Is Talent Acquisition part of your Branding Strategy?

Very few organizations have considered that recruiting plays an important role in their branding strategy. When the executive search process takes you from multiple potential candidates to the select few that you want to meet in person, each finalist gets a window into your organization's culture throughout the interview process. Many organizations miss the opportunity to leave a lasting positive impression with candidates regardless of whether these individuals get an offer.

Finalist candidates likely come from competitor, supplier, or customer organizations in your industry. These leaders will take away an image of your organization, whether positive or negative, that will stay with them well beyond the interview. How candidates are treated and what they perceive about your company during the selection process will directly reflect on your corporate brand and image going forward not only with the candidate, but also with his or her circle of influence.

Final interviews should be more like a first date than a courtroom experience. Keep in mind that you are selling as well as buying. Interviews are not a one-way street with only you doing the asking. You are selling your organization, selling the opportunity, and selling the location through how you communicate with candidates, how the interviews are structured, and even how well the interview logistics are handled.

Despite talk of unemployment levels, there is always a talent shortage of qualified talent. Talented people have options, yet many candidates report back after their interviews that the interviewers assumed that they were desperately looking for a job. The reality is that the candidates are interviewing to find out if they may be interested in your company.

Be thoughtful about the process and what it will look and feel like to the final candidates, as well as achieving the desired results for the hiring organization. In the consumer products goods industry candidates are also consumers.

You never get a second chance to make a first impression
Details matter. In the interview, everything reflects on the image of the company, even seemingly small things, such as choice of hotel." Some of our clients have a welcome letter with a basket of fruit or company product in the room when candidates arrive at their hotel. An option for a car service to pick up candidates after a long day of travel to get to your location creates a sigh of relief versus only having the option to run the rental car gauntlet and find their way to the hotel the night before the interview. Providing a detailed interview itinerary well in advance with titles of those the candidate will meet communicates that you care about the process and want each candidate to be well-prepared for their meetings. Don't forget to include instructions on how to submit incidental travel expenses for

reimbursement (meals/taxi/parking). Airfare & Hotel expenses should be directly billed to the company. Candidates appreciate the care taken with logistics and have a positive impression going into their interviews and beyond.

The Golden Rule of Interview Structure
The goal is to create an interview experience that reflects your organization's culture and brand beyond getting to a yes or no decision on each candidate. You could think about this as the "Golden Rule" of recruiting: treating each person as you would want to be treated during an interview. If your organization approaches each interview process in a thoughtful, organized manner, you will experience better outcomes – both in the short term by choosing the right person, and in the long term, as your brand is enhanced in the marketplace.

Dividing questions among the various interviewers is a good practice that avoids duplication of effort and keeps each interview experience fresh as the candidates make the circuit. Make a practice of having a short meeting of all interviewers before candidates arrive to review the position; the qualifications; and to determine which aspects each interviewer will focus on during their time with candidates. In contrast, some clients do not prepare interviewers in their organizations with background on each person or even with a list of the key criteria that the candidates are to be evaluated against. This lack of preparation will be obvious to the candidates. Within 48 hours of the last interview the hiring manager should have a consensus meeting completed with the interview team to determine next steps.

The final interview process is a two-way street. Time for candidates to ask their questions is essential. Using a bureaucratic, inflexible process that only focuses on the organization's side of the interview equation is not best practice for attracting and retaining talent in a candidates market.

Besides the hiring manager, it is often a good idea to include representatives from the key groups the potential hire would work with in the schedule in a less formal context such as a meal. This provides the candidates with another view of the organization and a chance to "loosen up" which can reveal surprising things, both good and bad, about the candidate.

When the location of the position has proven to be a challenge during the recruitment process, extra care is needed during final interviews. Like it or not, geography is part of the organization's culture and identity. Some clients take this challenge seriously and structure the finalist's interviews to build a positive impression of the location.

Interested, engaged, and prepared interviewers send the message that the company is interested in the candidate, and also that you are an organization of interesting, engaged people. This takes preparation and preparation takes time and thought.

Final Food for Thought

Top candidates in today's market make smart career moves and they have good options, so it is up to the hiring organization to sell during the interview process – in terms of company, culture, and environment. This will result in a positive brand image that will pay lasting dividends.