

# Strategic commentary

## Reputation management 101: consider candidate experience

Amy Finn

In the digital age, everyone can be a critic – or an advocate. Whether a restaurant review on Yelp, a class on Rate My Professor or an apartment on Review My Landlord, the internet has given voice to the masses to share what they want, when they want. For employers – particularly in this low-unemployment, competitive market – it is especially important to understand this and to recognize the importance of positive reviews on sites like Glassdoor and Vault or being listed as some of the best places to work. But also to recognize the power, and trickle-down effect, of any social platform – from Facebook to Twitter to Snapchat – in relaying stories (positive or negative) of an experience. This makes it critical for companies to develop, implement and refine processes, from recruiting to onboarding that create positive candidate experiences.

Just think about how quickly word travels within your industry. They are typically small circles, where word gets around. For example, if a software engineer leaves an interview feeling mistreated, chances are pretty good that colleagues hear about it – and then the treacherous game of telephone begins. A candidate may be excited about an opportunity, but when they hear it is with your company – a company

that a colleague told them to stay away from – it is likely to have an impact.

A bad candidate experience will hinder talent attraction, especially in a tight market, when talent is at a premium. In addition to the work, salary and culture, candidates evaluate opportunities based on how they have been treated during the process.

Improving candidate experience does not take a large capital investment or require many resources. Improvements can be made through simple changes in the way candidates are viewed and treated. The No. 1 tip for keeping candidates happy is to remember the Golden Rule: treat job seekers the way you would want to be treated – or the way you would want your parent, sibling, child or best friend to be treated. By simply treating candidates in a respectful, professional, honest and kind way, you will make the entire process more positive.

Some simple improvement steps in developing a strong candidate experience include:

- *Be responsive.* Professionals applying for appropriate jobs should always receive something from your organization to avoid the “black hole” of job applications. Responding is good for the

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candidate and good for your company.

- *Set expectations from the start.* If you choose to work with a candidate or are considering an applicant, let them know how often you will be in touch and who should contact whom. Whatever the response – automated or personalized from the start, it is crucial to have the expectations as clearly outlined as possible. The reasons candidates are angry vary, of course, but communication consistently tops the list. The candidate wants a level of communication they are not getting.
- *Don't try to force them into a job that isn't the right fit – professionally or culturally.* Even if you are desperate for qualified help, it is a disservice to all parties if someone feels pressured into a role and company that is not right.
- *Value their time.* Try to make the in-person experience as

seamless as possible. Allowing candidates to be left waiting for an unreasonable amount of time with no explanation, or not being prepared for the candidate's arrival, sends the impression, even unintentionally, that they are not valued.

- *Be helpful.* For recruiters and hiring managers, when applicable, give candidates a little free advice, whether you can help them or not. Point them to helpful blogs, websites or give them a few pointers to improve their resumes. If they left feeling that you heard them, even if you did not hire them, it will pay dividends.
- *Be straightforward.* If you are a recruiter and do not think you can work with a candidate, be honest and tell them in a kind way. We hear consistently that candidates would rather have someone be direct, than to be strung along.

- *Listen to them.* No matter if we are talking candidate experience or customer experience, the best way to turn around angry situations is to listen. Let the candidate tell his or her story without interruption. Avoid being defensive. Follow up with an apology. It is never a wrong answer to tell candidates you are sorry they had that experience with you or your agency.

Let's face it, there are some unreasonable candidates who are negative and unhappy and looking for someone to blame. But, most unhappy candidates have a legitimate reason for their discontent. Taking the time to improve candidate experience is easy, worthwhile and will ultimately set up your business for success.

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