



The Cambridge Perspective

Avoid “Reactive Hiring” Problems



Throughout the recession of 2009, organizations were inundated with top quality resumes from applicants across all industries and functions. As industries begin to rebound, however, we’re hearing repeatedly that the truly outstanding individuals, when contacted, have already been or are being recruited by others.

Many organizations make the common mistake of waiting until they have a specific requirement to swing into hiring mode. By then, it may be too late to take advantage of the best candidates, and you could be tempted to cut corners in the process to get a critical role filled.

Create a State of Readiness

We recommend that our clients avoid problems by establishing a proactive talent management process that will keep the organization in a constant state of readiness for hiring at all levels. A good place to begin the process is to establish a small, select group of senior managers to act as the “talent management team” to develop

and maintain a corporate hiring strategy. The group should plan to meet a few times per year to ensure that all hiring supports the agreed upon corporate goals.

The process should include an overall review of the organization’s hiring and retention strategy with regard to diversity, gender, etc., highlighting areas where the organization is successful and where it needs to make improvements.

The goal is to ensure that departmental hiring strategies are aligned with the organization’s overall hiring strategy, and secure a commitment from all team members that all hires going forward should be considered in light of both.

We recommend establishing Best Practices guidelines for hiring managers, including who should be involved in hiring decisions and how they should be made. These guidelines should cover any issues that need to be addressed with each hire, such as compensation and benefits policies, onboarding, mentoring, etc.

Additionally, the talent team should identify internal “high potential” candidates for developmental coaching to ensure that near term succession is adequately covered. Future succession plans can then be considered with each new hire.

Maintain a Talent Pipeline

To stay competitive, organizations need to

maintain a constant supply of high quality talent from the broadest possible base. One successful method that can be set up in-house is to establish an employee referral program, where existing employees are compensated (with cash or rewards) for introducing successful hires. This allows the organization to maintain a referral network database of “recommended” potential candidates to draw from when an opening occurs.

Another option is joining forces with a trusted search partner who can maintain an ongoing scouting program on your

behalf. Keep your search partner abreast of any potential changes in the organization to allow them to informally begin “scouting” for external candidates in advance. This can help tighten up the research phase of your search, and position you to act quickly to intercept a great candidate, before another offer is accepted.

Working with a search firm has the additional benefit of candidate “handling”. Your search partner will provide regular status updates to all considered candidates, keeping them apprised of the project status and next steps to prevent them from dropping out due to lack of interest or accepting another offer.

For instance, one of our clients in the financial industry was in the midst of a hiring freeze when a previously discussed and sought after executive became available. We recommended they at least meet with the individual personally to establish a relationship, and we maintained contact on



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their behalf throughout the candidate's job search to allow our client to move quickly, if necessary. When it became clear the candidate was close to accepting another offer, our client was able to persuade the CEO to move forward immediately, and make an offer. The candidate accepted and is now a highly valued company leader.

Tighten Hiring Processes

Prior to proceeding with a senior level search, it is wise to conduct a Team Assessment to identify communication issues, team dynamics, and how a "fit" with the team will be determined. The Team Assessment will also outline the specific skills, characteristics and personality traits that are required, and highlight those to avoid. Cambridge offers a complementary team assessment to our clients as part of our value added approach because we believe it improves hiring success and employee retention.

Once you have decided to move forward with hiring, you can begin to identify specific candidate requirements and outline what comprises a "cultural fit" with your organization. At the same time, you should flag any potential issues that could cause delays or problems to try to address or mitigate them in advance.

Another oft-overlooked step in the recruitment process is consideration of a "selling" strategy for hiring. The talent team should prepare a package outlining the benefits of working for the organization

that can be used in the recruitment process (i.e. culture of innovation, educational development, incentives, company retreats, personal benefits, etc.). And don't forget to promote these benefits on your web site, as well.



After the preferred candidate has been secured, be sure that your process includes an onboarding program to get them up-to-speed quickly, and with a minimum of difficulty. Doing so will not only improve their chances of success greatly, but they will be also be more likely to refer other great candidates to

the organization. Cambridge offers an Onboarding service for organizations without an in-house capability.

Promote "Candidate Attraction"

It's not enough to set up your process and hope for the best. Communicate to everyone in the organization that your people are your most valued asset, and demonstrate that in all your actions, including regularly revisiting your hiring strategies, asking for input from your top talent on what attracted them (and what did not), and then incorporating the good ideas.

Don't forget to tout the benefits of working for your organization in advertising and company promotional materials, whenever possible, and ask employees to assist in the recruitment process through personal referrals. Social networks can help to promote not just the company and its

services, but also the benefits of joining the organization. More importantly, because social networks are based on personal peer-to-peer information sharing, employee networking can be one of your most powerful and persuasive recruiting tools. Many tech-savvy employers now include a review of social networking sites for corporate feedback as part of their market research.

A trusted search partner with a thorough understanding of your organization can also provide a wealth of helpful, up-to-date advice on compensation, competitive issues and emerging talent strategies to help you get the most out of your recruitment and retention efforts.

By taking a proactive approach to talent management, you can shorten your search process, lower hiring costs, reduce employee turnover and attract better candidates. And you won't miss out on a top quality candidate simply because you're not ready to move.

Call Cambridge for a pressure-free discussion *BEFORE* you have a critical need, and we can help you create an effective talent management program to ensure that the best candidates are 'in your sight', so you can act quickly when your next requirement arises.

Cambridge Management Planning Inc. has been providing executive search and human resources consulting across Canada and internationally since 1976. Working in partnership with our clients, we add value, achieve performance improvement objectives and improve profitability. Cambridge offers a full suite of services including Executive Search, Board Search, Interim Management, Career Transition and Executive Coaching services.

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**“He who fails to plan,
...plans to fail.”**
-- Proverb