

Creating an Environment to Attract Talent

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Recruiting executives has never been easy – and it's getting even harder. According to the 2019 *Conference Board Annual Survey*, a CEO's #1 worry is hiring leadership talent.⁽¹⁾ Most senior-level candidates already have a good job and can choose where they want to work and when to make a change. Since today's job market is as much as 90% candidate-drivenⁱⁱ (2), always treat your candidates like you treat your customers – with the utmost respect.

At Sockwell Partners, we have observed our clients meet, assess and bring candidates on board for more than 30 years. Obviously, we've played some role in this endeavor. However, candidates ultimately decide to work for the company, not the recruiter. Some of our clients recruit exceptionally well, separating themselves from the market in the "War for Talent". Those clients who *focus on creating a memorable candidate experience* from day one attract a higher caliber of executive and better position the company and the executive for success.

Here are our clients' best recruiting practices:

Before meeting candidates:

Understand your competitive position within your industry and/or geography (including market comp, benefits and equity); if your offer will be below market, look for other benefits that can close the gap;

Accentuate your mission in your recruitment effort; increasingly, candidates are expressing a need to connect with a company's mission and culture;

Develop a customized hiring strategy (including anticipated interview schedules, those who need to be involved, and timely scheduling of any required assessments or assignments);

Commit to maintaining confidentiality throughout the process.

Initially meeting candidates:

Prepare ahead of time just as you would before meeting a key prospect; read their resume presentation closely before the meeting; look at the candidate's LinkedIn profile to see if you have any mutual connections; plan your discussion with the candidate; "winging it" with a candidate shows and reflects poorly on the hiring executives;

Make the candidate feel welcome upon arrival; create an environment that makes him/her feel special; spend time breaking the ice before delving into your planned interview questions;

Listen carefully; learn the candidate's drivers; get to know his/her motivators; encourage questions; build personal and professional relationships;

Schedule mutually convenient meetings and conversations; be mindful that candidates are likely taking vacation or scheduling around their current work commitments; find opportunities to meet them on turf that makes them feel comfortable;

Assess – of course, but don't fail to clearly communicate your vision and mission and how individual candidates can add value; "The majority of executives who took a new job last year weren't searching for one: somebody came and got them"ⁱⁱⁱ (3); they have to be RECRUITED.

Next steps:

Keep the process moving forward with pace and momentum; promptly gather feedback and schedule next candidate interactions;

Strive to leave every candidate wanting to work for your company, even if you decide the fit is not right;

Stay in touch personally and through Sockwell Partners – phone, text and/or email, as well as in person when possible; be honest and transparent about the ongoing process, candidate status, and when next steps will occur;

Expect tough questions and negotiations from candidates;

Remember that candidates make a change like this only six to ten times in their career; appreciate that it is a big deal to the candidate and treat him/her accordingly;

Express gratitude for each candidate's time and interest.

Every interaction (or lack of) with your candidates sends a message about you and your organization. Make your messages resonate with the candidate you want to hire.

We're sure this isn't an exhaustive list. We'd love to hear from you about ways you and your organization make senior-level recruitment a differentiator for you.

ⁱ Conference Board Annual Survey, 2019

ⁱⁱ Forbes, 10/9/2018

ⁱⁱⁱ Harvard Business Review, May-June 2019