

Avoiding the Moby Dick Syndrome:



Don't Let the Ideal Recruit Get Away

By John P. Kreiss

With the process of sorting through résumés and interviewing candidates so draining and time consuming, the last thing a business owner like yourself wants is for the ideal candidate to reject a job offer. In the water treatment business, we all know how difficult it can be to find the perfect catch a la Moby Dick—particularly salespeople—to take the firm to a new level. Besides, let's face it, without the right people, the business is doomed to mediocrity at best.

While many times a candidate's decision to switch jobs hinges on his or her potential to make more money and advance a career, sometimes a "thanks, but no thanks" response stems from what I can only describe as "bad vibes" about the firm. Occasionally, candidates will have second thoughts about changing jobs because of perceptions about company culture gleaned from the recruiting and hiring process. This is unfortunate, particularly if the candidate forms negative perceptions that really don't reflect the reality of the work environment.

These misperceptions can occur due to sloppy handoffs from one hiring manager to another or via inattention to other details, which are avoidable if the firm follows some tried-and-true hiring procedures. Pay attention to these issues, and

you can reduce the possibility of a prized recruit losing interest in your firm during the recruiting and hiring process.

Know what you want

Identify the plusses and minuses of the job. Be honest about both when interviewing candidates. What immediate and long-range challenges will this new hire face? What makes this position special? Before you begin interviews, try describing a typical day or work week for the position in detail. This exercise enables you to crystallize the job description and clarify the qualities that you seek in candidates, and it will help you describe what to expect from candidates during interviews. Think like your target recruit and anticipate his or her needs. Make sure you describe the characteristics of others who have been successful in this role when interviewing recruits.

While there are certain traits that may be a must—high energy and a personable demeanor for sales positions, for example—be open to the possibility of hiring someone who may not fit the "ideal image." We never want to hire someone who doesn't seem right for a position, but sometimes we are blinded by our preconceptions or a tendency to believe there's only one personality type that will succeed in the position. Maybe you're

looking for another Joe Dokes, who was your best salesman ever, and overlook someone who is a bit different but can reach an even higher level of success. Too often, people are hired for a job to which they aren't well suited, or never get an opportunity for a position because managers project their own value judgments on the recruit.

Your recruiting plan should ensure you have the manpower to execute it, and the capacity to handle the volume of résumé reviews, screens, and follow-up interviews it will generate. Don't let your "to do" list get very long.

The recruit's perspective

Is each step of the selection process consistent for each candidate? Are the right people involved in the selection process, and are they executing a standard process consistently? Does each stage of the process identify the right number of candidates for the next? Does your selection process contribute to selling the candidate on the opportunity, or is it so intense it turns him or her off?

Be considerate of candidates' time. Try to schedule each candidate's visit to include meetings with multiple managers and staff to make each visit as efficient as possible for both the firm and candidate. Be sensitive to candidates'

schedules, keeping in mind that job interviews can be disruptive to their current obligations.

Selling the firm

Does your selection process accurately convey the organizational culture? Of course, you want to make sure to offer plenty of information about your firm's philosophy and goals. But also put your best face forward by holding interviews in an attractive conference room or office. Display professional awards, certificates of appreciation from charities for volunteer work by employees, and your best marketing publications so that recruits will see them when they visit. If the recruit is unfamiliar with the water treatment industry, provide articles and other written material from industry publications that tout the industry's prospects for growth.

Think through how you want to conduct interviews and the questions you want to ask of job hopefuls in advance. If you're well prepared for the interview, you'll convey an impression that the company is on the ball and well managed. Make sure to infuse your conversation with enthusiasm for the water

treatment business. State your vision for the future and how the recruit will contribute. Every candidate wants to know how and why he or she will succeed by working for your firm. Describe your firm's strengths and how you expect to improve, with their help, in some areas.

Make someone responsible

Make sure one person is in charge of the recruiting process and keeps top candidates apprised of their status. Spell out who owns what and when, so that no balls are dropped and candidates see that your firm has its act together.

If several people will be calling the candidate, coordinate the ongoing communication. The last thing you want is for firm representatives to give contrary messages to the candidate about their status, expected duties, compensation, or anything else that can affect the candidate's prospects. Who makes the offer? Consider who will have the most impact on the candidate, based on relationship and role. That person is usually the best choice.

Following up with the candidate after the offer has been made can be the difference in luring a prized recruit. You

want to show that you are eager to have the candidate join the team, but you don't want to pressure him or her. It may be worthwhile to develop a schedule of follow-up calls, so that you don't unintentionally bombard the candidate with multiple calls from managers. Make sure every interaction is professional and courteous.

Conclusion

Ultimately, you want to convey to the candidate that your firm is professionally managed, cares about its employees' welfare, and is a stimulating, rewarding place to work with plenty of opportunities. Each interaction between your firm and the candidate is an opportunity to do that. Make every one count and your chances of landing your next star, or Moby Dick, will improve.

About the author

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