

LEGAL MANAGEMENT

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Stop Hiring the Best Applicants — Hire the Best Employees Instead

By Mel Kleiman



To pinpoint ALA membership's biggest challenges when it comes to recruiting, selecting and retaining employees, I surveyed members prior to my presentation at the association's 2016 Annual Conference & Expo in May.

The 255 responses allowed me to customize my material to meet the audience's specific needs, and this article is a summary of those responses as well as a reminder of the best practices, tools and techniques I recommend you use to tackle these issues.

THE RESULTS

The three biggest challenges were:

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| 1. Not having enough qualified applicants from which to choose | 56% |
| 2. The ability to identify the applicants with the highest potential of becoming STARS (Self-motivated, Talented, Accountable, Responsible, Stable) | 54% |
| 3. Keeping our STARS motivated and engaged | 36% |

For a copy of a “stay interview” script, email lhamel@humetrics.com with “ALA Stay Interview” in the subject line.

Meanwhile, the best sources for applicants were:

Source	Percentage
1. Referrals from employees, vendors, customers and/or social networks	83

2. Internet job boards	59
3. Our company website	26
4. Our competition	21
5. Schools	21
6. We re-recruit former STAR employees who left	8
7. Newspapers	6
8. Walk-ins	2
9. Signage	1
10. Job fairs	1

IMMEDIATE REFERRAL REWARDS

Referrals are by far the best source of job applicants across all industries — and have been for at least the 30 years that these statistics have been tracked.

If you suffer from a lack of qualified applicants (the biggest reported challenge), a quick remedy is an employee referral reward program. If you already have a program and it's not yielding the results you need, it's probably because you defer the employee's reward until the new hire has been on the job for 90 days, and then you just quietly add the cash award to the employee's regular paycheck.

Behavior that you'd like to see repeated must be rewarded immediately. On the new hire's first day, gather everyone for introductions and say, "This is our new coworker, Jake, and I know he's going to be a real asset to our team because he was referred by Michele. Michele, thank you. Here's your employee referral reward."

(If you balk at this, consider the fact that you don't pay a job board, recruiter or newspaper only after your new hire has a certain tenure. You pay them up front, in spite of the fact that new hires from these sources are not as likely as referrals to work out well.)

It's also of interest that, in most industries, re-recruiting former employees is a highly effective strategy, but only 8 percent of the respondents to this survey report using it. If you don't make this a practice, at least try it. The grass is not always greener, and besides, the worst they could say is no.

ATTRACTIVE JOB POSTINGS

When it comes to job board postings, here are a few tips to ensure the best results:

- Make sure the headline grabs the reader's attention.
- Sell the sizzle first (why yours is a great place to work).
- Specify your requirement in terms of CAPS (capacities — both physical and intellectual, attitudes, personality traits and skills), but make it a rule to hire for attitude and train for skills whenever possible.
- If "high attention to detail" is required, put something in the post that tells you if the applicant possesses this trait, i.e., "Respond with 'A9987' and your full given name in the subject line."

When we asked the open-ended question, "What is the No. 1 reason a STAR employee would want to work for you and/or your organization?" the reason cited most frequently was some version of "our culture." What's important here is to ensure you clearly *define and communicate* your particular culture. For instance, it might be any of the following:

- Nurturing (often expressed as "we care")

- Fun
- Work/life balance
- Growth opportunities
- Community involvement
- Laid-back

Once you have defined your culture, use the description in your recruitment ads to attract the kinds of people who would thrive in it, i.e., “Looking for growth opportunities and work/life balance?”

INTERVIEWING FOR STAR POWER

More than 50 percent of survey responders said their firm’s hiring managers had not been trained in best practice interviewing techniques, and another 20 percent said “Don’t know.” This most certainly points to a major reason why staffing is such a challenge.

Would you let someone who has not been trained get behind the wheel of a car? If not, why do so many let those who make the most important decision any business ever makes — who gets hired — do it without the benefit of best-practice training?

Another weak link reported by these respondents is the fact that 77 percent do not use a structured interview question set. Now, this astounds me. Only by asking all applicants the same questions can you:

1. Legally protect yourself against claims of discrimination.
2. Legitimately compare “apples to apples” based on the information you gather rather than on gut feeling alone.

KEEP THE GOOD ONES

Although this survey’s respondents reported that the top reason good people quit is “for more money,” research shows time and time again that the real reason any employee ever goes looking for a new job is because of their unsatisfactory relationship with the people they work for and with (most often their manager). “More money” is just a face-saving way out.

When it comes to what’s being done to keep good and great employees from leaving, the most frequently cited preventative measures were open communication (72 percent), flexible hours/time off (59 percent), and performance bonuses (56 percent).

In spite of the fact that a lack of recognition is most often cited by employees as a major job frustration, only 28 percent of the responding group uses recognition as a component of their employee retention effort.

The bottom line is that the best way to find STAR employees is to be a great place for people to work — and then let it be known. And the best ways to keep your STARS on board are with a culture that supports their needs, healthy doses of recognition and appreciation, and the regular use of employee retention “stay interviews” to foster a strong positive relationship between employees and their managers.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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