

IS YOUR HR DEPARTMENT TURNING GOOD CANDIDATES AWAY?

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I distinctly remember as a teenager looking for a job and being directed to a Human Resources Department, where a friendly face would provide me with an application form and tell me about the job vacancies. If I was lucky, I would receive a pre-screening interview or a full interview on the spot. Before long, I would be working!

Long gone are the days when we could easily find the information that we needed about a job in one location. Previously, it was quite common to get to speak to a real live person or a representative of the company that we wanted to employ us.

Instead, today's job seekers are placed through a technological maze where they are subjected to voicemails and websites, rarely receiving any personal acknowledgement of their application. Job seekers are told specifically about how they are to submit their resumes, "by e-mail only", "no phone calls, please", "only resumes in MS format will be accepted", or through a complicated web process that is supposed to make it easier for the HR department to manage. Since many companies are outsourcing human resource functions, personal contact is almost non-existent.

Although somewhat impersonal and barrier-laden, these hoops that many job seekers must learn to jump through are in place to facilitate the work of short-staffed Human Resources Departments. When the number of applicants far exceeds the jobs available, it then becomes a "BUYER'S MARKET". Consequently, in the past, HR had to find ways to screen out as many applicants as possible, to create an ideal list of candidates.

However, it is no longer a "BUYER'S MARKET" for employers. By contrast, we are now faced with labour shortages in just about every sector in Canada, and it is expected to get much worse.

So why then do we continue to create huge and deterrent obstacles for job seekers when we should be encouraging them to apply? We need to take a serious look at who our applicants will be.

With a greater emphasis on diversity recruiting, we need to recognize that many of these applicants could benefit from the type of customer service that was available through human resource departments from previous generations.

Hiring aboriginals, immigrants, people with disabilities and experienced workers can help to fill these gaps. However, flexibility and innovation is required in how we advertise, recruit, and screen applicants. Making the HR department as a distributor of company information and job postings with a personal face will make a big difference in attracting good employees that face certain barriers.

To maximize the number of applications that you receive, try to consider removing the organizational barriers that may be limiting the number of applications that you are receiving.

Consider receiving your applications in a number of formats. This includes: in person, fax, e-mail, mail applications. Enabling the applicant to drop of their resume in person will help them to ask any questions that they may have regarding the company and the job. This is especially important when you consider that many new job seekers could be people with language barriers or may have a disability that would be best accommodated by an in-person conversation rather than over the telephone.

Ensure that your website is universally accessible. Have your company's website checked out by an accommodation specialist to see if it is accessible to visitors with different types of disabilities (visual, learning etc.).

Expand your corporation's networking circle. Include diverse religious and cultural organizations, agencies or publications that serve people with disabilities. Include gay/lesbian social clubs and places where you might find retired and experienced workers. By expanding your network, you will send the message that your organization is open to diversity.

Organize your interview questions so that they are structured and behaviour-based. Implement a rating system to maximize the fairness of the process. This will give both you and the candidate a better understanding as to whether they can perform the job. It also gives you a paper trail, if your work should be audited in the future.

Ensure that your recruiting and selection team is fully informed about bias-free pre-screening and interviewing practices. This will go a long way with making your candidates feel more comfortable with the process and protect your company from turning down good candidates because they "would not fit in". This statement is often an indicator that the hiring committee missed some of the cultural cues that were conveyed in the interview or that they were less focused on the real question of: Can this candidate do the job? Training in bias-free hiring practices will help to reduce or eliminate complaints of favouritism or discrimination in the workplace.

By reducing the number of barriers your organization has set up, and by replacing them with more inclusive human resource practices, it will help you to increase the number of applications that you will receive. In addition, it will help you to spot good, potential employees whom you might otherwise turn away.

