

## **“Why You Can’t Find Good Staff and What to do About it”**

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Successful sourcing outcomes are largely realized through purpose and attention. Yeah sure, what does that have to do with finding good staff? Everything. This needn’t be a needle in the haystack search for good staff. When the idea of the best and brightest job candidates clamouring to work for your organization seems to you not just an improbable notion but a downright laughable one, then there should be no surprises about your eventual recruitment result. Sourcing good people requires the right attitude as much as it does dedicated focus.

### **Reframing a problem into a solution**

When it’s all said and done have you substituted talking for action? Not being able to find great staff has become a statement of fact for many businesses that have convinced themselves that their poor recruitment results have nothing to do with their practices. This has been compounded by a plethora of press articles that reinforce difficult employment circumstances. It has become easier to mentally subscribe to notions of a “war for talent”, “shallow leadership pipelines” and “shortages across the industry spectrum” than it is to think differently about the employment market in unique ways. So convinced are leaders and recruiters of there being an inaccessible employment market and a requirement for expensive gaming tactics that you can’t find an article that debunks that reality. Moreover, it justifies giving up before you’ve even started. It vindicates the act of *trying* to recruit as the primary objective of the exercise over successful recruitment. We are indeed setting ourselves up to fail. So besides reinforcing that paradigm what can employers do practically for candidate attraction?

Firstly we need to reframe the problem of recruitment into a solution with a strategy. What we give expression to inadvertently and for many of us unfortunately affects what we experience. We spend far too much time and energy talking about how difficult and expensive it is to attract staff rather than focusing on the target. As problem solvers of talent attraction how well do we understand the employment market and marketing tactics?

### **Know your market & marketing**

There is no disputing that candidates in general have far more access to both company information and intelligence. This affects numbers in recruitment pools and retention for *bait-and-switch* employers who err on the side of over promising and under delivering. Employees are more diligent in their research and discerning in their career choices. Many adopt a “prove it to me” mentality with a recruiter’s offer, having undertaken better due diligence than the employer on any potential role. They seek out data about jobs, salaries and comparable benefits as well as on leadership reputation, work environment, development opportunities and corporate social responsibility. The insecurity of corporate life has required that workers play employment as free agents. Increasingly the “Y”

generation's push for flexibility coupled with higher expectations on moral conduct and ethics means that their attraction to and eventual choice of your role is values based. Gen Y's push has spread to other workers' needs. What starts in more successful corporates as a new benefit in time becomes the price of entry for the public sector, SMEs and not-for-profit organisations.

Many employers are left flat footed with old mindsets. It is no longer smart to be a shareholder-passionate, employee-ambivalent recruiter. Employees increasingly feel more in control with choice on their side. And the choice is conditional on a mutually beneficial ongoing relationship, not loyalty and a contract of employment. Marketing requires research of and location spotting. It uses communication strategies and media that match needs.

For those organisations with scarce funds for discrete activities you need to be inventive piggybacking on company advertising and getting assistance from the marketing departments. Marketers can be very helpful in collecting competitor intelligence or brainstorming new ideas & solutions for connecting with future people. You can also utilise company collateral and publications to promote employment. There are many white papers, consulting reports and informed commentary on emerging trends, salaries and requirements that can be accessed via the internet

### **Recruitment Strategy linked to business needs**

There are two types of employers. Those who invest in recruitment, marketing and infrastructure and those who job it. The latter are activity based, reacting only to job openings. They may call an abrupt halt at any time to recruitment related initiatives according to budget constraints.

A fully developed recruitment strategy has no "closed" sign and is aligned to both the current needs as well as future changes to the type and quantity of employees. Such a strategy has explicit targets for external sourcing and works also to support the risk of internal succession plans. It manages the whole workforce. Importantly the strategy is owned by the business not by HR or external recruiters and evaluation and metrics are markers of success milestones

### **No substitute: Employers of Choice**

Employers of choice are known for a point of excellence but do many things in the people space very well. It's part of their DNA. It's not contrived or done as a program - it is part and parcel of how they view their people. Why is it important to understand this? Best Employers have large selection ratios in comparison to their industry peers. With minimal or no advertising their reputation draws word of mouth referrals in droves. This is the ideal recruitment position.

