

WHITE PAPER

COMMUNICATING YOUR EMPLOYMENT BRAND

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Introduction

In a complex and demand-driven employment market, enticing the best talent requires more than just a quality benefit package. A strong employer brand must go beyond an organization's market position and include an environment that provides positive experiences and meaningful work. Gone are the days of long-term loyalty and pension plans. Only one in ten millennial generation job candidates are expected to stay with the same employer, according to a recent survey.¹ To recruit best-in-class talent and keep them, companies must understand their differentiating brand value and learn how to accurately market it to candidates.

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Part One: Importance of Brand

A brand is more than the perception of a company's reputation. It is an expression of its culture—the unique microcosm of people endeavoring toward certain goals through specific processes. Open communication and understanding of these features combine to improve the company's ability to recruit and retain the best and the brightest talent that will thrive within their organization.

Highly talented individuals with desirable skill sets seek more than just high-paying jobs—they're looking for meaningful, consequential careers. To effectively communicate the employment brand, a recruiter therefore must reflect the culture of the hiring organization. As the point of first contact with the potential hire, the recruiter embodies the answer to the candidate's crucial question, "Is this the right company for me?"

This personal connection to an employing entity is affirmed by a 2013 survey, in which 85 percent of the respondents stated that their work is part of who they are and not just a means of making money.ⁱⁱ In effect, the recruiter is perceived as someone who is an extension of the hiring company, even in cases where an external RPO provider operates as this individual's employer.

The Importance of Enjoying One's Work

It would seem obvious that anyone seeking employment wants a job that he or she actually will enjoy. Yet, an astonishing seven out of 10 U.S. workers dislike their jobs, according to the latest *State of the American Workplace Report*.ⁱⁱⁱ The 2013 report, which examines levels of employee engagement, draws its data from interviews with more than 150,000 U.S. employees. The fact that more than two-thirds of them feel disengaged from the work they perform is a sobering revelation.

The report also suggests financial problems ahead for their employers. "People are the fundamental determinants of organizational behavior," writes Professor Benjamin Schneider from the University of Maryland in the article "People Make the Place," published by the journal, *Personnel Psychology*.^{iv} A disengaged workforce breeds a negative work atmosphere. If employees detest their jobs, the company will pay the price.

Quite often when organizations fail to hire the talent they seek, they simply go down the list and hire whomever they can. There is a price to pay here. More than two-thirds (68 percent) of employers acknowledge making poor hiring decisions, costing them 30 percent of the recent hire's potential first-year income.^v As much as 80 percent of employee turnover issues can also be tied to poor hiring choices, and the longer an inferior employee remains in a position, the more it will cost to replace that person.

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In reality though, not every organization will be able to recruit and retain the human capital they need to execute strategic imperatives. According to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, the proportion of employers reporting a “war for talent” has increased sharply, from 20 percent in 2009 to 62 percent in 2013. Six in 10 companies now report difficulty filling key employment vacancies.

There is enormous bottom line value in having a more engaged workforce. A massive analysis of 1.4 million employees by the polling company Gallup illustrate indicates that if employees actually like what they do, feel the work they undertake has meaning, and their contributions are valued, the employing entity achieves the following benefits:^{vi}

- 37 percent lower absenteeism
- 25 percent lower turnover (in high-turnover organizations)
- 65 percent lower turnover (in low-turnover organizations)
- 28 percent less shrinkage
- 48 percent fewer safety incidents
- 41 percent fewer patient safety incidents
- 41 percent fewer quality incidents (defects)
- 10 percent higher customer metrics
- 21 percent higher productivity
- 22 percent higher profitability

The report states: “During difficult economic times, employee engagement is an important competitive differentiator for organizations,” noting that companies with more engaged employees “have better odds of achieving the outcomes their organizations desire, such as revenue, profit, customer engagement, safety, quality work, and employee retention.”

Gallup is not alone in reaching these conclusions. A recent survey by LinkedIn of 2,250 corporate recruiters in the U.S. indicates that companies with strong employer brands enjoy significant cost savings from lower cost-per-hire metrics and employee turnover rates. In fact, the lower cost-per-hire rate is more than twice as low for companies with strong employer brands.^{vii}

This research paper argues that a work culture that fosters meaningful employment is a powerful recruitment tool. However, this tool is useless unless the recruiter can effectively convey the organization’s employment brand. The following section of the report provides insight on how best to get this message across.

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Part Two: The On-Site Difference

If the goal of employer branding is to manage how the organization is perceived, there must be a tighter rein on the use of external recruiters. This is because the goal of hiring the best, brightest, and right people—human capital motivated and aligned with corporate strategy—is affected by a job candidate’s assessment of the recruitment professional. If the recruiter fails to convey the hiring company’s positive work culture, the candidate is likely to look elsewhere for employment.

A recruiter must express a sincere belief in the organization’s ability to promote the job applicant’s professional and personal development. The entry fee, of course, is an understanding of the company’s strategy, markets, and products. However, the more compelling knowledge is how employees engage with fellow colleagues in important work toward specific outcomes. In other words, what is it from an employment viewpoint that the company’s brand stands for? Is it to motivate and inspire employees or perhaps to fill them with purpose and pride?

