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Route to:

Fickle job-seekers return

CAN EMPLOYERS GAIN BETTER CONTROL OF THEM IN TODAY'S CANDIDATE-DRIVEN MARKETPLACE?

A READER LAMENTS that job candidates these days act as if they run the show: “The global demand for key talent, the aging population and the demand for people to fill new specialties have all conspired to put candidates in the driver’s seat.”

“More and more,” he continues, “we are seeing them entertain multiple job offers – not to mention counter-offers from their current employers, who really don’t want to lose them. Also, candidates are acting a lot more squirrely about revealing their true intentions, are more inclined to accept job offers but not show up for work, or do report to work and then leave a week later when a better offer arrives. It used to be over when the Fat Lady sang and granted them employment, but now the uncertainty goes on and on.”

Not all searches, of course, end so inconclusively – but the employment marketplace has begun to resemble that of the late 1990s, when newly minted college graduates received Porsches not from their parents but rather from grateful employers in Silicon Valley and beyond.

While today’s talent pool is somewhat less avaricious than its counterpart of a decade ago, its members place their own particular needs at the center of their respective universes and are highly aware of the rich number of career options they perceive to be available to them. That notwithstanding, there are many positive steps an employer can take throughout the recruiting and onboarding process to strengthen its own hand and secure the talent it needs to thrive.

Why a Second Set of Eyes Helps

HIRING CAN BE a daunting process. We see candidate after candidate who is not exactly right, and then lightning strikes: Mr. or Ms. Wonderful appears, and we fall in love. It is not so much that this particular individual possesses all the experience and attributes that the position requires, but rather it is because we *like* the person. We can imagine him or her fitting in. We can envision the beneficial impact of having him or her aboard. This is whom we are determined to hire.

An outside search consultant can provide a second set of eyes that may be less clouded with passion and more open to objective observation. While any professional recruiter wants you to select a candidate with whom you will be comfortable, day in and day out, it is the consultant’s goal to present not just those individuals with the right credentials and the right fit – but, equally important, those who will actually go to work for you.

Some readers may recall the fable of the fox and the hedgehog. Unlike the hedgehog who knows one great thing (how to avoid the fox), a good recruiter (like the fox) wants to know many things. For example, does a potential candidate have a compelling reason to change jobs (such as a dead-end job, missed promotion or intolerable boss)? Are there conditions in the candidate’s current life (such as a daughter in her junior year of high school) that realistically preclude relocation? Are the pay and perks of the potential new job in line with those of other jobs open to the candidate?

A good search consultant likewise looks for buying signs – e.g., the candidate’s willingness to provide an up-to-date résumé, schedule interviews, respond to questions, reveal information about other job opportunities, provide references, etc. Most experienced recruiters can spot the less-than-candid candidate at fifty paces.

An added bonus today for employers and recruiters alike is the Internet, where simple Google or ask.com searches can turn up amazing amounts of information on candidates at all levels of seniority and experience. With the inclination by many people under age 35 to bare their souls (and some-times more) online, personal pages on Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn and other social/business networking sites can provide a goldmine of information and insight into a candidate’s character. Two recent surveys have found that approximately 10 percent of U.S. employers currently check out the online profiles of job candidates. That means about four-fifths have yet to take advantage of this readily available intelligence.

Many people also publish blogs, another source of candidate insight. NBC’s *Today Show* recently featured a young woman under consideration for an important job. On her blog, however, she posted reservations about the employer and the job and invited others to comment. Needless to say, she failed to receive an offer.

Last but not least, search consultants consider family-related issues. Spouses, whether employed or working at home, often have anxieties about a job change – not to mention sometimes outright resistance to it. Moreover, few children (especially older ones) want to abandon their friends or positions held at school. Skilled search professionals often can probe for such concerns and help address them in non-threatening ways. If they can’t be resolved, employers are well advised to move on.

How to Maintain Control Once an Offer is Extended

THERE’S AN OLD SAYING that no trial lawyer should ask a question of a witness unless the lawyer already knows the answer. In similar fashion, no employer (or its recruiter) should extend an offer without being reasonably certain of the outcome.

Imagine for example Jack proposing marriage to Jill, who responds that she will get back to him in a week or so. Unless hopelessly in love and delusional as a result, Jack would say *sayonara* to Jill. Yet employers routinely offer jobs to candidates and then agree to let them take all the time they need. That is simply allowing Jill to shop the offer around, increase the amount of a competing offer and/or encourage a counter-offer from her current employer.

Here as well, recruiters can provide great assistance by testing an offer before it is formally extended. Is the candidate anxious to proceed, or are there signs of hesitation? And once a formal offer has been made and accepted, the candidate faces the stressful act of resigning. A professional search consultant can coach the person on how to resign professionally and effectively – and how to resist a counter-offer if one is extended. Unless there are mitigating circumstances, he or she should normally provide no more than two weeks’ notice and should be prepared to assume the new position.

The period between acceptance of an offer and the official reporting date provides an ideal time for new employee and boss to begin discussions on position objectives, budgets, personnel and other matters that help make the opportunity both tangible and exciting. Also during this period, the entire family can become involved in house-hunting if moving to a new community, further helping make the hiring process “real.”

Once at the workplace, the new incumbent should receive the onboarding assistance that smart employers provide these days. (Please see the January/February 2007 issue for a full discussion.) By providing mentors to employees, usually outside their chain of command, companies help them learn the local customs, identify the landmines and adjust to the new culture. Having invested considerable resources to bring each new person onboard, employers have a vested interest in helping them succeed – not leave for something better elsewhere.

—George Snider

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