

The Selection and Recruitment Game

-B.Mohan Kumar

Introduction

Staffing is one of the most critical functions for the success of any Organization. This paper demystifies the function and explains how one can go about the whole process. This white paper can be a useful reference document for corporate staffing manager as well as for the practicing recruitment consultant.

Background

The Human Resource Manager must be very clear about the background of the vacancy to be filled. The likely scenarios could be a replacement, or an absolutely new requirement. If it is a replacement, the situation gets more complicated. It is possible that the current incumbent is still continuing in the job and the management is considering getting a replacement without the incumbent's knowledge. The sensitivity of such a situation is imaginable. It may also be possible that the subordinates would be eyeing the job and when they come to know from the grapevine that they are not being considered in the race, the morale takes a beating and the new incumbent will have a tough time. The easiest case is when the vacancy is for a new position or when the current incumbent is also involved in the selection process.

The Process

- ✓ The first step to the whole process is defining the requirement vis-à-vis the above background. There must be absolute clarity on the role, the reporting relationships, the performance measurement parameters and the compensation envisaged for the position. Quite often, some of these are left vague in the hope of attracting all potential candidates. The ulterior motive is often to save cost, but the end result is a huge waste of time and money, which is not accounted. This happens by way of refused offers, meeting many candidates than really required etc.
- ✓ Depending on the background, confidentiality, one must determine the approach to be followed. This is akin to the "Make or Buy" decision taken in the conventional manufacturing industry. The options available to Human Resource is either to get external help or fill the vacancy by it's own effort. If the decision is to do so internally, the choices are again to advertise the position in newspapers, business & trade magazines, Internet portals or employee referrals. Only when confidentiality is an issue, would an advertisement using a post box number advised. However, research has shown that these options do not attract the best and the expense is a sunken cost. Advertising, directly with the company name, logo has a lot more advantages, including a lot of mileage for the company. However, it may be counterproductive if the company directly advertises similar jobs too often.
- ✓ If the decision is to seek external help, then help is available at hand. They come in various forms and names viz: placement agencies, recruitment consultants, Search firms, Executive Search Consultants or manpower consultants. All permutation and combination of the words are there in the industry. However there are some distinctions between those who add value to the whole process and those who just "peddle" resumes.

The basic distinction is of those who act as a consultant – like any management consultant, valuing inputs based on time spent and those who just broker a deal. For the former, there is seldom any clash of interest on the process or the end result. Such firms are hard to come by. Their professional fee is normally “fixed “ and is retained in nature. A diluted version of this is the firm, which engages itself on a **retained** basis to work for the client, with deliverables clearly laid out. “Retained” concept is that in which the firm is paid periodically on achievement of milestones, irrespective of the outcome. The downside is that the payment is a percentage of the compensation offered and obviously there is a conflict of interest.

The other is the “**contingency**” model, where in the payment is made only on success. The downside is that there are too many players and commitment of the firm is suspect. However this is a very cost effective model, if a right firm is identified and the user also patronizes just a couple of firms.

Once the decision on the selection of type of firm is firmed up, the other point on the decision tree is whether to advertise or not. The fundamental issue that would come up is twofold:

- 1) An advertisement most often taps the **active** job seeker, though not hundred percent of the time. The respondent to an advertisement has shown his willingness to seek a change. The timelines can be adhered to very comfortably, but the copy of the advertisement must be very specific, without frills. An effective advertisement is one that produces a good % of shortlist against the total responses. An approach highly recommended for Middle and junior level openings.
 - 2) If the potential candidate is to be identified without placing an advertisement, the approach is normally to rely on a database held by the selection firm or search by mapping the market and headhunting to identify the **passive** job seeker. This might apparently reduce the cost of advertisement, but the downside is that the candidate acts like a superstar, the compensation to be offered gets bloated and timelines are longer.
- ✓ Beyond this point the other steps in the recruitment process are very straightforward. The incumbent is interviewed, references checked, and an offer made. The interviewing process could be either a general profiling, a detailed competency based assessment or a combination of the above. Competency definition for a job and its assessment is a specialized subject on its own. Reference checking is an art and is a delicate subject. It must be exercised with caution and this also requires specialist skills. Making an offer, getting it accepted and subsequent follow up till the incumbent is actually on board is required to close the loop.

Conclusion

Most often, the point of contention about effectiveness of recruitment by an internal staff member vis-à-vis an external consultant arises, because of large communication gaps in the earlier part of definition process.

The author is a turnaround management consultant with diverse experience in Manufacturing, Software Development and even as a professional recruiter. He can be reached at mohankumarb@hotmail.com