



Attracting Talent

“In the context of the UK’s skills crisis and global business, those organisations that effectively measure and manage their human capital will have a competitive advantage in the marketplace.”

Jo Causon
Director of Marketing and
Corporate Affairs for the
Chartered Management Institute



In today’s market, there is a shortage of top recruits, and exceptional candidates are highly aware of their marketability. Employers should think hard about the true motivation of candidates for better talent acquisition.

Response to employer brand

An employer brand includes what current, past or potential workers think about you as an organisation. It’s forged partly by advertising and recruitment web sites, but far more often by experience – what actually happens to a candidate when they apply for a job. The way candidates are treated has a strong impact on their willingness to recommend you as an employer. It also influences the likelihood that they will buy or recommend your products or services.

A March 2007 study by Capital Consulting recorded that one in four job seekers say they have been badly treated when applying for a job. This has a knock-on effect. Over half of job seekers will not purchase products and services if they have been badly treated. 55% tell at least three people about their bad experience, putting off the candidate pool.

Knowledge is king

In an age of information overload, having the right knowledge at your fingertips can make the difference between success or failure for an organisation. Yet very few companies are good at knowledge retention, and a lot of candidates recognise that it’s their know-how which makes them most marketable.

Tip: Don’t take knowledge for granted, review your knowledge base regularly to make sure the most important know-how isn’t about to walk out of the door.

Awareness of market value

Many candidates are increasingly aware of their value to an employer: both in terms of market rates and opportunity cost – how much it will cost an employer to hire the wrong person. The danger here is that employers can be distracted into thinking that money is the key issue. It isn’t: it’s just the easiest to talk about.

Tip: find out where salary expectations come from – colleagues, or genuine market research? When candidates present money as their prime motivator, ask them how they will respond to a (likely) counter-offer.



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Declining work satisfaction

Don't be surprised when candidates moan about work: as a nation we're a lot less happy in work than 10-15 years ago. Candidates have also learned to be more demanding. We all want increased personal choice: in terms of lifestyle and job content.

Tip: your role is often to help people understand what really motivates them. Probe the real reasons for past job changes, and ask candidates to describe their best day at work.

Concern about working hours

The biggest single factor in declining work satisfaction is working hours. Nationally each family is working about 20 hours a week more than we were a generation ago. This quickly leads to burn out. This is often the biggest mismatch in terms of candidate expectations and company culture.

Tip: think about ways of building flexibility into your corporate culture – could you encourage employees to work from home? Could you adopt a flex-time policy? These approaches can be a very cost effective way to generate good will.

Ambiguity about money

Ask candidates why they want to change jobs, and most of them will say they are interested in a pay rise. However recruiters also know that money is rarely the main reason; in fact, money is a weak motivator. If someone feels seriously underpaid this may be enough to get them to make a move, but for most candidates money is a smokescreen. In surveys most people say they would gladly swap pay for a better working balance. Not only that, it's becoming increasingly common for people to downshift and reduce their financial resources.

Tip: when setting your employment policies, make sure you have a well-rounded package of benefits. Sometimes employees will actually be more drawn by non-financial benefits such as a family friendly workplace, health club membership or an impressive record of corporate social responsibility.

Networking power

Candidates have become far less passive about making their own luck. If people have ready-made networks, they may make progress in the hidden job market more quickly than you do.

Tip: make the most of your current employee networks – invite your staff to recommend their contacts to you.

Personal values high up the agenda

Increasingly, candidates talk about wanting to “give something back” or find “meaningful” work. It's important to take this seriously, and even more vital to find out exactly what this means for the individual in front of you.

Tip: consider how your organisation represents itself to the world – do you give back to the community? If so, do you promote this work in a way that potential candidates would see?

Caree flexibility and life/work balance

Perhaps because we are expected to work longer hours and retiring later in life, there is currently a huge interest in career breaks. When only a minority took gap years, recruiters in the past tended to look on this as lack of focus, but today it may well be a sign of someone who really has taken control of their working life.

Tip: make it clear that you value relevant life experience. Consider, for example, whether you would like to reach out to women returners to work. A campaign promoting yourself as a good employer for today's flexible lifestyles will help your brand overall.



REC 15 Welbeck Street, London W1G 9XT

t: 020 7009 2187

f: 020 7935 4112

e: camille.paulsen@rec.uk.com

USEFUL WEBSITES:

REC www.rec.uk.com



BUILDING A TALENT COMPANY

- Branding is strongly linked to electronic recruitment. Build a strong website and encourage casual visitors to register and become part of an e-community as a source of talent, present and future.
- Publicise strong and flexible benefit packages on your website.
- Use case studies of current members of staff to emphasise the range of roles on offer, and to give real examples of key messages, e.g. flexible working, talent progression.
- Look carefully at the attractive and unattractive elements in a job. Find out why candidates say yes to jobs, and why they turn them down.
- More important still, find out why talented staff stay with you.
- Start to manage your employer brand. Think about all the messages that go out to the marketplace about the way you recruit and employ people. Make sure that external recruiters understand and enhance your brand.
- Consider appointing a Talent Manager who can manage your employer brand and identify, bring in, and retain the key talent.
- Remember the factors that damage an employer brand, such as poor communication of job objectives, and slow response time to candidates.
- Incentivise current staff to recommend friends and colleagues who can bring the right skills to your organisation.



John Lees FREC is the author of the best-selling *How To Get A Job You'll Love* (McGraw-Hill). His book *Take Control of Your Career* discusses ways of matching employer needs with candidate expectations. See www.johnleescareers.com for a wide range of free career tools.



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t: 020 7009 2187
f: 020 7935 4112
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