

Human Resources, Recruitment & Training

The Battle to Recruit, Motivate and Retain Staff in the Coming Years

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Mr. Feeney

The perception used to be that the purpose of a first interview is to get invited back for a second interview. This is because the decision for next steps then rests solely on the shoulders of the candidate, and options are limitless. But does every candidate who interviews with your organization want to be invited back for a second interview? If not, consider the possibility that although the interviewing process is designed to both screen as well as sell, there are ways to maximize the odds of candidates craving an invitation to return.

Positioning your hotel to every encounter with your brand influences a candidate's perception of your organization, which impacts your hotel's ability to stay in the driver's seat when deciding which candidate to hire. Hotel branding and candidate experience are inextricably linked, and they matter greatly for recruiting and retaining talent. How can you communicate your brand while simultaneously improving the candidate experience throughout each step of the selection process?

How is Your Company Pitching Itself?

How employees represent the company's mission and brand is as important as anything said by human resources or leaders during the hiring process. Within the first interview, a candidate needs to grasp an understanding of what is unique about the organization, environment, and opportunity. If a candidate was to ask "why your hotel" as opposed to others, do you know how your employees respond? The "why your company" moment is an excellent opportunity for an employee to communicate the elevator pitch of the organization. Consider providing employees with an example of a strong and succinct elevator pitch script to be used in both social settings as well as the interviewing process. It is important to have all decision makers involved in the interview, have a concrete understanding of the mission of the firm, the vision for the future, and alignment of organizational goals.

Not so long ago, business was rooted in personal relationships and one-on-one interactions. Then came decades of technology, with automated recruiting, email, job recruiting sites, training videos, all of which remove the human element of relationships. Electronic and telephonic communication works well, but video communication personalizes the candidate experience significantly. Employees talking about why they love the organization or key customers sharing why they value the firm serve to provide multiple perspectives to potential candidates. Videos with clips from around the office and spotlighting superstars can be an effective way to share "why your hotel" to prospects considering applying to your organization.

Recruiting Via a Smart Phone

Contrary to popular opinion, prospective candidates do not wait to get home from work to look for new career opportunities or research alternative employers. The most popular day to search for jobs is Monday, and it tapers off throughout the week before plummeting over the weekend. This means that candidates are looking for jobs while at work. Since most users realize their computer use is monitored, those searches are conducted on their mobile phones. Hotels must implement a mobile-friendly experience to create a recruitment strategy that aligns with consumer behavior.

You must have more than an appealing job posting or creative job description. Take note of how you describe your corporate culture on your organization's website and social media pages. How compelling is the "Join Us" section on your website? Consider sharing testimonials from recent hires who can attest to the significant benefits of working for your firm. Share Newsletters or Quarterly Updates with photos from events and cultural initiatives. Contact your city's Business Journal and investigate "Best Place to Work" awards or accolades to which you could apply. A video with clips from around the office, community, and spotlighting superstars can be an effective way to share "why your hotel" to prospects considering applying to your organization.

Why Join Our Hotel?

Prior to a first interview, provide candidates with an "About Us" packet highlighting the history of the company, growth plans, success stories of employees, and other items that will engage them on a human level. Internal company employee newsletters or binders of information about the company in the lobby for candidates to flip through while waiting for an interview. The binder could be stocked with pictures from company events, parties, charity events, or volunteer initiatives. Including company newsletters, quarterly updates

with announcements and achievements, and photos from events and cultural initiatives add a sense of the company's personality and may appeal to candidates.

Communication is Key

Take time to evaluate the lines of communication between prospective candidates and your internal hiring team. When a candidate applies to your organization, is an automatic response sent to notify that the information has been received? If the candidate interviewed and is no longer in consideration for the role, how is that communicated to the candidate? Set expectations and do not leave candidates in the dark; be clear about what your process is, when they can expect feedback, and how quickly a decision will be made. Have the experience be a positive one for the future of the company (an example would be a well-known consumer product's company once shared with me that every candidate they interviewed, was also a customer and they had the interviewee treated in a very professional manner).

What About the Millennials?

By the year 2030, Millennials, also known as Gen Y (those born in the 80's and 90's) will make up 75% of the workforce. This should not come as a surprise as it's been on the horizon for years, but are we prepared for the rise of Millennials?

These new wave of Digital Natives coming through your office doors are not just tech literate; they are accustomed to being connected at any place and at any time. They can't recall life before the Internet, they've always had a cell phone with Caller ID, and they communicate via text and social media more frequently than phone and in-person. Thanks to the rise of mobile, cloud and social media, Millennials are used to flexibility, openness and instantly connecting with people regardless of their location.

This generation is also acutely aware of the importance of job security and financial responsibility, yet that balances an innate need to do meaningful work and make an impact. They are idealistic, diverse, social and perhaps most importantly, ambitious. They are digitally-enabled, question the status quo, and work on their own terms. You may think that eventually this group will grow up and things will change. You may be right, but in the meantime it is necessary to readjust the way Millennials are recruited, managed, and inspired.

Managing and Engaging Millennials

What Millennials are not used to are constraints of any kind. They need to be creative through their work and their ability to solve problems. They need to be able to work remotely, and have technology that allows them to access information quickly and at all hours of the night. They use social media as a form of communication – not just socially. Restraining social media access would be suffocating their ability to communicate.

