

## The Art & Science of Recruiting

Artistic endeavors like music, drama, or writing have fundamentals that help us identify and distinguish each particular art form. Scientific laws dictate that a golf ball will slice off in the wrong direction or go straight. How far the ball will travel is based on a number of mathematical formulas, which come into play in that millisecond at the point of impact between club and ball.

Whether you are playing music or golf, there are always masters of the game. Likewise, achieving mastery in recruiting requires both an understanding of the art of recruiting as-well-as acknowledgment of the laws that affect how the game is played.

Is recruiting art or is it science? Applying the concept of the genius of “AND” – it’s an art *AND* a science. Our understanding of recruiting from both viewpoints and applying the fundamentals of recruiting results in predictability, and a successful recruiting effort.

Have you ever met anyone who came on board who didn’t want to do a good job? Probably you can’t think of someone. Even though that is the case, companies receive less than stellar performance from those who they hoped would deliver superior results. When that situation occurs, there will be outcomes you really didn’t want.

1. An employee ends of leaving or being fired.
2. The company takes another hit to their bottom line from the expense of recruiting another employee.
3. Perhaps the former employee bad mouths the company to everyone who is willing to give them a listening ear.

If you calculated the cost of failure to retain employees, and the investment in recruiting the wrong person, you might end up grabbing your chest, your wallet or both.

There are other costs to a company that may not be so easy to measure. Reflect on the following questions: What financial impact is associated with increased frustration and poor morale caused by less than desirable performance? What happens to the speed of communication when people lose the endorsement and trust of others? How will the loss of trust impact the flow of information in a timely manner? What costs are associated with customer dissatisfaction? Is your customer not also a victim of poor performance from your company?

### The New Mindset:

Einstein said, “We cannot solve today’s problems with the same level of thinking that we had when we created them.” How many times have we thought: ‘If I knew then, what I know now, I would have made different choices and wouldn’t be in the position I’m in today.’ Driving by looking through the rearview mirror is certainly not the best option. Seeing the twists and turns in the road ahead, discerning how the traffic is moving, and knowing the rules of the road is a lot safer and is the surest way to reach our destination.

Continuing with the road analogy – have you ever been lost while traveling? It’s not because you had a bad attitude, or weren’t skilled in driving or were lacking proper ethics that you didn’t arrive at your destination when you planned to. Perhaps it was because you had the wrong map. The same might be said about your company’s mindset when it comes to how and who to recruit. If we are not being as successful in recruiting the right people as we would like, perhaps we need to change our map or our thinking, as Einstein implied. The first step is to **know what you really want**.

## **Benchmarking the position and recruiting:**

When interviewing managers about the accountabilities of a particular position, not too surprisingly, I received different responses to the same question. Understanding what we really want from a position has everything to do with results.

If the company doesn't agree on why the job exists, or what it's accountable for; people with the wrong behaviors and values are likely the ones who will be courted and hired.

Have you ever had someone hired for skills and fired for attitude? To prevent this from happening, create a Job Benchmark. This process is started by having stakeholders very familiar with the position or affected by the position; identify the accountabilities of the job. Each stakeholder then takes an assessment. When all the assessments are combined and averaged, the job's behaviors, values, and capacities, or what the job requires to achieve success will be quantified. Then any future candidate can be compared to the benchmark to assure a good fit. The outcome from recruiting through this method will bring you the results you **really** want.

The initial recruiting step is to create ads based on the benchmark that attract the right person. Individuals who then read the ad and relate to the behaviors and values can now say 'that's me'.

The next step occurs before a face-to-face interview. Send a series of questions for an e-mail interview. These questions come from the benchmark. This allows a person to think things through in order to give an intelligent response. You can learn how they process and how they think. When the recruiter knows what they are looking for (based on the benchmark) they can read between the lines and begin to conduct an unbiased evaluation.

Of course you will want to have a face-to-face interview as well. How does a person respond under stress? What questions do they ask about your company? Remember, if they are not desperate for a job, they will be thinking long-term and looking for something that meets their future needs. This entire effort is designed to attract the right person and weed out others who will conclude; 'this is not for me.' They've made a good decision and you have now saved a lot of time and money.

## **Interviews:**

In the course of writing this article I interviewed three executives from Insurance Agencies and I wish to extend my thanks for their time and input. Tim Fleming, President of RJF Agencies in Minnesota, Scott White, a Principle of Hetrick & Associates of Michigan, and Jim Kessler, CFO of Saginaw Bay Underwriters, Michigan. Each of them very clearly highlighted similar thinking on recruiting, and shared their well thought-out ideas and experience. At this time I will share some of their thoughts to one of the questions we discussed: **What is your process for recruiting?**

### **Fleming said:**

"The best talent out there is not seeking a career in the insurance industry. I am now promoting the insurance industry as the place to be. Our industry, offers so much more; like selling complex solutions and intangibles and doing so strategically...

