



5 ways to rethink staff recruitment

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Jan 20, 2016



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A tighter job outlook means employers need to market themselves to top talent.

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Sign of the times: Employers are fishing in a shallower talent pool.

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We are facing one of the tightest job markets in recent memory, and the restaurant industry is not immune. In fact, the industry is a leader in job creation, driven by strong growth. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the foodservice business is expected to add 1.7 million new jobs over the next decade.

To stay competitive with that growth you will need to

attract and retain top talent. For years restaurateurs could count on a steady stream of workers coming to them, but since the job market has changed, your recruitment strategies also need to change. The talent will not come to you; you need to find them then court them. Candidates have options and they know it.

Here's a strategy to make sure you are able to attract talent.

1. Rethink your whole approach to recruitment. Take a page or two out of the sales and marketing handbook: Approach candidates the same way you do customers. After all, not only are they potential applicants, but they also are potential customers. By providing a positive experience to each candidate—including those who are not hired—you build both your employment brand and your company brand.

This goes for every open position you may have, from busser to executive chef. Apply these steps from Sales 101 to recruitment:

* Define the value proposition: Why should a candidate leave his or her current job to take your open position?

* Convert that proposition into a compelling message: Distill it down to the hook that will engage the right candidates.

* Bring the message to targeted prospects: Post and source, of course, but also leverage social media.

* Manage leads/applicants: Qualify them and score them against the likelihood that the lead will be converted to a hire.

* If a lead says "no," ask for referrals.

* Follow through until you close the deal.

2. Hit the market with an "instant crescendo" of searching, sourcing and networking. Find out where the candidates are today and hit those sources hard. Your best prospects may "hang out" on a niche board, or be avid users of social media. Ask your current staff about their online habits. Foodservicerumors.com is an example of an industry chat room. Maybe a more traditional approach will be best, such as cold-calling from a list of competitors. Most likely your strategy will need to be made up of multiple tactics.

3. For résumé databases, mainstream sites like Monster, CareerBuilder and LinkedIn are always good places to start. For management roles, try TheLadders.com. Digging deeper, look at professional associations or technical schools that match the skill set you are seeking. You may already know of these industry-specific databases:

* Foodservice.com has a résumé database as well as forums and chat rooms.

* Hcareers.com serves the entire hospitality industry, but you can focus in on restaurant candidates

* HospitalityOnline.com also is broader than just restaurant résumés, but it also offers recruitment tools like social media marketing and email blasts.

4. Have an employment brand and a great careers portal on your website, both informed by your sales approach. Post photos of employees at work to help prospects picture themselves at your workplace. You might also include pictures of employees at teambuilding events, employee picnics or participating in community service projects. Describe your culture and share any workplace awards you have won. Remember: the emphasis should not be on what you need, but on what you are offering to entice top talent.

5. To draw people to your career portal, borrow more best practices from sales and marketing. Send email blasts. Fishbowl.com is an email service that focuses on the restaurant industry, and there are others. Capture business cards by offering a drawing for a free meal. Be active on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. (By the way, these tactics can help find both customers and candidates.) Leverage tabletop marketing, or have staff sign customers up for a loyalty program.

6. Ask key staff members to post in blogs and online forums frequented by the kinds of candidates you need. Rather than writing about how great it is to work at your business, however, have your chef post some recipes or kitchen tips. Have a bartender write about keeping lemon peels fresh, or even about the history of scotch distilling. The goal is to establish your people as subject matter experts. That will raise the company's profile among prospects. Then, when they run across an ad you posted or an email you sent, they will think, "Oh, yeah, I've heard of them."

The talent market is only going to get tighter, and the restaurants that thrive will be those who sell employment opportunities and court candidates the same way they court potential customers.

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