Develop small milestones and incremental titles in order to serve the need for constant career advancement. More than their Baby Boomer parents or Gen X older siblings, Millennials are especially eager to progress in their careers and less willing to wait three to five years for a promotion. This can also provide incremental training that will aid them later with larger career advancement opportunities.

Creating a Millennial-Friendly Culture

In numerous studies, Millennials said they would prefer feedback in real time rather than through traditional performance reviews. Millennials are used to speed, multi-tasking, and working on their own schedule; all are ingredients for success if your organization values end results over the process. Make sure Millennials understand the organization's corporate vision; they are more likely to look for meaning and impact in their work and helping them understand their role in a larger plan gives them a clearer sense of purpose. If a Millennial recommends a new tool that they think would improve working practices, increase productivity and make office life a little easier, strongly consider that tool. Millennials live and breathe technology and they may be able to teach their managers a new thing or two!

Retaining Millennials Once They are on Board

As a leader, you are responsible for making sure your team has the necessary skills to perform well in their roles. Training likely revolves around concrete and definable abilities that link directly back to the expectations of acceptable performance in the role. Concrete training is valuable, but training should not stop there. What can be done to impact not only an employee's skill set, but their mindset as well? Organizations and teams that inspire an ownership mindset, where ideas are encouraged and initiative is commended, are more successful than those that don't. However, you shouldn't expect behavior that you haven't asked for. How do you train a mindset of entrepreneurial thinking and individual responsibility?

Learning on the Job

One of the best ways to help your employees assume an ownership mindset is to help them understand your own mindset – what you think about, how you prioritize, how you make business decisions and how you solve problems. You are their best teacher, but you

must be transparent about how you operate. Remember to provide access to pertinent information. Share historical data and context, past cases of failures and successes, and even confidential information if it will create a more insightful thought process and outcome. It is impossible to withhold relevant information and still expect profound thinking and deep insight.

It is certainly desirable for employees to be able to look around, see what needs doing, and proactively step into those tasks. If they do not, it might not be because they can't or don't want to. It may be because you have not made clear to them that this is what you want and expect on a regular basis.

Ask more questions and give fewer answers; the best leaders ask more questions than they answer. Thinking is a developmental activity, and tough questions stimulate thought. Instead of immediately responding to a problem or issue voiced by an employee, start with:

- You sound frustrated; what do you think could be done to address this issue?
- I certainly understand that this is a problem; what do you think could be done to solve it?
- What are some approaches we might not have thought of yet?
- What additional information do you think you need in order to formulate an accurate opinion or to recommend a solution?
- In hindsight, is there anything that could or should have been done differently to avoid this manifesting into a problem?

Create a Proactive Environment to Thrive

When asking for feedback or opinions, create an environment in which employees are comfortable sharing their feedback and opinions. Defensiveness by a leader is the genesis of apprehension and insecurity from employees. Even if you do not agree with their thought process, ask questions to lead them to a more appropriate conclusion – one that they arrive at by themselves.

Similarly, employees can't be expected to take risks if failure isn't tolerated. Good employees make mistakes, and great leaders allow them to. Give people the opportunity to learn from mistakes, own them, fix them, and then put safeguards in place to ensure the same mistake will never be repeated. Give employees room to fail – within reason – and they will step up more readily.

Be comfortable delegating. Fear of losing control is what stops most people from delegating; as a leader, you will ultimately be held accountable for failure. It can be intimidating to hand over the keys to the car if you don't fully trust the person driving.

Givers and Takers

How do we create an environment of giving, when many people are naturally reluctant to seek help? They may fear burdening their colleagues, lack knowledge about who is willing and able to help, or be concerned about appearing vulnerable, incompetent, and dependent.

How do we make sure, in turn, to set boundaries and protect against employees becoming so consumed with responding to each other's requests that they lack the time and energy to complete their own responsibilities?

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to creating a corporate culture of collaboration. Remember, what makes a painting a masterpiece is not any one brush stroke but rather many different and complimentary ones. The retention "canvas" is never a complete work of art and needs continuous attention. The following are a few strokes that just might make a difference!

Corporate Surveys

Regardless of the size of your organization, a survey can provide you with great insight. Ask questions related to every dimension of your business, including technology, training, tools, culture, leadership, operations, marketing/branding, hiring, and compensation. By giving people a chance to weigh in, you get an opportunity to see potential problems and solutions. Too many leaders subscribe to the Ostrich Theory of "if I don't ask, I won't have to fix anything". Giving the people the chance to feel heard, or to brainstorm solutions to a problem (that then spawns a host of additional problems), can sometimes be the solution itself!

Town Hall Sessions

Dedicate a morning meeting or lunch with your team, division or company, ask what changes they would make if they were CEO. The answers to this question will give great insight into what they think needs to be changed as well as what opportunities they think are being missed. It is important to listen to their feedback without judgment and share your opinions later. Retention Interviews

Conduct an annual meeting with each team member and ask why they like being there and what could cause them to leave. This is a tough question to ask, but it is imperative to uncovering someone's unhappiness before it is too late.

Corporate Charity

Adopt a local charity. Host a casino night, golf tournament, bake sale or perhaps a "blue jeans day" each week (if you don't already

have one every day!) that requires a small donation. By getting people involved in a common cause, you not only give back to the community but also create or enhance a sense of community within your office or team.

The job market for hotel staff will continue to stay strong for the coming years and attracting the best talent will remain competitive. Staying ahead of the pack with new and innovative ideas is key to retaining your most valuable asset.

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