role Play Simulations
- Structured Behavioral Interviewing

Attributes for Success:

KSAs alone don’t give the full picture of success. Such factors as intelligence, personality, and past experience are critical factors that contribute to how effectively one applies their knowledge, skills, and abilities in the workplace. These factors also contribute to the capacity to learn. There are certain competencies that you select for and certain competencies you train for

- Personality Assessments

- Emotional Intelligence Assessments
- Cognitive Ability Assessments (IQ tests)

Culture and Fit:

In order to attract top level candidates whose values, philosophies, and ambitions are consistent with those of your organization, you must consider the influence of your organization’s culture! According to “Attraction-Selection-Attrition Theory” or ASA (Schneider, 1987), individuals are attracted to, and typically selected by, those organizations who share their own values, philosophies, and ambitions.

Potential for Success:

Hiring Synergy

Just as yellow and blue combine to make green, so too, does the convergence of candidate and employer needs combine to create potential for success. As illustrated in my frightful anecdote, effective recruitment and selection is indeed a two-way street. And, ironically, some of the most heated battles (like competing for talent) are won by finding consensus instead of combat. ♦



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