

How Do You Find Qualified Candidates?

By Ray Silverstein
*(Based on inputs from
PRO Members)*

It's one of the most pressing challenges faced by business owners: how do you locate qualified candidates? You know they are out there—but where? How do you go about finding them?

But wait! This question assumes that you have already defined what a “qualified candidate” is. But have you? Have you really determined the experience, talents, skills, knowledge and ability to learn that your position requires? Have you created a specific job description and defined the amount of responsibility and authority you will give your new hire? If not, that is your first step. Make sure that candidate, once hired, is positioned for success and not failure!

24-7-365

Once you have defined what your qualified candidate looks like, it is time to move forward and find him or her. The best approach? The 24-7, 365-day program. This means keeping your eyes open all of the time—even when you're not actively hiring.

Act like you are creating your own minor league, complete with potential replacements to bring up to your team at the appropriate time. Keep an ongoing list of all potential candidates you meet during the course of business. Perhaps one of you is not ready to make the change when you happen to meet, but keeping those names in your file gives you a leg up when the time does come.

Always keep your business card handy. When you meet someone you like, don't be bashful: give him your card and tell him outright that you would like to discuss a job opportunity. This works particularly well when filling customer service positions. When you see someone who has that “customer first” attitude, grab them!

The 24-7-365 also works well in encounters at trade associations, trade shows, not-for-profit boards—even your church. In these environments, you are working shoulder to shoulder with potential candidates. You have the opportunity to observe their work ethic, communication skills, and speed of learning, along with any other traits that are important to you.

Here's another way to locate candidates in the course of daily business. When calling on a customer or prospect, take a look at their sign-in book—it's a goldmine! You may find dozens of experienced sales reps who already know your client or target. Jot down names and companies for future possible contact.

Take Advantage of the Internet

The Internet has dramatically changed the way companies hire and recruit. There are many web sites that list both openings and resumes. A good example is monster.com.

If you wish to do some research into your market, visit the websites of your competition as well as organizations that resemble your own in terms of distribution or necessary employee skill sets. Often, companies will list their employees on their sites—literally naming potential candidates for you!

The cost to list your job opportunity on a web site is not very expensive. More importantly, you can include more information than in a classified ad, including background about your company and its culture—i.e., the warm-and-fuzzies. You can also reference your own web site for more information. The advantage? By providing additional background information about your company's objectives and attitudes, you will draw the kind of candidates you want, while weeding out those who do not share your values.

Just Ask

Don't overlook your own employees as a valuable source for candidates. Ask your people if they know anyone they would recommend for a position in your company. Some companies pay a finder's fee to their employees for successful referrals. The bottom line: your employees already know your work ethic and company culture. And they are not about to recommend anyone they don't want to work with!

Your customers and vendors are another viable resource. They know something about your company and may be able to suggest people who would fit in well. Ask the contacts you have confidence in—but be prepared to communicate exactly what you are looking for. Describe not only the position and job requirements, but the soft ingredients that ultimately create a good fit.

Looking for top sales people? Ask your customers who calls on them—and who does a good job of servicing their needs and meeting expectations. You can even ask potential customers if you have established some rapport. (This can sometimes be a way of breaking into a target account, providing you with the opportunity to talk about your core values.)

Reconsider the Traditional Hiring Process

Traditionally, the hiring process consisted of either advertising in the classifieds or using a recruiter. Advertising is usually placed in local newspapers, but consider trade journals as a good alternative—particularly if your business requires industry expertise. Of course, advertising in any media—newspapers, trade journals, or Internet web sites—does require an upfront cost and offers no guarantee of success.

You may be reluctant to hire a recruiter because of the cost. Think again! Factor in all the direct and indirect costs you incur by advertising, screening and interviewing. Don't forget to consider your time as well as the opportunity cost incurred by the delay in filling the position. In the long run, a good recruiter could be a bargain!

Be aware, however, that there are two types of recruiters: those who work on retainer, and those that are paid a success fee when their candidate is hired. Remember that the latter, like employment agencies, do not work on an exclusive representation agreement. They will send the same candidate to you...and to your competition! In general, they may also send you a lower level of candidate. A retained recruiting firm, on the other hand, works exclusively for you, and conducts a specific candidate search to your specifications. When filling key positions, a retained recruiter is a smarter choice.

Finding qualified people is not as tricky as you may think. Begin by creating a specific job description...keeping your eyes open...and trying a number of strategies that will lead you to prime candidates. And even if you're not hiring today, start practicing the 24-7-365 approach now. That way, you always have a place to begin.

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