...using a benchmark for the sales position and assessments to see if there is a fit, we have no candidates that are performing poorly. Prior to using the assessments we were not skilled at asking the right questions, or understanding behaviors. We left it up to pure luck. We now have gone from 50% to 90% success ratio.

You need to honestly answer questions like:

- What should be your commitment to the process? In other words how much time are the upper managers willing and capable of investing in the recruiting process?
- Who should be involved?

I try to get a lot of buy in from those who will be working with the individual. Having others give their approval is important to the success of the person, when they come on the job.”

**White said:**

“It’s no different than looking for new clients for our organization. We feel very strongly about building a future employee pipeline. We look for referrals from our centers of influence. We can call candidates in for interviews when there is a need.

The most valuable thing we have done is to make sure that all our employees know what our needs are. They are the best ones to look for individuals who have the right culture. After all they have to work with them. In addition we give them a \$500 finder fee.”

**Kessler said:**

**Stage One:** Referrals

We are in a small community and we use referrals from professional organizations; banking, law firms, securities, attorneys, and CPA’s.

**Stage two:** Research

We look for those who have been or who are in sports, and who have that competitive nature. If we get them they are pre-qualified because they are not coming in through ads. From there when the resumes come in you can analyze the basic skill sets that you are looking for that meet the sales criteria.

**Stage three:** Interview & Assess

Phone interview is first to see how they sound, then face-to-face. Before we talk to them they fill out the agency application and we already have their resume. We look at their financials to see if they really make what they said they make.” The next step is running behavioral assessments.

**Food for thought:**

**First:** Don’t sell someone on coming to your organization with untruths about your real situation. As you can imagine there is no quicker way to demoralize a person than to have them quickly figure out that they have been sold a bill of goods. When the rosy picture the recruiter painted doesn’t pan out, the new employee will very likely become upset about their decision to join your organization. Trust will take a hit, and when that happens, communication begins breaking down and there are definite costs associated with all of that. It now becomes a matter of time before they leave and find a job they really want.

**Second:** Inherent in having unclear and undefined expectations of a job, is an inability to communicate to the prospective candidate or employee what is really expected of them. Ask yourselves these questions: What happens when a manager is unable to communicate exactly how an employee needs to improve? What happens when behaviors that are irrelevant to performance are being discussed? Answer: Expectations will not be met by either party. In addition, when developing and recruiting internally for different positions, the focus will not be on the right behaviors or capacities and we may be setting people up for failure.

**Third:** Remember that when hiring a salesperson to remind yourself that they are **salespeople**. Selling is what they do, and you might be a victim of being sold something you should never have bought...the wrong salesperson. *Stay in control of the process.*

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## **Asking the right questions:**

Below are a few examples of questions from a TriMetrix® System Benchmark, which is a trademark of Performance Benchmarking, Inc.

### **BEHAVIORAL FEEDBACK QUESTIONS:**

#### **URGENCY**

- When faced with a deadline, how do you respond?
- How important is it to you to have all the facts before proceeding? Give me an example of a time when you didn't have all the facts and you proceeded anyway.
- How did you feel? How did it work out?

#### **COMPETITIVENESS**

- How demanding are you of yourself and others? Do you think you are sometimes too demanding? Give me an example of a job situation where being demanding helped to achieve the goal. Did it lead to other problems? Would others ever describe you as aggressive? Pushy? Why?
- How important is winning to you? How do you define winning? Give me an example of a situation where you felt you were going to lose. How did it feel? How did you handle it?

### **VALUES QUESTIONS:**

#### **UTILITARIAN/ECONOMIC**

- How important is earning a lot of money to you? What do you consider to be a "lot of money"?
- Where would you like to be, financially, in 5 years? 10 years? Why?
- What role does earning a significant income play in your job choices? In staying in a job?
- Would you consider yourself to be a bottom line, practical thinker or are you more theoretical or philosophical? Why do you say that?

### **JOB ATTRIBUTES QUESTIONS:**

**SELF MANAGEMENT:** The ability to prioritize and complete tasks in order to deliver desired outcomes within allotted time frames.

- Give me a specific example of a project that you were responsible for organizing from beginning to end. How did you go about it? How did you deal with changes that arose? How did you ensure that the project stayed on track? What was the final outcome? What did you learn from this experience?
- Do you consider yourself to be a good time manager? Share with me the planning system you use and show me how you use it.
- How much time do you spend getting organized on a daily basis? When do you do it? What impact do you think this habit has on your results?
- What is the difference between activity and results? How do you personally define this difference?