

30+ ACTIONS FOR IMPROVING OFFER ACCEPTANCE RATES

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Unfortunately, despite the obvious importance of selling, many employees, recruiters, and most hiring managers are weak at selling. In addition, generally few effective data-driven selling tools are provided to those that interact with prospects and candidates. If you want to improve your selling capability in recruiting, here are some actions to consider. They are broken into 5 distinct categories. The benchmark firms to learn from can be found in parentheses for many of the actions.

PART 1 – SELLING YOUR COMPANY AND YOUR EMPLOYER BRAND

Actions that sell your company and help excite prospects about someday working for your firm are essential.

1. **Provide stories to your employees** – provide employees with a story inventory so that they can spread stories about your brand on social media and as part of the employee referral program. (Google has an excellent model to copy).
2. **Film festival** – if a picture is worth 1000 words, then a video must worth a million. Encourage employees and teams to make short videos revealing “the excitement” within your firm and post them on YouTube or your own site. (Deloitte).
3. **Green and sustainable recruiting** – because sustainability is such a hot topic among candidates, it pays to emphasize environmentally friendly actions, programs, and products both on your website and during interviews. (GE).

PART 2 – BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AND CONVINCING PROSPECTS TO APPLY

Actions that convince reluctant prospects to apply are a critical component of the overall sales effort.

- **Provide a selling tool kit** – provide employees, recruiters, and hiring managers with a “selling toolkit” of simple, proven approaches which they can use to successfully sell prospects and candidates.
- **Provide sales education** – provide recruiters and managers with a compact but effective online sales education site, wikis and forums, where they can learn, ask questions and share recruiting sales best practices and problems. (Whirlpool has a benchmark model to follow). Where it is feasible, identify your

recruiters with the strongest selling capabilities and provide them as “recruiting sales consultants” to hiring managers that do high volume or key position hiring.

- **Change who calls them** – it is a fact that many individuals simply will not return a single recruiter call. Instead, have someone at their professional level call them and you will get as much as a 10 times higher call return rate. The reason for this is “professional courtesy” and the opportunity to learn from a colleague.
- **Contact them on the “right day”** – individuals that continually say no to applying may “all of a sudden” become interested because of a negative event at work (a boss/friend just left, a merger has been announced, they didn’t get a promotion or project approved, they got a bad performance appraisal or other “triggering event”). Contact them right away when they are unhappy and close the deal.
- **Assigned referrals make relationship building easier** – when a top candidate has already been identified, you can improve the odds of building a strong relationship with them by using software to identify which employee already has the strongest social media relationship with the target. The employee is then given the assignment and provided with coaching so that they can use their connection to contact and to build a recruiting relationship with the target. (Zynga is the benchmark firm here).

PART 3 – TELEPHONE CALLS AND INTERVIEW RELATED ACTIONS

Talking to candidates on the phone and during interview visits are both opportune times to sell them.

- **Sell during the interview** – it’s important to encourage hiring managers and interviewers to spend at least ½ of the time during the interview selling the candidate. Also, periodically ask the candidate during the interview process, “Are we close?” or “Do you see any roadblocks at this point?”
- **Peer interviews** – many organizations have found that they get a significantly higher acceptance rate if candidates are interviewed primarily by the individuals they will work directly with. Because peers know the job, they can be more convincing and at the same time, more believable than hiring managers.
- **Select a hiring team** – some managers just aren’t good salespeople or recruiters. So instead of relying on individual managers to hire, identify a group of your employees that excel at selling candidates and let them do most of the hiring. Provide recruiter training and reward this group for their efforts. Because this group will do a lot of hiring, they will naturally be better at it than a single manager that only does hiring once or twice a year.
- **Targeted sales approaches** – the process for selling innovators, top performers, technologists, and executives generally has an extremely high failure rate without utilizing customized sales approaches.

As a result, the recruiting function needs to develop separate protocols or processes for assessing and selling each of these important types of recruiting targets.

- **A side-by-side “company sell sheet”** – many managers do a poor job selling the company to potential recruits simply because they don’t have time to keep up with the competitive job market. So, an alternative is to provide hiring managers with a side-by-side comparison sheet (like in Consumer Reports). This simple sheet makes it easy for them to highlight the advantages and the compelling features of working at your firm (versus top competitors) when they are talking to a candidate. You can also attach a version of this “company sell sheet” to your hardcopy application form and show it on your application website immediately before the application process begins.
- **Show them where they will be in two years** – provide top candidates with a profile of what “others like them” have accomplished and learned while at your firm. Excite them by showing them where they could be in a year or two if they were to join your firm. (Google is a benchmark firm in this area).
- **Sell on the mobile platform** – a great deal of interaction with candidates involve phone conversations and interviews. Because these calls are interactive, it provides the prospect or candidate an opportunity to ask questions and the company representative a chance to sell. It’s also important for all to understand that the smartphone is the most powerful communications medium, simply because prospects and candidates constantly carry in instantly answer it. Make sure that your corporate website is compatible with smart phones and use text, voice and videos to communicate your message. And finally make it possible for individuals to apply using the mobile platform alone. (Sodexo and AT&T).

