

Too good for training?

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

The recruitment industry as a whole has never given high priority to professional development and training for experienced consultants. The prevailing attitudes toward training of our veterans aren't vastly different to the attitudes toward training of our beginners: training is seen as little more than an impingement on core consulting time.

This attitude goes one step further for experienced consultants, as many of them believe that their years, or maybe decades, of experience somehow make them "immune" to any further improvement and development of their work as recruiters.

I became a trainer not just because I believed that the new and inexperienced consultants of our industry needed more mentoring than they were being given, but also to create opportunities for experienced consultants to further develop and refine their skills, particularly as the industry changes (and it has changed immeasurably, particularly in the past 15 or so years). My concern was then, and is now, that consultants with an "I'm too good for training" attitude will be left behind as change continues, but their skills are not updated to reflect this.

Here are three key areas of recruitment where I believe that further development and training are needed, particularly for experienced consultants, who due to many years' experience, may not have updated their skills to reflect the changing market:

Generational issues

I recently gave some tuition to a pharmaceutical agency in the Melbourne area. As a baby boomer team working with predominately Gen Y candidates, they were struggling to maintain candidate commitment and loyalty, which naturally was having an adverse effect on the business.

It comes as no surprise that a team of baby boomer consultants would experience such difficulties. Having spent many years recruiting candidates belonging to their own generation, as well Generation X, they would quite naturally have been unequipped with the skills and knowledge to meet the needs of self-focused, lifestyle-oriented Gen Y candidates, as they began to flow into the workforce in numbers. And, of course, the issue went further: Gen Y's require a different style of communication and language to that which the consultants were used to providing, including a greater reliance on SMS and email communication.

So with this in mind, what makes this particular team of consultants so different to (and so much more effective than) so many others experiencing the same generational issues? The answer is simple: they were willing to see the need for their own improvement and development in this area, hence their request for training.

As it was, the training they undertook to address these issues raised their awareness, knowledge and skill in dealing with Gen Y to such a degree, that their individual billings went from \$10K a month to \$50K! All because they saw the need to update their skills, and acted upon it!

Client services

The only constant in the principles of client relationship-building is change. In terms of the service you provide to your clients, what was expected 10 years ago is different to what is expected today, and what is expected today will be nothing more than outdated notions in another 10 years.

But which way is the continuum moving? The answer is simple: towards a higher standard of service.

And why? Several reasons, one of the most obvious being that industries and professions across the workforce have developed something of a stigma towards the use of recruitment services, due to poor and unethical standards of some (certainly not all) providers in the past, and indeed the present. Because of this, it's fair to say that the industry now has something to prove.

The other reason is simply that the industry is saturated with agencies, who have to compete for the same clients. Once again, the better the reputation of a particular agency through the provision of exceptional client services, the more likely that agency is to come up on top in this fiercely competitive industry.

There are numerous training opportunities for those consultants and teams wishing to learn ideas and techniques to increase their standards of service. It is a complex area where creativity and innovation are the tools required, and training and professional development both provide excellent opportunities for ideas to be shared and analysed in a results-driven, practical way. The client of 20 years ago is not the client of today, the bar is raised, and the role of training in responding to this change cannot be denied.

Candidate care

Once again, more agencies, more competition, more choice for the candidate. With this in mind, the question for any given agency team is: "What do we need to do, for the candidate to choose us, or indeed choose us exclusively?"

With the amount of choice available, it is obvious that most candidates (especially Gen Y) will not give loyalty for loyalty's sake. The candidate wants a job, but more importantly, wants, and expects, job options.

It is my belief as a trainer that we have overcomplicated the issue of gaining candidate commitment and loyalty. In our quest to satisfy their job-searching (which, of course, is our major function) we often forget the smaller service value-adds that make the candidate feel at home, feel like a person rather than a number, and, above all, make them feel as though we have their best interests at heart.

Training and professional development provide an important vehicle for ideas and techniques of how to address these issues. For example, at the public workshops I run throughout the country, consultants from all sectors and experiences meet together to further develop their skills. This is what provides the true value of the workshop, not just the content of my training, but the opportunities to discuss and brainstorm solutions to issues we face as an industry, most notably the candidate retention issue. Many valuable ideas and practical solutions have been generated in sessions such as these.

These issues highlight an important truth to me: As long as our work evolves, we too must evolve, and without a means such as training to facilitate this evolution, our methods as recruiters may become outdated, and ultimately ineffective. This leads me to think that perhaps professional development should be seen as more than a combination of two dirty words! ■



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