

Now is the Best Time to Build Your Proactive Pipelines of External Talent

By Simon Parkin

One of the continuing challenges facing the Recruitment function is moving from a reactive and primarily transactional focus to a proactive and enhanced recruitment model. The best time to build proactive pipelines of external talent is during hiring slowdowns which many of us are currently faced with. Recruiters usually aren't that busy with hiring during a recession and need to constantly justify their roles. This is the perfect time to work with your business leaders and start planning for when hiring will be the priority again.

Think about when you first sat down with your hiring leaders to scope the position details and you asked the hiring leaders for a proposed start date, how many of them responded with "ASAP" or "yesterday"? How many of your hiring leaders complained about the time it takes to recruit talent externally? And how many of us recruiters continue to get frustrated with the pressure from hiring leaders? We know that for the most part, top external talent just doesn't fall into our laps. Effective sourcing can take time especially for tougher and more specialized positions to fill.

Over the past few years, I have been working with our clients to build and develop effective proactive pipelines of top external talent. Building this type of pipeline isn't for the light hearted; it takes time and effort and requires planning, proper resourcing, as well as a skilled recruiter.

The return on investment of proactive pipelining is more than worth the effort. I have witnessed first hand the enhanced quality of hire via this proactive channel as time is no longer the recruiter's enemy. Beyond quality of hire, the average Time-to-Fill of a position is reduced by on average 10-12 days as the sourcing of the top external talent has already been completed prior to the position becoming open.

So how do you get started with building these proactive pipelines of external talent? I look at it as a simple 5 step process. I call this process **PIBME!**

- 1 – **Plan**
- 2 – **Identify**
- 3 – **Build**
- 4 – **Manage**
- 5 – **Execute**

1. **Plan**

By far the most important step of this process is the planning. Within the planning stage you need to determine what position or positions you plan on building these pipelines for. I would recommend selecting only a few positions, those you and your business deem "critical" to your organization's success and bottom line either now or within the next

year. Determining what positions are “critical” is a difficult task. If you ask any hiring leader they will say that all of their open positions are “critical”. This will force you to walk a political tight rope to prioritize “criticalness”. You should work with the top level business leaders to determine which positions they think are “critical”. Once you have your critical position(s) identified, you need to invest your time into understanding all about the position and why it would be attractive to potential candidates. Remember, as it is proactive, you are recruiting for a position that isn’t currently open. Knowing all the features and the upside of the position will allow you to effectively sell the potential opportunity to the top talent.

2. Identify

Once the planning is complete it is time to identify the top external talent in the market. This is where your skills as a top recruiter will come into play and requires you to be at the top of your game. I always go by the rule that the majority of the top talent in the external market is passive and not actively searching for a new opportunity. Your typical transactional and reactive recruitment sourcing channels won’t effectively work, so don’t count on simply posting the position to job boards as a solution to attract top talent. Be aggressive. Use your networks and referrals to determine who is at the top of their field within the market. Who is the top talent at your competition, or within a recognized leading top talent organization within your geographic area? Get out of the office and do some true recruiting to identify those resources outside your organization that will bring value and success to your company.

3. Build

This is when you worry about getting them interested and excited about your organization. You have identified the individuals you think are the best of the best for the skillset you are looking for. Now it is time to determine the ideal approach to contact and sell to this talent in order to effectively build your proactive pipeline. Again, this is where a recruiter must be a “salesperson” and effectively sell the talent on the organization and the opportunities potentially coming in the future. You must be honest and set expectations that you are recruiting proactively for future opportunities and they have been identified to you as top talent within the market. Don’t be too aggressive with the candidate and ask if it is alright to keep in touch within an agreed upon timeframe. Also use this opportunity to network further and ask for referrals for other positions you are recruiting for. Be careful to ensure the communication with these candidates is very positive and is a “win-win” for both the candidate and the recruiter.

4. Manage

By “Manage”, I mean, effectively manage your pipelined candidates. You need to ensure you nurture and speak with your pipelined candidates on a regular basis as was established and agreed upon when you first spoke with the candidates. If possible use technology to effectively document and track your pipeline – this is where a CRM tool could be effectively used by recruiters similar to the way salespeople use this tool for building and managing sales pipelines.

Steps 2, 3 and 4 are ongoing. You should always be on the lookout for new top talent externally and ensure you are effectively building and managing your pipelines. Again, this is an investment and will pay off when your organization most needs it to.

5. Execute

Step 5 is sometimes forgotten and it is simply to execute once one of your critical positions becomes open. Your sourcing is hopefully already complete and now when your hiring leaders answer your “when would you like the person to start” with “ASAP” you can pull out a slate of pre-sourced and qualified top external talent and sit back and relax.....ok, maybe not relax but you will be feeling very good about your efforts as will your business leaders.

Obviously there are many more details within each of these 5 steps to effectively build proactive pipelines of external talent and I hope this high level description provides insight into how to further add value to your organization’s hunt for top talent and allows you to continue to demonstrate why it is important to recruit during challenging economic times.

Finally you need to monitor the success of your proactive pipelining – how are you going to show your business leaders the ROI of your efforts?

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