

Finding the best and brightest

In today's tight hiring market, finding top candidates takes time and effort. **Interviewed by Troy Sympson**

In today's ultracompetitive job market, it's hard to find a good fit. It's difficult for applicants to find a good job, and it's equally difficult for companies to find good help. But, if both sides are looking for the similar qualities, shouldn't it be easier to find common ground?

According to Jessica Morris, accounting/finance recruiting manager with Burnett Staffing in Houston, finding the right candidates can be easy if a company knows what they're looking for and knows how to attract it.

"To find the right person, you can't just post a job in the paper or online anymore," says Morris. "Companies need to actively recruit candidates, but also, they need to know exactly what they want in a candidate before bringing anyone in for an interview."

Smart Business spoke to Morris about today's tough hiring market and what companies can do to stand out to potential candidates.

How can a company find good applicants?

In most cases, the best candidate is not actually looking for a position. To locate these hard-to-find, passive candidates, your staff will have to work harder and smarter. But finding, recruiting and screening candidates can be a very time-consuming process, and an expensive one to boot. Utilizing outside recruiting specialists, networking with colleagues and encouraging employee referrals are ways companies can effectively find good applicants, without wasting valuable time and money.

What can a company do to stand out to an applicant?

Know exactly what you want out of an applicant and be sure that you clearly express it in the job description. Many companies spend a great deal of time in the recruiting and hiring process only to find that their top candidate has accepted another job offer. In today's tight market, communication and timeliness are keys. You have to make a candidate feel special—you can't leave them hanging. When you begin recruiting, effectively communicate



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with applicants where they are in the process. Immediately notify candidates if you have no interest in them, because if your recruiter has to keep fielding follow up calls from a candidate you're not interested in, it's a waste of time and resources. If you are interested in the candidate, continue to keep him or her updated at each stage of the hiring process. Even if the decision won't be made for another three weeks, communicate this to the applicant. They may wait for your offer. Otherwise, they'll assume you have no interest and accept a competing offer.

What, besides salary, can attract a potential applicant?

When the demand for candidates is high and the supply of top talent is low, sign-on bonuses should be utilized to set your company apart. This will discourage candidates from taking the counteroffer their current company is likely to make. For professional candidates, benefits can make or break an offer. In addition to salary and benefits, companies who discuss career development during the hiring process are given a competitive advantage. I encourage companies to continue to highlight the employee's career path. The majority of the candi-

dates I interview who are currently working choose to leave their position because there is no growth potential. Do your employees know what your plans are for their career development? If not, you could lose some of your top talent. Other attractive incentives could include matching 401(k) plans, vacation time, access to company vehicles and tuition reimbursements.

What are companies looking for? What positions are in high demand?

Of the divisions I manage, accounting and finance candidates are in the highest demand. Many companies are seeking degreed accountants who have experience at one of the 'Big 4' CPA firms or those with a specialty like manufacturing, cost accounting or audit experience. Companies are also looking for candidates who are professional, accepting of changes and challenges, driven, detail-oriented, and, most importantly, willing to do whatever it takes to succeed.

What hiring challenges are companies facing and how do they overcome them?

Many companies have their HR staff recruit for internal positions utilizing job descriptions that do not accurately portray the requirements of the position. It is important to list all the education, skills and experience necessary for the job, and then highlight the preferred skills. Do not limit your candidate pool in a tight labor market. If you are not able to relax any requirements and you are still having trouble filling a job, I recommend adjusting one of the other main components of a candidate's hiring decision or highlighting how your company or this position already enhances one of these areas. Salary, benefits, location and environment are key components of a candidate's hiring decision. In addition to increasing the salary range, a company can also offer telecommuting or a flexible schedule to improve its ability to attract top talent.

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