

Recruiting

Possibly the most tiresome, time-consuming, yet critical job function that must be performed as an HR professional is recruiting, interviewing and hiring - but there's no getting around it. When I started in the recruiting business 20 years ago, I set forth to learn as many "tricks" as I could from my clients as well as peers in my industry. Here are a few.

REFERRALS/NETWORKING

First, you must find qualified candidates to interview... not an easy task with unemployment as low as it is today. You need as many "painless" sources as possible.

Many firms have very successful employee-referral systems, whereby an employee receives a bonus on successfully referred hires. The bonus can vary in dollar amount and generally has some sort of guarantee period built in to ensure the person will stay.

In your spare time, develop some of your own sources, such as peer groups and professional affiliations. One of my clients teaches a legal secretarial course one night a week at a local business school. It keeps her up-to-date and provides a constant source of good candidates.

It's also smart to keep in touch with ex-employees who were excellent. Good people know other good people.

ADVERTISING

Another good idea is an occasional ad. The operative word here is "occasional." You don't want your organization's name to appear in the want ads too often, or the firm may be perceived as having a turnover problem. I advocate a directed ad for a specific position. Pick a "grabber" for a title - something a superior candidate will find enticing. Make the body of the ad succinct, highlighting unique qualities of the position (prestige, exposure, responsibility, special benefits, such as stock options, tuition, flexible hours, health spa, etc.) and finish with pointed qualifiers. Include your company name. A professional candidate will generally not respond to a "blind ad," that is, one with only a P.O. box number.

THE PHONE INTERVIEW

Both referrals and ads will enable you to use one important tool - the phone interview. These calls can be made at either the beginning or the end of the workday, so they don't cut into your prime work time.

You can get an idea of the applicant's special skills, experience, job tenure, reasons for leaving, salary requirement, poise and savvy... in a matter of minutes.

If after your conversation, you want to meet with the candidate in person, "sell" them a little on the organization and the position (helps prevent cancellations and "no-shows") and schedule an interview.

If the individual is not right for the position, explain in such a way as to maintain their self-esteem, and use the call as an opportunity to network for a more qualified candidate. For example, "I'm sorry, but this position requires at least three years' legislative experience, however if you'll send me a copy of your resume, I'd like to contact you when we have another opening. Do you know anyone who might be right for this position"?

CHOOSE QUALITY PERSONNEL AGENCIES

Don't forget personnel agencies. If you're fortunate enough to have a special working relationship with one agency and they're able to handle your needs, that is fabulous - there's something to be said for loyalty.

If you're not that lucky, I suggest choosing and cultivating two favorites. This can be a task in itself, but it will prove well worth the effort. Don't sign any exclusivity contracts and avoid any agency anxious to discount their fee. You really do get what you pay for. Make sure you meet any consultants you plan to do business with in person. Invite them to your office.

Find consultants you respect and develop a strong communication system up front. Be direct. Be responsive. Insist upon the same from them. Feel free to change agencies if you're not getting proper service.

When you find a good agency or two, you may be able to spare yourself some of the really time-consuming tasks such as checking work and academic references. This will leave more time for thorough interviews with you and anyone else involved in the hiring process.

Move swiftly! In today's competitive market, expediency is mandatory. A true "waste of time" is interviewing an outstanding candidate and losing them to another firm before you are able to introduce them to the next person in the process. Have as many people as possible on standby to meet with the candidates after you're finished. Talk to your staff before hand about what the market is like and what they are looking for in this hire. Educate them as to the hiring process and impress upon them the urgency of immediate feedback. In other words, think ahead and do everything you can to minimize frustrations.