The very best offer a very different work experience such that retention levels are also higher because employees experience a superior working environment characterised by development, stretch & challenge, good performance-based

salaries and autonomy. In Australia examples include Salesforce, Microsoft, Seek Limited, Nokia, SAP, American Express, the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority and the Cancer Council of NSW. Increasingly “unsexy” industries such as manufacturing, call centres and retail are turning around their businesses and implementing strategies to attract the best.

It can't be left to chance, businesses need to benchmark themselves against the best, understand the gap and change the way they view employees. When did you even informally survey your employees to establish your recruitment position? Survey questions can be sourced in the public domain or if you think you're ready, contact providers such as Hewitt, Gallup or Mercer to name some of the better consultancies. In addition, tracking & learning from those companies who win awards for their strategies can help you devise successful approaches e.g. Alcan, Macquarie Group, Flight Centre & BHP Billiton

**Value proposition: employment branding, brand families**

The best recruitment offerings are found with your satisfied “stayers” and those targeted employees you are trying to attract. It is not possible to provide a blanket offering and meet everyone's needs. Australian best practice winner SC Johnson is a superior example of turning around a turnover problem & a failure to attract young people to the business. Using market research internally and externally they developed five value propositions including employee recognition and career development. They trialed each until they could deliver on the promise under a dedicated brand logo *Enjoy the Difference* reaping the benefits of improved attraction retention, employee satisfaction and external accolades. The drop in turnover paid for the marketing strategies.



Brand families within your workforce should be explored along such lines as professionals, females and generational groups. You might select very different go-to-market offerings using different media approaches using tailored collateral, brand image and values. There should also be opportunities to craft individual deals employee by employee & customised agreements with changing traditional entry points and tracks.

## **eRecruitment & power users**

As part of your strategy you need to understand the potential of both pull and push strategies. There is more to this than an internet career page or the posting of a job on SEEK. Larger organisations understand the efficiency and effectiveness of large technology infrastructure purchases that allow for resume storage, pre-employment testing, applicant tracking, data mining and candidate relationship systems.

For others company produced blogs and podcasts are particularly effective for graduates and industries heavily focused on technology, media or communications e.g. Honeywell & Cadbury Schweppes. This is a cost-effective point of recognition, building brand & the promotion of jobs. Databases of competitor businesses (of products as well as competencies) or talent contacts can be purchased.

There are also sleuth-type technologies such as tools for downloading resumes, niche board postings, unique keywords & advanced search methods. Public IT workshops can quickly help people to navigate behind job boards and Google.com, Live.com as well as explain the merits of software purchases such as Broadlook Diver. Deloitte is one such employer who has improved their recruitment using such tactics.

Some of the newer online social networks are powerful cost-effective recruitment portals e.g. LinkedIn & LinkedIn Hacks, FaceBook and MySpace. KPMG has used YouTube as an effective way to post a vamped image in record time. Cisco has developed a powerful web-based referral network “Make Friends” linked to their internet site and combined this with a recruitment track through their internal staff who act as a buddy for the process.



If all this sounds too daunting, balancing the technology with a “high touch” approach can be a refreshing differentiator. What about customised responses to inquiries, investing in good candidate care tactics, providing opportunities for candidates to be interviewed at all hours in candidate-friendly locales, paying for parking & travel, different pace responses for different roles and let’s not forget the basics – common courtesy and a cup of coffee.

