

## Treat Them Like Customers – Because They Are

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When the economy was slower, candidates competing for limited job openings routinely waited months for job offers. Often, there was little or no communication from the employer between resume receipt, interview and offer. Candidates were expected to wait patiently. It was a buyer's market.

Candidates who interviewed with a company often found out that they had not been selected when they received a form letter, or received no communication at all. Little thought was given to how the candidate might react to this unprofessional approach.

There are two reasons why this kind of behavior will no longer work today. The first is that the U.S. is approaching a labor crisis of historic proportions. By 2010, we will be millions of people short of having enough employees to fill available jobs. We are entering what will become a raging seller's market for labor. Employers who fail to shorten and improve their hiring processes will lose scarce candidates. Candidates will no longer wait patiently or accept thoughtless treatment from prospective employers in the new labor market.

The second reason is that candidates who don't feel like they have been treated with respect wield considerable marketing clout today. Poor hiring practices can easily result in negative public relations for the offending company. The candidate not placed tells colleagues, friends and family about his or her experience. The internet is filled with complaints about lack of professionalism. All this has the potential to negatively impact sales – and often does. In a highly competitive global economy, every customer is meaningful.

Candidates who feel that they have been treated disrespectfully are more likely to seek assistance from regulatory agencies or from the advertisements on the back cover of the telephone book. The consequences of employment complaints can be both expensive and time consuming.

There are a number of simple things that can be done to improve hiring processes.

### **Know What You Want**

Job requirements are often the product of a few minutes of casual conversation rather than a focused process to identify the factors that will lead to successful performance. Requirements like “good work history,” “good office skills,” “good people skills” are open to very wide interpretation. Because of this, good candidates are overlooked, bad candidates are hired and the process yields few successes.

Start by clearly thinking through the work that must be done. Understand the specific factors that have lead previous incumbents to succeed. Develop specific, written qualifications and, if possible, measurable requirements. Share these guidelines with everyone involved in the selection process. For example, instead of saying that a person must have “good office skills,” say that the candidate must be able to format and type a letter from hand written notes within five minutes with no uncorrected mistakes.

### **Advertise For What You Want**

Whether you place print, radio, television or internet advertisements, you are better to ask for exactly what you want. Ads that ask for “hardworking people” may bring in more resumes, but not the right ones. This lack of specificity also encourages those who are mentally qualified—those who think they have what it takes—to apply. Again, this causes unnecessary work and inconvenience for everyone. The more people who are disappointed, the worse the potential public relations and legal liability.

### **Interview Properly**

A candidate who has five interviews in the same day has the same interview five times. Candidates quickly tire of telling their life stories and being asked the same inane questions. Unless you are willing to commit to doing good interviews, you’ll be better off making your employment decisions by flipping a coin. That method would be quicker, take less staff time and, given the typical results of poorly done interviews, probably yield as good or better results.

Anyone who conducts interviews should attend appropriate training to ensure that he or she has the skills necessary to legally and effectively select employees. Failure to provide this training is false economy.

Additionally, you should have clearly defined requirements for hiring processes. What is the target date by which the position will be filled? How will the candidate's comfort and feelings be protected? What steps will be taken to ensure the flow of needed information to candidates? A coordinated, organization-wide approach to interviewing will help you deliver much better results in less time.

### **Select Quickly**

Make recruiting, interviewing, reference checking and job offers high-priority activities. Don't let anything interfere with your ability to secure good candidates. As the economy picks up, good candidates will have many opportunities from which to choose. They won't sit by the phone waiting for you.

### **Show Them They Matter – Especially If You Don't Hire Them**

It is fairly easy to make the person you are going to hire feel good about the outcome of the process. It is harder, but equally important, to make those not selected appreciate the quality of the process. Each candidate you do not select is a potential customer and influences many others.

By knowing what you are looking for and advertising appropriately, you limit the number of candidates who will apply. A personal phone call or hand written note thanking them for their interest enhances your professional reputation at a very minimal cost.

Good selection processes will help you attract the best candidates, improve your company's reputation, reduce the number of bad hiring decisions and the flood of problems that accompany them.

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