Such powerful attributes should be clearly evident in all written communications and other forms of content, such as on the organization’s website and in the verbal messages conveyed by internal and external recruiters. So important is this need that were an external recruiter to miscommunicate the employment brand, he or she would markedly increase the risk of making a poor hiring decision. Similarly, the threat of disengagement would also rise. For example, if the employee is assured of certain work expectations that fail to materialize, he or she is less likely to feel engaged.

There is another risk to an external recruiter ill equipped to convey the employment brand, much less be cognizant that one exists. The face of a recruiter is typically the first face a job candidate sees in the hiring process. The candidate perceives the recruiter as an embodiment of the corporate entity itself. As Professor Schneider puts it, the recruiter in this context is a “determinant” of the organization’s behavior. Despite the similar goals and other characteristics that many organizations share, they all look and feel differently, based on the “personalities” of their members, he explains. If the recruiter’s personality does not ring truthfully, reflecting the company as a great place to work, there is a stronger chance of recruitment failure.

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Boots on the Ground

Imagine the alternative—an external recruiter that, for all intents and purposes, *is* an adjunct of the employing organization. The recruiter’s personal connection to the company is so taut that he or she surely must be part of the organization. The language and gestures of the recruiter affirmatively and conclusively convey the company’s brand, reflect its culture and demonstrate its commitment to employee engagement. The chance of hiring the right job candidates, acquiring superior human capital and winning the war for talent discernibly increases. The risk of employing workers that become disaffected reduces. The opportunity for greater productivity and profitability is enhanced.

This is a powerful alternative, indeed. However, it depends on a different type of RPO engagement, one elevating the relationship between the transacting parties to the level of a true partnership. It requires a far more holistic view of the recruitment function that a typical talent agency provides. It insists upon the RPO provider’s personnel literally working on-site at client locations, engaging on a daily basis with the company’s HR staff and in-house recruitment professionals.

Such external people are *de facto* employees—they attend strategy meetings with internal personnel and interact personally with business unit and department hiring managers. They become experts in the company’s market opportunities, technological capabilities, business challenges, and corporate responsibility initiatives. Their extraordinary knowledge of the company brought about by their on-site presence offers the optimal means to express the employer’s brand with heartfelt conviction.

This has been the experience at Deutsche Bank USA. One of the world’s largest banks, Deutsche Bank has invested substantially in building a campus in Jacksonville, Florida, to provide front office, back office and middle office functions across all asset classes to the global organization. Since 2008, the bank has created more than 1,000 high-level jobs at the campus and recently hired another 200 employees. On-site recruitment specialists from Advantage xPO assisted the organization’s hiring goals. “We had a clear set of talent objectives and they’ve hit the deliverables for us,” said Len O’Neill, Director and Chief Operating Officer, Global Technology, at Deutsche Bank, when talking about Advantage xPO’s performance and results.^{viii}

The task before Mr. O’Neill was complicated—to recruit a range of specific skill sets for the IT organization that were both in high demand and scant supply. “We were recruiting senior-level network administrators, information security specialists, server administrators, and database administrators—the people that keep the light on for the organization but are hard to recruit,” he explained. “Advantage xPO provided two full-time recruiters who were extremely knowledgeable about the space and eventually sourced roughly 25 roles each for us. If our book of business grows, we can bring on more of (Advantage xPO’s) resources to scale. They provide the rubber bandwidth I need when I need it.”

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Critical to the recruitment endeavor was finding people who suited Deutsche Bank's culture. Another pressure was the need to build the IT organization quickly. "By having the recruiters not just on-site, but co-located with my leadership team in the same building during the ramp-up phase was crucial to our recruitment success," Mr. O'Neill said. "They were there for all the leadership meetings to set talent priorities to build the franchise. They are literally embedded in my organization."

The external recruiters "had the pulse of which organizations were laying off top-notch people in the region," he added. "They knew about competitors coming here that we would compete against for talent, and they had an extremely good sense of our culture—the sense and feel of what we are. You need boots on the ground to do all this, to be able to quickly filter out the individuals that don't fit. We have partnered on an incredible success story."

This is the advantage that Advantage xPO provides in today's RPO space. The firm's singular value proposition is having its experienced recruitment professionals reside inside the client's four walls. To the outside eye, they may appear to be actual employees of the companies they serve. They understand and appreciate the client's staffing needs because they are literally a part of this organization. Through their personalities they are able to convey the emotional aspects of the client's value proposition, answering the candidate question, "How does this company address what I want to do with my life?"

It's a profound alternative, with a clear upshot—a winning way of communicating the employment brand to acquire and retain superior human capital, driving profitable business growth well into the future.

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Endnotes

ⁱ http://www.philly.com/philly/blogs/jobs/INQ_Jobbing_Millennials-Where-is-the-loyalty.html

ⁱⁱ *Universum survey on career archetypes, 2013*

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/on-leadership/wp/2013/04/30/new-data-show-only-30-of-american-workers-engaged-in-their-jobs/>

^{iv} “The People Make the Place,” Benjamin Schneider, *Personnel Psychology*

^v <http://resources.dice.com/report/the-cost-of-bad-hiring-decisions/>

^{vi} <http://www.gallup.com/strategicconsulting/161459/engagement-work-effect-performance-continues-tough-economic-times.aspx>

^{vii} <http://talent.linkedin.com/blog/index.php/2011/12/whats-the-value-of-your-employment-brand/>

^{viii} Interview with Len O’Neill, Sept. 23, 2013