## **Changing approaches to attracting not-on-the market talent**

Active candidates are a small part of the potential talent market. Most of our approaches through job postings, fairs and recruitment firms do not tap talent pools. A recent two year study of Australia’s Top Companies indicated that the real talent missed is up to 70%. Some of the more innovative strategies successfully deployed include:

- Employee referrals with significant finders’ fees

- Alumni and re-hire programs
- Using your own employees as ambassadors, recruiters or in advertisements
- Tracking competitor talent over long periods
- Targeted internet advertising
- Talent tracking in competitor companies made a part of a manager's key performance metrics
- Hiring people with IT research & investigative backgrounds into the recruitment function
- Sending emails to competitor employees following dips in organisation's profits or performance
- Special invitations using URL blanketing
- Learning about talent through networks and at functions
- Rusing tactics – calling talent on the pretext of learning about employment prospects but actually learning more about talent themselves
- Warm referrals – job holders inviting talent in other firms to submit applications for same or similar roles

Companies such as Yahoo! here in Australia have hired dedicated sourcers of talent whose job is to build relationships with managers from other companies. This goes beyond data mining and recognises the importance of networks for successful recruitment.

### **Recruitment and Search Companies**

Third party providers remain a popular choice if not the only approach taken by many companies. There is no doubt that recruiters and search consultants are specialist providers and when chosen carefully can potentially be allies in your sourcing strategy.

That stated, there is not enough use of multiple search firms for broader pools, global reach & tracking search firms themselves for both quality and fees. Preferred supplier arrangements can be cost effective but all contracts should be regularly evaluated and run as a true partnership. Experts as part of managed services can improve recruitment processes considerably e.g. Johnson & Johnson Medical with Hudson created large talent pools, reduced time to fill and halved costs.

Inter-company forums can be powerful for information exchange on recruitment consortia practices. There are also other opportunities to in part or to totally insource or outsource arrangements to suit business requirements. There is also room to move from the traditional brokerage services to more investigative activities to obtain more comprehensive personal data. Indeed unbundling search activities to suit specific needs e.g. research list of contacts, can be a clever and cost effective service purchase.

### **Creation of “Sticky” Entry/Exit Strategies**

An important part of the attraction strategy is not just the selection but the whole process of impression management to onboarding. I call these retention initiatives “sticky” because it engages new starters as much as retains an internal labour market. Indeed recent research suggested that one in four new employees take only a week to decide if they will remain with the employer, and many within the first day. Besides putting resources, care, time and effort into the period from hire to week one on the job newer initiatives include:

- Extended entry periods for learning & networking unencumbered from work demands
- Speeding up & improving the standard of onboarding e.g. [iinduction.com](http://iinduction.com)
- Research of turnover drivers
- Searching for early warning signs of departure or “at risk” defections with triage-type interventions

**.....and some Don'ts**

We can be equally handicapped by poor practices that don't help our recruitment:

- Poor job ads e.g. requesting industry skills when people management is the main role
- Internet design flaws including hostile language, outdated jobs, “construction” postings instead of information, confusing & complicated headings and generic listings
- Not using metrics or tracking weak metrics e.g. time to fill metric versus dollars revenue lost to the business, cost per hire versus quality of fit
- Forgetting that past behaviour, intellect & conscientiousness are big predictors of on the job success – all can be established prior to hire through testing and reference checks.

Moving from problem to action requires an attraction strategy that has a solid investment business case. A poorly budgeted problem-focussed recruitment function left to a few in the business without appropriate performance metrics is a limited and unsustainable foundation. Furthermore, we need to rethink our all too passive recruitment methods to source the true talent pools of inactive candidates located in competitor companies.

Recruiting talent remains a critical challenge not a unique one. Yet it is harder to locate talent when others are prepared to move their businesses offshore, emerging economies are able to source from a global pool of skilled employees and many employees are attracted to start their own businesses or opt for a portfolio of interests. Attraction of the right people is a strategic and leadership accountability not a service or support function. As such it deserves top prioritization and the courage to try proven strategies of market innovators.



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