

Your Recruiting Brand: Earning a Seat at the Table

According to the Management Action Program (MAP) Quarterly CEO Survey, more than 36% of CEOs don't have confidence in their own recruiting department. Why do talent acquisition teams often lack credibility with senior management? Although there are many reasons, here are some of the typical descriptions we hear from managers when describing their internal talent acquisition function:

Expense Center vs. Profit Center – Internal recruiters, like the U.S. government, don't generate income; they only take profitability away from the organization. Where is the value?

Administrative/Transactional – The recruiting department does the hiring and firing, manages the benefits and payroll, complies with and enforces laws.

Generalists – “If you need an expert, hire a search firm.” The hiring team is good at performing the mundane, basic transactional details, but don't trust them to understand how to hire strategically.

“A Necessary Evil” – HR and internal recruiting are something we are required to have, so we do; however, they bring little value to the organization.

Lack of Understanding – The recruiting department does not understand the business, so how can they recruit for us?

This is hardly a complimentary, or complete, picture. However, perception is reality in the minds of many of these executives. The bigger problem is that talent acquisition team members are often party to their own questionable reputation. Many are constantly seeking, and feel they deserve, “a seat at the table” without truly understanding why they don't have one. They often lack internal brand; many hiring managers believe they know more about recruiting high-potential talent than their recruiting department does. Most recruiting models are designed to focus on quantity, not quality. Metrics are most often staffing-driven, not business-driven. Recruiters can point to how many positions were filled but not necessarily how – or if – those positions furthered business goals. The focus is on the staffing process, not on the business impact. They often have to come up with justifications for their expenses (remember, management sees them only as an expense center).

And yet, it could be argued that the recruiter is more important than the CEO. The CEO leads people, and the recruiter acquires people. The CEO can't lead without people! Specifically, the

right people. But rather than trying to convince your CEO and other leaders how important you are to them, let's focus on how to *demonstrate* your importance.

How Do You Create Credibility With Senior Management?

Building credibility with senior management starts with creating an effective internal brand. It takes time to create a poor reputation and it might even take more time to begin building a positive reputation internally. Building a strong, positive reputation takes patience and consistency in a number of key focus areas:

Become Subject-Matter Savvy – Recruiters are not expected to become subject matter experts if they have never performed the specific function they are recruiting for. Subject matter savvy is built on doing a little research: understanding the industry, its history, the main players, new technologies, etc. It's amazing the knowledge that we can gather just by using Google to search a few key words!

Always Be Communicating – Recruiters often play a game of hide and seek when things may not be going well. Communicating often, even when things are going poorly, will open the door for building a strong relationship with hiring managers. The most effective type of communication happens verbally or in person, not hiding behind your keyboard. Time and time again managers complain that they just want to know the status of their open positions. They may be disappointed when things go bad; however, they appreciate knowing.

Develop the Reputation as a Problem-Solver – If recruiters are the experts, then they need to come to the table with solutions. Initial sourcing and recruiting strategies do not always work. The goal is to be prepared with additional solutions. "Since source A did not generate the quality of candidates we need, our next step is to try source B and then source C."

Lead Your Manager – Once initial credibility begins to take hold, leading the manager through the rest of the recruiting process is critical. There are a number of basic areas where the recruiter is the subject matter expert: taking the job order, developing the search strategy, presenting the candidate properly, candidate selection.

Move from "Recruiter Speak" to "Business Speak" – Hiring managers are primarily focused on increasing revenues, increasing profitability, bringing products to market at a lower cost, etc. Learn to speak their language. Instead of saying, "We filled 18 positions," frame the statement in business terms: "We placed 18 sales reps, who earned \$4 million in additional revenue for the company."

Properly Justify Costs – John Ryder (VP, HR – Champion Technologies, USA) explains it this way: "We are not buying to save money anymore; it's much more about the value we can bring to your company. That is the new business case... Justify the cost based on the value it brings to your organization." If you are not aligned with business goals and helping to achieve them, you are not bringing value.

Measure the Right Things – It becomes very easy to track and report on typical recruiting metrics such as Time to Fill and Cost Per Hire. The question is what is most important to the hiring managers and executive management? According to the Aberdeen Group, following is a snapshot of what matters most to business leaders.

The annual study by the Aberdeen Group shows a significant difference in what Business Leaders and Talent Acquisition leaders see as key drivers for the recruiting department. While many TA leaders focus on time to fill and number of open requisitions, business executives are focused on those metrics that drive business performance – quality of hire and time to productivity. Misalignment of talent acquisition goals and business goals is a key factor in why there often seems to be a negative perception of the recruiting team by business leaders, thus killing the internal brand.

What Does The Talent Acquisition Professional Need to Look Like Today?

There is much discussion surrounding the goal of talent acquisition departments to get the right people in the right seats for their organization. In order to effectively deliver on this task, it is just as important for the recruiting group to have the right people in the right seats themselves. What does this look like today? According to the University of Michigan Business School, there are five must-have competencies for those who truly want a seat at the table.

1. **Strategic Contribution:** This competency is shown to have the biggest impact on profitability. Can a talent acquisition strategy be developed that is in alignment with the business needs of the organization?
2. **Personal Credibility:** This is where the talent acquisition professional is seen as the functional expert.
3. **Service Delivery:** Having a reputation for follow-through on commitments and having performed successfully as related to overall business objectives
4. **Business Knowledge:** Can you articulate your organization's mission? Its business goals for the next year? The next five years? Do you have a big-picture understanding of how your organization works? Are you business savvy?
5. **Mastery of Technology:** Do you have, and know how to use, the technology tools that streamline and automate the administrative aspects of talent acquisition? Are you using social networking tools in a strategic and effective way?

The Complete Package

Internal recruiters have a lot to contend with. No one likes to be thought of as a necessary evil! Years of misunderstanding and miscommunication are hard to overcome, but the recruiter who wants to build personal brand can do so by changing the way they think and speak about hiring. Instead of relying on the old quantity-based, seat-filling mentality, make the extra effort to become an expert in the business you work for and communicate in ways that business leaders will understand and value. Be so good at adding strategic value and solving problems that you become intrinsic to the business's success. In this way you will "craft" your way to a seat at the table. If you have to ask for a seat, you probably don't deserve one.

CONTACT ME:

www.stevelowisz.com



steve@stevelowisz.com



734-521-7800



www.linkedin.com/in/stevelowisz



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