

# I Your Career

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## Searching For Talent

**Good people have never been in so much demand. Trying to snap them up is becoming a hard sell, writes SIMON PANCKHURST.**

As young nipper I remember repeating the advice to never 'assume' as you'll make an 'ass' out of 'u' and 'me' probably as an opportunity to get away with the risqué word 'ass' than generate wisdom. But for recruiting managers making an employment offer to the preferred candidate and believing acceptance is a foregone conclusion, it might still serve as a good reminder.

New Zealand's present rate of unemployment at 3.7% (Statistics NZ, June 05) is the lowest of all OECD countries. While certain jobs will always attract wide interest, talented individuals with valued skills and attributes have rarely had so many opportunities to choose from and so much bargaining power. And funnily enough if you've identified who you think is the best applicant chances are unknown others have picked them too. Good people have never been in such demand. The ball is firmly in their court.

But to avoid being branded a small ugly horse, employing managers can be proactive to increase their chances of the recruitment process ending in cheers rather than tears.

Begin by viewing applicants in the same way you would view a customer or client. It's a sales process. To clearly communicate how the job will meet their needs and desires you need to know them. Careful now... you might want to ask. Rarely is money at the top of the list.

Typically you'll hear- clear and open communication of job expectations and relevant information, flexibility or control over how and when work is done and real opportunities to learn, develop and receive constructive feedback. Being appreciated and valued always scores highly.

Start the hard sell immediately. It's never too early.

While adverts always have space limitations, make communicating the job and the employment benefits the priority. Bullet points that can be immediately culled are subjective lists of desired skills. You can't expect people to eliminate themselves when the criteria are personality characteristics. "No point in applying for that job they are looking for someone with lots of enthusiasm." Healthy self preservation makes this a "yeah right" statement.

Send out as part of an 'application pack' information about the job, team and organisation that answers "what's in it for me?" This information should include implicit and explicit benefits. Try to avoid unsubstantiated claims, jargon and acronyms.

The salary band should always be communicated early in the process, it's not a post interview discussion. The salary band not only helps clarify the level of the position but a lower than anticipated salary can be a show stopper if lifestyle or financial commitments dictate.

Communicate background and personal information about the people the incumbent will be interacting with as well as the organisation's vision and goals. This can help to personalize the position, process and the organisation and appeal to ingrained values.

By attempting to answer obvious questions you will eliminate uncertainty and save valuable time later in the process.

Quotes from existing staff might create an emotive appeal. "I



Talent quest: Cultural fit is critical. Potential employees should be given an opportunity to meet key people before signing on the dotted line. Photo: Fairfax

really value what our team sets out to achieve and feel that I am able to make a genuine contribution that positively affects the lives of young people." Or similarly if the culture is an organisational strength "Our work floor is such a positive and supportive environment, when things get busy we all chip in and help each other so you are always in control and never feel snowed under."

However, rosey descriptions of job benefits and opportunities will be only be seen as credible if matched with the less desirable job realities. Avoid surprises. If the role requires having to deal with difficult customers or long hours, be honest. A mismatch between expectations and reality normally results in premature departures - a no-win outcome.

Most of us would be very reluctant to invest in a car or house without experiencing it first hand. A job is no different. Before an offer is made show preferred applicant(s) the work environment and create an informal opportunity to meet the key people that were introduced in the job information. Your own staff will also value this opportunity. Cultural fit is critical. Morale can fluctuate.

As tempting as it is to be slightly more diligent when dealing with the more favored applicant, try and treat all equally well. A positive experience will leave those ultimately unsuccessful more likely to potentially do business with you as a customer. Furthermore if things turn sour with your preferred applicant you don't want your second choice to feel like they were your second choice.

Some time up front can save significant time and hassle further down the track. Those that cut corners and makes assumptions will sometimes get lucky. But in the long term luck plays a lesser role.

Recruitment is a two way street and an investment that can pay healthy dividends.

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