

Candidate Centric Recruiting

There has been a lot published over the years about optimizing the candidate experience. In virtually every case, the prescription has been a series of “fixes” to the practices used in our recruiting processes. We’ve tried, for example, to improve the interviewing habits of highly disagreeable managers and the unfriendly messages generated by our applicant tracking systems. Ask 100 job seekers to describe what it was like to apply for a job, however, and 99 will tell you it was the worst experience of their lives.

To put it bluntly, all of our efforts have been to no avail. Candidates still think we’re Laurent in business attire. So, what’s the problem?

The answer, I think, is that we’re addressing the wrong things. We spend all our time trying to fix what happens to candidates, and what they really want us to do is care about them. Sure, they look for the process to be efficient and the individuals with whom they interact to be courteous. But more than that, they would like to feel as if they matter. They want us to act as if they have worth, even if they don’t have the skills we need for our openings.

How do you convey such a sense?

First, remember that it’s not what you say; it’s how you (and the organization) act that counts. Candidates know we’re going to say they matter. They’ve heard it countless times before, from CEOs (who then cut their pay) and from supervisors (who then lay them off). To passive as well as active job seekers, those words are simply the PC-side of what we do. So, what do they do? They ignore the words, and watch our actions.

Second, you must add a new dimension to what you focus on in your candidate acquisition strategy. You have to move from paying exclusive attention to filling a req—your organization’s goal—to a binocular focus which accomplishes the organization’s goal by paying attention, as well, to the candidate’s goal—their career success. That’s why I call it candidate-centric recruiting.

Here are two examples of acting as if candidates really do matter. They both appeared in the Career area of corporate Web-sites, but sadly, as far as I can tell, they’re no longer in operation:

- A major high tech company offered a career planning tool it described this way: Our “Engineer Your Career program is a way for you to begin the process of planning an ideal career ... whether you choose to work for [us] or not.”
- A major consumer products company featured a Career Advice Center with a self-improvement curriculum it described this way: “Build your personal and professional skills with a free online course from our experts.”

Admittedly, it’s unlikely that either of these features sourced candidates for a specific opening. Each has absolutely nothing to do with its respective employer, and ironically, everything to do with it. They do not describe its culture, benefits, brand or openings. They are, instead, an act of support that conveys the organization’s genuine commitment to the individual working person.

And that's the essence of candidate centric recruiting. These two features created strongly positive and lasting impressions with those who came across them. They were so unusual that they undoubtedly differentiated the two organizations from their competitors in the talent market. And, they were so obviously meant to help individuals that they created a career-long propensity to pay attention to and consider the two organization's employment opportunities.

Certainly, it's important to get the practices and interactions of your recruiting process right. Candidates expect that. To optimize their experience in your process, however, give them what they don't expect. Act as if they really do matter.

Thanks for reading,
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Visit me at Weddles.com

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