

5 Tips for Building and Managing Positive Candidate Relationships

- *Paul Dodd, Co-Founder of Head2Head*

CRM. Customer Relationship Management. Unless your organization has been living under a rock for the past few years, this has probably been one of your core mandates: We must do a better job of developing long-term relationships with our customers!

But these days, the acronym has taken on a whole new meaning: Candidate Relationship Management.

In a market where the war for top talent is increasingly competitive - especially given the shrinking workforce - organizations are beginning to realize that if they want to attract the best candidates, they have to start building positive, long-term relationships with those candidates, using many of the same principles they've learned from their focus on building customer relationships. Don't get distracted by all the CRM software that's descended on the marketplace: technology has given us some great tools to help manage relationships - but it's important to remember that Applicant Tracking Systems and Contact Management Systems can't actually build and maintain relationships for you.

Relationships exist between human beings. They are built on human emotions and values such as trust, empathy, respect and enjoyment. No tool yet built can take the place of establishing meaningful relationships with your candidates.

Yes, nurturing a true relationship takes more time than pushing a button, but it's time that will pay off with a rock-solid candidate network and employment brand. Here are six tips for showing candidates you're interested in them, not just their database entry.

1. Create a candidate charter.

The entire hiring process runs much more smoothly when all the players are aware of what's going on. Have a candidate charter that outlines exactly what candidates can expect from you, and what you expect from them. In your charter, you might include:

- Your step-by-step recruitment and hiring process
- When candidates will be contacted and by whom
- What candidates can do to help you or to contribute to the process in a positive way
- How a candidate's information is stored in your database
- Your policies or standards about confidentiality, disclosure of information, ethics, diversity and other key issues
- Setting out clear expectations fosters trust and goodwill, and leads to positive relationships.

2. Acknowledge every applicant.

As a job seeker, there is nothing more discouraging than being completely ignored by the companies who are supposedly interested in hearing from you. Being ignored does not lead to warm fuzzy feelings, and if I'm not feeling warm fuzzies-or at the very least,

professional courtesy-from you, then you've lost an opportunity to establish a relationship with me. Another one bites the dust.

Acknowledging each candidate does not need to be complex or time-consuming, and there is simply no excuse for not doing it. Tools can help here! Even an automated form letter sent by your applicant tracking system will do the trick. Acknowledgement says to the candidate:

- We appreciate that you took the time to apply for a job with us. Thank you!
- We received your application safely.
- You will receive due consideration.
- We want to keep you informed.

This lays the groundwork for a positive relationship in the future. Silence from you is just a brick wall.

3. Treat every candidate with respect.

Following hard on the heels of acknowledging candidates is ensuring that every single interaction you have with a candidate is characterized by professionalism and respect. Emails and letters, even though they may be templated communications, should be honest. Be cheerful and energetic in your phone calls and interviews. If you're having a bad day, never take it out on a candidate. Avoid being condescending, sarcastic, frustrated or angry.

4. Help candidates, don't just screen them.

Be as helpful as you can to the candidates you interact with. Have a network of trusted partners such as resume specialists, career coaches and wardrobe consultants that you can refer people to should they ask.

If a candidate interviews with you, but does not make the cut, offer tips on where they might improve their performance. Share some information about where the market for their skills is moving. Every time you offer assistance, you turn yourself into an ally instead of just a recruiter.

5. Offer a check-in facility.

Too often, recruiters think the hiring process is all about their schedule. But your candidates are busy people, just like you, and their time is equally valuable. Hot candidates especially will be in high demand. Show that you recognize and understand the realities of a jam-packed schedule. One way to do this is to set up a communications centre where candidates can check in with their voice mail and e-mail before and after their interview. This center should be easily accessible from reception so that candidates don't have to walk through work areas to get there, and can quickly return to the waiting room on their own.

These tips are only the beginning that will hopefully spark other ideas. Just remember that candidates are people too, and the human connection is what it's all about.

Paul Dodd is Co-Founder of Head2Head Canada, which specializes in niche recruiting solutions for some of Canada's leading Fortune 500 organizations. Contact Paul at paul@head2head.ca.

www.head2head.ca