

The New Rules for Recruiting

"The Brief Overview"

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"They" don't care that you're hiring. With the constant presence of "Now Hiring" signs in retail windows, applicants have come to expect that any store into which they walk will bend over backwards to hire them. (In some cases, sadly, this is true.) Because of this long-term trend, many applicants bring with them an expectation that they are in the driver's seat when deciding where to work. While it is the employer, obviously, who has the final say, managers who take more time to respond to applicants' values and expectations find themselves with better overall workers who remain on the job a long time. How well do you integrate consideration of the applicants' values and priorities into the recruiting process?

"They" have noticed that "all's fair" is part of the new business ethic. Right used to be right and wrong used to be wrong. But in a world filled with too much information and too many competing messages about values, many applicants, especially in younger generations, tend to take an average of what they hear. This can result in a "end justifying the means" approach to job search. Allow me an illustration:

A career counselor friend of mine had a discussion with a group of college seniors. It seems they had signed up for on-campus interviews with employers in which they had little interest. When she asked why, they responded that these "no-risk" interviews would provide them with the practice they needed to perform well with employers in whom they had a great deal of interest.

She observed that these students, by using this tactic, were preventing other students who had a sincere interest in the "practice employers" from getting a chance to interview. Their retort? "They should have signed up before we did."

Then she commented that they were also wasting the recruiters' time. To this, they replied that if the recruiters were really on their toes they might be able to change the minds of these students who possessed no interest in working for them.

While some may find this reasoning offensive, others may find this a legitimate strategy in a new world. What will you do the next time an applicant walks in telling you that he or she is interested in a retailing career, but is really thinking of the job as stop-gap until something better comes along?

"They" may know more about your organization than you do. Turn on a computer these days and you can obtain more information about any organization in 10 minutes than we used to be able to gather in a month of *Wall Street Journals*. Managerial and professional applicants are adept at finding this material. How much do you know about your own organization? Stock price? Expansion plans? Competition? Leadership? Market share? Those who have a vested interest in building a career will ask these questions before investing in you.

"They" conduct a reference check on your organization before applying. Just as employers are used to asking questions about applicants' backgrounds before hiring, these same applicants are conducting an investigation before they even apply. They talk to their friends. They ask your employees when you're not looking. They read the newspapers and watch the news. They listen to the word on the street. "Is this a good place to work?"

"They" tell lots of their friends if they like what they hear and see. Now, more than ever, your ability to recruit quality people depends upon your store's reputation in the community. Technology has enabled young and old alike to communicate instantaneously with their peers. The careless or disorganized attitude your people displayed in the hiring process with one applicant may end up in a local chat room of high school students

or senior citizens. On the other hand, the care you take in selecting just the right people may also end up in the same forums.

"They" don't know what vesting is and wouldn't care if they did. This may be an oversimplification, but here's the point: Applicants from younger generations have little desire to remain with the same firm for the 10, 20, or 30 years that it takes to make most pensions meaningful. Many are focused on the immediate cash they receive with every paycheck. Pensions are only meaningful to them if the investments are portable.

In addition, there has been an economic shift from higher paying manufacturing jobs to lower paid service positions in the past decade. This, in turn, has had a significant impact on the purchasing power of younger generations. While many may want to build a nest egg for the future, their cost of living does not allow for it.

"They" focus on the *values messages* in recruiting promotions. As I travel the nation, I still see thousands of signs in retail windows announcing "Positions Available, Accepting Applications and Now Hiring." The truth is no one cares. If you not appeal to an applicant's core desires from the first moment he or she looks at the promotion, you will never attract the person's attention. Some of these individuals may still come to work for you, but only for the paycheck. You will not have captured their hearts and minds.

"They" ask questions that you thought no one asked in polite company. To the dismay of many in older generations, politeness, as a practice appears to be eroding. Employers have told me a host of stories about what they consider to be rude, pushy and even obnoxious behaviors among applicants. They list inappropriate questions, overly casual attire and demanding attitudes among these offensive acts.

Those in younger generations respond by saying, "Get over it. The purpose of an interview," they argue, "is to obtain the information necessary to make an informed decision. You can't dance around the subject and make nice. Ask the questions that need to be asked. Who cares what I look like as long as we both keep our ends of the bargain?"

There can obviously be a happy medium here. Employers have both a right and an obligation to set parameters and expectations. But don't let the rituals of the past impair your ability to recruit and hire effectively.

"They" expect you to follow through in a timely and consistent manner. Even as the economy has slowed down, those filling front-line positions are still in short supply. Managers who interview on a Monday may find their best applicants gone by Wednesday. Younger applicants have learned that they can "shop" for an employer.

"They" decide and act quickly. Younger generations have grown up on images and information that move faster and faster. With this inbred impatience, one can understand their desire to get on with what's new. Besides, they know the consequences are few if they choose to move to another employer a month later.

"They" protect their personal assets first. Younger generations look at each job they work as a contract. They will do what is best for them. This should not be perceived as selfishness, but as a focus on the balance they desire in life. Many have watched their parents throw everything they had into a job only to be laid off after long years of service. They have felt the unintentional neglect of those parents who "lived to work" and have sworn they will never do that to their families.