

Technology changes ... people don't!

By Gaynor Lowndes, Managing Director of The Recruitment Training Factory and The Recruitment and Training Company.

Online recruitment has been a controversial technological issue in our industry for quite some time, along with phenomena such as MySpace, Facebook, and, going further back, even email and SMS. Technology continues to change and advance, but it is my firm belief that people on the whole stay the same, and our clients and candidates respond to the same personal courtesies and efforts as they did before communications technology took its "Great Leap Forward," over the past 15 years.

It isn't my intention to conduct an analysis of these technological communications. I'm not opposed to them, but nor am I a die-hard advocate of their use in the recruitment process. The purpose of this article is to remind all of us in the recruitment industry that if we choose to embrace these technologies in our work, then we need to make sure that they do not replace the personalised relationship-based service that we strive to provide in order to satisfy our candidates and clients.

Much has been spoken and written about the place of new technology in recruitment, not enough by has been spoken and written about the importance of remembering that we are ultimately part of a people business. People are our employees; people are our product; people are our clients ... And people respond to direct interaction, through phone calls or, even better, face-to-face communications.

Disregard this at your peril, as your reliance on new technologies may jeopardise your relationships with clients and candidates. Here are three key areas where a reliance on new, impersonal technologies is becoming a major concern, and where direct interpersonal emphasis is now more important than ever:

Client visits to the business – A dying technique!

Is a job brief enough to go by? Absolutely not. In most cases, the dot point outlines on a job brief are just that ... brief! The issue here is one that many consultants miss these days, specifically the importance of "fleshing out the brief."

What needs fleshing out? For a start, there is the obvious issue of the details of the duties. There will always be more to the role than what a client can provide online or on paper, often because every role has intangibles that cannot be easily articulated in a dot point.

For example, an experienced colleague of mine recruits telemarketers and call-centre personnel. Rather than simply guessing what kind of candidates would best suit the role, based on the job brief, he actually pays a visit to the call centre, and listens to the employees on the phone, thus getting a detailed, first-hand, and above all, realistic idea of what he should be looking for in a quality, suitable candidate for the vacancy. Indeed, he tells me that one visit to the clients' place of business tells him more about their requirements than the job brief they provide him with.

A visit to the client's business also provides an important insight into the culture of the place. A suitable candidate is far more than one with sufficient skills and experience for the role. Cultural fit is just as important, and once again, this cannot be adequately communicated on paper. How else can the atmosphere, style, and mood of the business be properly gauged, without seeing it first-hand?

I train many consultants who desire strong, long-term retained or exclusive relationships with clients, yet don't seem to realise that this can only be achieved by getting a personalised, interactive understanding of what the client needs. Seeing employees in action, face-to-face, is by far the most effective way of making suitable job-fits.

Phone vs email

Email, as a quick, convenient form of communication, is here to stay ... and that's ok. What isn't ok is that many consultants think that email is an effective medium for relationship-building. Consider a personal or romantic relationship: would it be more effective to maintain such a relationship via email, or by face-to-face interaction, or at the very least phone conversation?

And conversation is the key word here, a conversation can hardly exist via email, particularly when there is a conflict or problem to be dealt with. Indeed, experts believe that dealing with a volatile issue or dispute via email can be a complicating factor, rather than an efficient solution, because written words can be misinterpreted in a way that they would not be during a conversation.

Most of us in the recruitment industry would agree that it would be, for the most part, ineffective to conduct pre-screens, interviews, or business development via email. It's simply too impersonal, yet many of us revert to email communication with candidates and clients once the initial relationship has been developed. The point is that it isn't enough to develop a client or candidate relationship on a personalised level; the relationship must continue to be maintained on a personalised level.

So next time you go to send an email to a client or candidate, consider that a phone call (or even perhaps a meeting if the matter is serious) would facilitate greater personal trust and loyalty between the candidate or client, and yourself, as the consultant. Emails are ok, but not as the exclusive avenue of communication.

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