

Passive candidate strategies: winning the war for talent



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According to the Department of Labor's (DOL) Bureau of Labor Statistics, baby boomers have begun retiring at an alarming rate. Compounding this issue is the fact that the next generation of workers is much smaller and that the DOL estimates that job openings will increase by 13 percent or nearly 19 million through the year 2014. A smaller replacement population of workers along with increased job creation has already created challenges in today's recruiting environment.

To make matters worse, the DOL also estimates that the 'active candidate' population (those actively seeking employment through job boards, postings, etc) only makes up 16 percent of the population while the 'passive candidate' population (those not actively seeking employment) makes up 84 percent of our workforce. In essence, traditional search methods are proving to be ineffective in identifying the top talent that managers are seeking and that corporations need to remain successful.

As the 'war for talent' continues to heat up, organizations need to focus their efforts in three specific areas: candidate identification, recruiter training, and management education.

Candidate identification

This is the most widely discussed topic in recruitment circles today. With the creation of social networking sites such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and MySpace to name just a few, today's buzz seems to indicate that this is the new silver bullet in the recruitment process. Organizations are spending thousands of dollars and hundreds of man-hours on these and simi-

lar sites in hopes of accessing the 84 percent of the population considered 'passive'. Although these tools can be effective, it is imperative to realize that there is no single solution for identifying these elusive and sought after candidate pools. Sourcing candidates must be accomplished by utilizing multiple tools including recruitment research, referrals and association lists, as well as the online social networking sites mentioned above.

Recruiter training

Recruiting groups are often so focused on the importance of candidate identification that they fail to properly utilize the information they generate or purchase from third party vendors. Recruiters can spend countless hours and dollars gathering lists of names for specific job functions, only to misuse or under-utilize the same information. There are two major issues to contend with – the first is how to properly track the information and the second is how to properly approach a candidate.

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Effective recruiting teams employ a sales based CRM (Client Relationship Management) system to track and stay in touch with potential candidates. Gathering a list of names from the internet or third party research provider without being able to monitor your progress or calling efforts through a dedicated CRM system will most likely render the information useless.

Knowing how to approach a 'passive candidate' once you have identified them is the key to success for any recruiting initiative. Recruiters of today must be sales individuals who understand and are committed to the fact that recruiting in today's environment is a sales pro-

cess. Traditional recruiters generally pitch the benefits of the position that they believe are important – never asking the candidate what is most important to them. The recruiting process must be viewed in the following steps:

- Develop a relationship
- Uncover the needs or points of pain
- Fill the needs
- Overcome the objectives
- Advance the sale

Most recruiters are focused on the transaction of filling a position, never establishing a true relationship with a potential candidate and most often pitching a position before understanding the emotional buying reasons of the candidate.

Management education

It is imperative that hiring managers and executive management understand the current and future labor shortage as well as the psychological differences between active and passive candidates. Active candidates have already emotionally decided to pursue new career opportunities, whether by choice or force, and will be quick to respond to requests from recruiters and managers. Passive candidates are by definition not seeking new employment and will often respond in complete contrast: not returning calls, wanting to be sold on the company and hiring manager, not willing to interview on a client site, etc. As important as it is for recruiters to be properly trained, it is just as crucial for managers to obtain the proper coaching in order to gain the passive talent they want.

Having a defined passive candidate strategy is key. Organizations that have a plan encompassing identification, recruiter training and management education will have greater success in this ongoing war for talent. ■

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