PART 4 – ACTIONS RELATED TO THE OFFER PROCESS

1. **Educate everyone about offer trends** – many candidates are lost because of the initial insulting lowball offers. As a result, I recommend that you put together a team to gather data and to educate recruiters, compensation specialists and managers about the most recent offer “trends”, candidate expectations and specifically why recent offers at your firm were accepted or rejected.
2. **Offer them a salary re-opener after 6 months** – as previously noted, low salary offers are a major cause for losing candidates that have multiple choices. I have found that you can overcome a situation where the applicant thinks that their value is higher than the company’s offer by formally or informally offering the candidate a salary “re-opener” three or six months after they start. The reason that this works is that neither the hiring manager nor the candidate can really know how good they are until they actually start work. If after they start working, they turn out to be as good as they believe they are, you can then justify giving them more money. This approach can be a “win” for both sides.

3. **CEO calls** – having your CEO or senior executive call the finalist directly and encourage them to accept is a powerful tool for hard to convince key individuals.
4. **Dream job offers** – the most effective attraction and sales tool is offering top candidate their “dream job”. For top-candidates, ask them to describe the non-monetary aspects of their dream job...and then offer it to them (within reason). Incidentally, most ask for things that are relatively easy to provide.
5. **Include an “unexpected” surprise in the offer** – where possible, try to include something in the offer that was not discussed were that they would not likely anticipate. Surprising them, even a small way will increase your chances of getting a “yes”.
6. **The offer letter format** – it might be a surprise to you, but another reason why offers are rejected, is the form and format of the offer letter itself. Letters that are overly legalistic (with a lot of fine print) are turnoffs. The offer letter needs to minimize the legal elements. Instead, a letter should continue to excite the candidate is a superior selling approach. Also, offer letters that leave out key “promises” that were verbally discussed during interviews will frequently confuse or frustrate the candidate.
7. **Influence the influencers** – remember job decisions are not made alone. It’s important, wherever possible, to influence those that will influence the finalist’s acceptance decision (colleagues, mentors, co-workers and especially references and family members). You can improve your chances of getting support from these individuals by talking to them directly by sending them information about the company or even giving them a sample of the company’s products. Focusing on talking to references, the spouse and mentors about the positive aspects of the company and the job are especially high impact steps for improving your acceptance rates.
8. **Utilize “exploding offers”** – candidates that are likely to get multiple offers need to be closed very quickly. If you are bold, try offering a significant sign-on bonus that is contingent upon accepting your offer either before they leave your facility or the same day. If the offer is not accepted right away, the bonus continually decreases over the next few days. This bold approach can provide a powerful incentive to accept or make a quick decision.
9. **Hire them both** – if you’re really bold, offer a program where you will hire a top candidate and their best friend at the same time (colleague, spouse/ partner). Offering an exceptional opportunity to commute together or to work together with their best friend is extremely powerful. (Agilent and the US Army).

PART 5 – ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIONS THAT SUPPORT SELLING

- **A robust employee referral program** – because your employees are often the most effective salespeople for branding and convincing prospects to apply (because they “live the job” every day), it is

important to have a robust employee referral program to ensure that employees are actively meeting and selling prospects 24/7.

- **Identify their job acceptance criteria**– somewhere early in the recruiting process there should be a formal step for asking the candidate to list their specific “job acceptance criteria”. Once it is provided to recruiters and managers, they can use those criteria to personalize their selling approach. A list of “deal breakers” can also help everyone to avoid driving top talent away.
- **A post recruiting survey on what worked** – you need to know the root causes of your successes and failures. As a result, survey all new hires during onboarding and a sample of unsuccessful applicants and candidates 3months later to determine which aspects of the sales pitch worked and didn’t work. Also, ask them what could be added to make the overall sales pitch more convincing. Use this information to improve your sourcing, marketing materials, interviews and the offer process.
- **Collaborate with the sales department** –it’s important to work with and benchmark your own sales and market research functions in order to take advantage of already developed tools and approaches that can be modified to fit recruiting.
- **Use CRM tools** – how the candidate is treated during the recruiting process (the candidate experience) may be the most important factor in keeping the candidate from dropping out and in selling them on the job. Fortunately, you can adapt the CRM software (Customer Relationship Management) that is utilized by the customer service function to build a relationship and to keep in touch with top candidates.
- **Make your job postings exciting** – many recruiters pull job descriptions from internal systems that were written long ago for purposes other than marketing a “dream” opportunity. Your job postings, to put it simply, are dull. Recruiters should rewrite them so that they sell the exciting aspects of the job and give applicants an idea of how they will be able to influence the future. At the very least, they should be tested against competitors’ descriptions to ensure they are more compelling.
- **Improve your job descriptions** – after dull job postings, dull job descriptions are a common selling roadblock. Rewrite your job descriptions to make them more like marketing pieces. Survey your current employees to identify the WOW job duties and opportunities that excite and put them in your job descriptions to make them compelling.

Final thoughts

In my view, the time has come during this increasingly difficult battle for top talent. For strategic recruiting leaders to begin shifting resources towards this underfunded but strategically important area of recruiting... selling applicants, candidates, and the finalists.

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