

The Importance of the Personal Touch - By Christian Anklin

2008-07-10

Making a candidate feel truly wanted at the offer stage by personalizing the process.

There is nothing more frustrating for a hiring company than spending several weeks and often months sourcing possible candidates, conducting in-depth interviews, administering rigorous assessments, and negotiating an offer only to lose the preferred candidate at the last minute due to some sort of mishap. In addition to the emotional frustration, this can set the search back several weeks. We have even seen companies change their entire business strategy and steer away from certain ventures because they have become so attached to their ideal candidate and cannot really see anyone else in that position.

There are several reasons for candidates to change their minds at the last minute in the recruitment process. Below are some of the most common ones:

- * Pressure from the family,
- * Counteroffer by the current employer,
- * Third Party Offers,
- * Lingering doubts,
- * Loss of momentum due to bureaucracy
- * Waiting for offer/contract
- * Mistakes in offer/contract
- * Pressure from the family

The hiring company may at times forget that they are often negotiating with more than one person. Families and relationships tend to be a significant component of many candidates' private lives and, as such, their partners and children have a big say in any major lifestyle-changing decisions. Thus it is important for the hiring party to ascertain whether there are any such concerns and attend to them accordingly.

For any hire that involves a geographical relocation, it makes tremendous sense to invite the candidate to the country/city together with his/her family for at least the weekend. This allows them to familiarize themselves with their future surroundings, get acquainted with the living and schooling choices, and generally to make the move more tangible and thereby less threatening. As common sense as this would appear to be, a good number of companies shy away from spending the necessary amount of money on someone who is not even on the payroll yet. They need to understand, however, that this outlay pales in comparison to the cost of restarting the hiring process should things fall through.

Counter Offer

The counteroffer will always be a tricky situation to handle. The hiring company needs to be sufficiently prepared for this eventuality. At a senior level, the more progressive companies will recognize that it is far easier to increase an existing employee's pay than it is to replace that person. This is where the finesse of an experienced headhunter comes into play, judging the right amount for an initial offer which still leaves enough room to match the often inevitable counteroffer.

However, the attraction of any new position must be much more than simple monetary value. Responsibility, recognition, empowerment and the opportunity for career growth can outweigh the allure of a bigger salary package. Furthermore, we often forget the emotional aspect. It is important for the future superior to stay in constant contact with the ideal candidate throughout the hiring process and especially towards the end game. Introducing the candidate to as many team members as possible will also go a long way in making him/her feel welcome, wanted and needed. These emotional ties may help in convincing a wavering and counter-offered candidate to make that leap.

Third Party Offers

Star players will always be in high demand, and in a competitive market for talent it is likely that your candidate may be approached by other parties during the selection, assessment and hiring process. The key is to have an open and transparent conversation with the individual so that they can make the hiring parties aware of any time pressure resulting from third party offers. If there is a real danger of losing a preferred candidate to a competitor, every effort must be made to fast track the process. In this case, it is extremely important for the superior to get involved directly and signal the need for immediate action and approval within his organization and especially to the Human Resources department. At times, we have found the HR department to be so far removed from the active headhunting assignment that they fail to recognize the urgency to get salary packages approved or offers sent out.

Lingering Doubts

The candidate may have justified or unjustified preconceptions about a hiring company, causing a sense of lingering doubt that will be greatly exacerbated by any mishaps or delays. No matter how much their potential superior professes their commitment to hiring and valuing the candidate, waiting three weeks for the physical offer letter to arrive in the post will put that commitment in doubt and shed a bad light on the organization as a whole. These types of delays will also cause a general loss of momentum. The excitement of accepting a new position can be severely worn down by an extended waiting game and quickly turn into frustration. This will be further compounded by any mistakes in the offer letter. Imagine waiting patiently for your offer letter only to find that they have misspelled your name. What if the fiercely negotiated terms of your salary package are not reflected in the final contract?

Communication between all parties is the key to avoiding such fiascos. This entails both the communication between the hiring department and their HR department, as well as with the candidate. To begin with, the HR department needs to be fully appraised of all the agreed terms. As a further safeguard, both the client and the headhunter should proof read the offer before it is sent out to the candidate.

The Personal Touch

The most important element to ensuring that everything runs smoothly at offer stage is constant communication between the client and the candidate. I cannot overemphasize the importance of the follow up call. This not only keeps the momentum going, it reassures the candidate while s/he is waiting for the formalities to be handled. If you know that there will be a delay, keep things going by setting up meetings with further team members. Feel free to send the candidate an email with some additional information about the company or maybe a recent press release. The smallest things will ensure that the opportunity is kept alive in the candidate's mind, and this will go a long way in securing that important hire. No matter how rational the candidate may be, human beings are steered by emotions. As any good hotelier should know, it's that personal touch that really counts.

About the author

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This article comes from Hotel News Resource

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