

perspectives



Recruiting: Getting "Back to Basics" is Key

BY KATHARINE GIACALONE

Recruiting in an economic downturn is not as easy as one may think. We've all heard comments from employers ranging from "Jane would be lucky to have a job with us" to "we can low-ball the starting salary because Joe has been out of work for three months and would probably be willing to take the job at a lower pay, I'm sure."

Actually, recruiting in any economy is difficult. If the economy is "fat and happy," and companies have "a little extra" to spend when putting the finishing touches on an offer, the problem may be there isn't a large pool of candidates to choose from—so you are left thinking, "Well, if I wait one more day, maybe the perfect candidate will appear!"

If the economy is in a "downturn," narrowing the selection of the "perfect" candidate may be tricky because there are so many candidates to choose from. The person in charge of making hiring decisions may get overwhelmed by all of the candidates they interview and only the last few tend to stick in their minds. Then they find themselves asking the age old question—"Am I making the right hiring decision for the organization and for the candidate?" If companies are tightening their belts they have to find the delicate balance between knowing if they need a staff person to help run their business—while worrying if they can afford to hire the candidate in the first place.

Please remember both candidates and employers have

choices and both have to work hard at employment during a downturn in the economy. The fact remains that you have to get "back to basics" when recruiting for top talent during any economy. However, in a down economy your tactics may need to change. Here are five questions to ask yourself before you advertise for your vacancy:

Why am I looking for someone?

This is a critical question—it will guide your job description criteria, where you are going to post the job and how much you are going to have to pay to hire top talent. So figure out "why" early in the game. Is it because you have reengineered your business in response to the economy and now you need a new skill? Is it because you eliminated the position and now you realized you should have kept it? Or is it because your business is picking up and you need more help?

Who am I really looking for?

Think through the job description—the exact work experiences and educational levels you want your final candidate to possess. Know what duties and responsibilities the candidate will have to provide during

the workday. Don't sugarcoat the list—here's where more is more—and don't limit yourself to just a few job duties—brainstorm every conceivable job duty this candidate will have to perform. Then begin to create major categories and sort the duties under each category. If you accidentally forgot something this process will help you see where you need to "fill in the holes."

The job description is also the basis for the job ad—whether you are posting a job internally or externally. So if you shortcut the job description process, then the ad will be weak and you'll find yourself reviewing tons of resumes and coming up with virtually no qualified candidates. If this is the case, even after you have carefully scripted the job description and ad—ask yourself "Did God make anyone like this?" If the answer is no—go back to the drawing board!

Where am I going to find top talent?

Many organizations start with internal postings—either on an electronic job board or their websites—which is fine—however, the person you maybe looking for may not be currently working in the organization. So, if you know that, intuitively, at the beginning of the process—don't waste time hoping someone will surface internally with the requisite skills. Start networking by attending association meetings, calling other employers who may have laid-off workers due to their financial pictures, plowing through resume databases on electronic job posting boards, using social media, etc. But at the end of the day, employee referrals usually offer up the best people—so offer a significant "bounty" to your current staff for those hard-to-fill positions.


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Is the candidate able to make a contribution to my business beyond what I am expecting?

Of course, the person responsible for making hiring decisions should have the standard interview questions written down before the candidate shows up for the interview. But here's where the candidate has to work hard at showing that they are more suited for the position than other candidates. So look beyond their answers to your interview questions and reflect on other things—did they give examples of their previous work experience that may complement what they have to do in your organization? Did they appear respectful of others? Can they see the "lighter side" of things? Did they display confidence? Are they resourceful? Taking note of these characteristics and attributes will help you set apart one candidate from another.

Am I able to pay for the top talent I need?

Make solid compensation job offers—don't "cheap out" on base pay and bonus because of uncertain economics. If that's your compensation philosophy you shouldn't be recruiting for the vacancy in the first place! Everyone is looking for a deal these days—so make sure you know your salary parameters before you start the recruiting process. Whatever you do, don't offer someone less than what they are or were making—it is insulting to the candidate. If you can't afford to pay market in an uncertain economy—maybe you should think about alternative solutions to get the work done in your organization and not hire someone at that moment.

And, last but certainly not least, after you have done the "recruiting dance" don't put the new hire to work right away without a proper orientation! Good luck! 

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