



By Michael Woodward

## Holistic Hiring

Strategies for a Changing Environment

I was recently asked by a client to consult on the early stages of an employment branding initiative. When I sat with the lead recruiter and one of their fairly tenured HR representatives, I began to do a little probing—that is, of course, my job. Naturally, the first question I asked was: could you tell me about your culture? Appearing shocked by the question, the recruiter looked at his associate then back at me and said “we don’t really know.” Assuming this was simply an issue of clarification, I rephrased my question, asking about the company’s values, philosophies, and work structure. But, again, their reaction was the same; “we don’t really know.” This organization is one of the older and more recognizable consumer brands in the marketplace—admittedly, I was a bit surprised. How can an established company not know their culture? And, what in the world are they doing talking about employment branding?

Unfortunately, this is a classic example of putting the cart before the

horse. How are you going to market an employment brand without even understanding the basics of what your organization is about? An organization is more than just a simple tangible product or service. An HR staff can’t just decide on a cultural direction, develop a marketing campaign, and bank on current employees buying into it. As aptly stated by noted organizational psychologist Ben Schneider, “the people make the place.” Well, if you don’t know who the people are, then how can you go about branding the place?

Recruitment and hiring is a process. It’s a process composed of several critical elements that must be attended to and administered in an appropriate fashion. Over the past two decades, the war for talent has become very heated. As the U.S. economy continues to transform from a hard asset-based market to a service-based environment, this war for talent will only get more intense. The talent game is no longer about butts in chairs. It’s about the strategic enhancement of market value through the acquisition of best-in-class human capital. What does that mean?

It means; the companies who win the war will be the one’s who recruit and hire the best people!

How do you hire the best people?

I often hear clients and colleagues talk about best practice hiring, but I rarely see it actually done. To meet this need, you, as an HR and recruitment practitioner, must get in the game! In other words, you need to have a plan. You need to have a strategy. And, you need to have a mindset that you, and your company, will win in the end.

How do you develop that plan? Here’s a simple and effective outline—a plan I refer to as the Holistic Hiring Plan.

### BE INTROSPECTIVE

The process of building a talent pool begins with an assessment of your culture. Before looking outward towards the available talent pool, it is critical to first look inward, so as to understand the values, philosophies, and underlying assumptions that create the foundation of your organization. You must first know who you are before you can begin the process of communicating your image to the public.

### CREATE A PROFILE

What does a successful employee look like at your organization? Before seeking out new hires you must first have a firm grasp on what it is you are looking to employ. To accomplish this end you must carefully examine the position through developing a profile of success. An effective competency profile includes an outline of the requisite knowledge and skills as well as the critical personality and behavioral factors that contribute to success.

### BUILD YOUR BRAND

Successful organizations have a defined brand. Talk to your marketing people and find out how they take your products/services to market. Candidates, especially good ones, will know your brand and thus perceive your organization as it has been marketed to consumers. Remember, marketers are experts at understanding target markets and packaging exciting images directed at these markets. Use this information to help you best understand how to leverage the existing brand image to attract the talent you want.

### SET YOUR SIGHTS

Identify your target talent pool. Once you have developed a profile of success and created a brand image you must begin the journey of identifying where the potential candidates who fit your profile are. Don’t rely on shotgun blasts—pick your targets and set your sights!

### TAP THE LOCAL MARKET

Many local markets have to deal with serious real estate and property tax issues that have made it increasingly more difficult to lure outside talent. The cost of relocation can be a hefty load for your organization to burden and is often not a viable option. Thus,

to hire successfully it is critical that you stay on top of the local market through the use of:

- Local job boards
- Local career expos and fairs
- Community colleges and universities
- Community organizations
- Professional associations

### GIVE A SNEAK PREVIEW

Be sure to provide candidates with a realistic preview of what the job entails. The hiring process is a two-way street. Allow candidates to self select before you get to the decision making process. Let them know what your organization is about, so as to ensure that there is an alignment of values and philosophies. Use such tools as:

- Your company web-site – describe or show “a day in the life...”
- Offer tours and open house events
- Provide company video and/or written materials at fairs and expos

### MAKE THE RIGHT PICK

Recruitment must be aligned with the selection process. Be sure that your recruitment efforts produce talent that is in-line with specific business needs. This alignment begins with your initial introspection and profile building, but should continue throughout the recruitment process as talent needs sometimes change or become highly specific. Develop a process and choose selection tools that make the most sense for your business. Some common and very effective techniques include:

- Personality assessments – especially for sales and customer service-oriented jobs
- Structured interviews – always structure interviews for enhanced standardization
- Role plays – have candidates

actually show you what they can do, why guess?

### TRACK PROGRESS

Monitor results through simple metrics. In the “bottom-line” focused world, if you don’t measure, you don’t know. Be bottom-line oriented and know your return on investment (ROI). Be sure you can talk about how quality hires contribute to the bottom line. Examine differences in the production of top performers compared to low performers. Be able to demonstrate how your system will ensure the hiring of more top performers. ♦



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