Developing an Internal, Dedicated Sourcing Team

Six key questions to ask
By: Shally Steckerl

In the Recruiting Leadership forum, Amy Johnson asked some key questions about how to design and build an internal team dedicated exclusively to sourcing. In my book, *Electronic Recruiting 101*, I review in detail the structure of a successful centralized sourcing team.

But the question wasn't a request for an infomercial. Amy asked some specific questions about building a sourcing team inside of a corporation, so I would like to offer my perspective based on having been instrumental in building several sourcing teams (Motorola, Cisco, Coke), architecting and managing two of my own (Google, Microsoft), and consulting on the design of numerous others.

Question 1: Do you currently have a dedicated team?

Yes, it's absolutely critical in order to reach the deepest of the talent pools, or those candidates who don't take the initiative to seek out career opportunities on their own. Check out this Kennedy Audio recording about just this subject, as well as the article I published in ERE's Journal in February 2006. (You can get past Journal issues here.)

Question 2: What metrics do you use to measure the team's success?

There are so many ways to measure, and only a few experts I can point to who totally understand them. People like Dan Kilgore and Dan Hilbert, or websites like Staffing.org and HRmetrics.org, can give you the full scoop. From having led my own teams, I advise that you do not forget to establish a baseline and track trends over time, not just take snapshots.

Anyone can look like they are flying if you take their picture while they are in the middle of a jump shot, but then again, anyone can look like a loser if you take their picture while they're in the middle of defeat. Don't take two-dimensional metrics; make sure there is enough comparison to clarify what the measurements mean, not just show the "current state" of your team.

Therefore, be sure to track the following metrics:

1. Sum of offers accepted (all the salaries added up)
2. Number of hires
3. Costs (total burdened cost of recruitment)
4. Costs per hire
5. Time to fill (be careful where you start counting)
6. Customer satisfaction
7. Quality of hire

Question 3: How does the team interact with the client?

The answer is very carefully.

I'm trying to be funny, but this is really important. If you are too aggressive, you will alienate recruiters because you are dealing too directly with hiring managers and leaving recruiters out of the process.

If you aren't aggressive enough, you will be relegated to a basement function that nobody knows about and you will be the first to get cut when budgets are tight. Deal with each group in the way your customer wants to be dealt with.

Not all your customers are going to want multiple points of contact (recruiter, sourcer, account manager, staffing manager, HR contacts, etc.), yet some will want to know who to go to for each function. Negotiate what is best for you customer group (business unit, branch, division) but include your hiring managers, business leaders, staffing leaders, and the recruiters in this discussion.

Question 4: What service level agreements are put in place between the recruiters and sourcers?

The short answer is to keep it simple.

The more complex answer is to provide a simple commitment that explains what is needed, what you guarantee to deliver if you get what is needed, and a promise that "if we deliver that, then this is what you promise to do in return" works best. If you need an attorney to decipher your SLA, then your customers won't know what to make of you.

Question 5: When do the sourcers hand off the candidate?

The short answer is when the candidate tells them to.

In some industries, candidates don't mind being approached by sourcers, but in others they would prefer the first call to come from a hiring manager, or even a business leader. Only you know your industry well enough to answer this.

Generally speaking, you want to hand off at the most natural point in the conversation, where there's the least potential for friction or drop off. There are a few places in the process where there is less friction: before you call/email the lead for the first time; when they are being scheduled for an interview; and when they show up for their interview.

One of those three should suit your candidates fine, but there are other places like technical phone screens and "initial conversations" with hiring managers where a natural handoff can occur.

Question 6: What challenges have you run into?

The short answer is that I have encountered all of them. This can be a very complex sell into the organization. The top-10 roadblocks I've seen include the following:

1. The expectation that the sourcing team will deliver a short-term solution to what is a long-term problem.
2. Lack of buy-in from upper management after a leadership change, restructuring, re-org, etc.
3. Oops, we have to cut the budget! Oh, I know, let's start by cutting this sourcing team because we don't really understand what value they add.
4. Recruiters afraid to pick up the phone and follow through with leads that have been sourced.
5. Hiring managers not having a clue how to treat a candidate who still needs a bit more romancing.
6. Recruiters thinking of sourcers as junior (i.e., thinking sourcers want to grow up someday and be a "real" recruiter).
7. Inadequate contact management technology, both in the CRM system as well as the applicant tracking system.
8. Over-reliance on email as the initial outreach.
9. Lack of follow up with future-interest candidates.
10. Failure to invest in the development and training of the sourcing team (yes, even sourcers can learn a few things!).

Naturally, the list goes on. Each environment will provide its own opportunities or obstacles. One thing you can do is bring someone in as a consultant who has done it before to help you architect the team from the ground up. Perhaps they can help you tool up and get things rolling, then staff your team and leave it ready for you to manage.

BIO

Shally Steckerl is a talent acquisition strategist, speaker, and recruitment consultant originally from Colombia, South America, now residing in Atlanta, Georgia. Mr. Steckerl currently manages the Research arm of Microsoft's Core Technical Central Sourcing team. He has consulted with leading organizations such as Google, Coca-Cola Enterprises, Cisco Systems, and Motorola where he has been instrumental in architecting and implementing centralized recruitment. Because of his passion for the Internet as a recruitment tool and his continually innovative methods, Mr. Steckerl has developed a reputation as an authority in Internet search, and a pioneer in recruitment intelligence. These extremely effective methods reduce the time to find qualified candidates for positions of all levels in every industry. An accomplished consultant and trainer, Mr. Steckerl is a frequent contributor to many industry forums and founder of JobMachine.net. He has a B.S. in International Business and Management with a focus on Information Technology from well-respected Rochester Institute of Technology. He is the 2005 Recruiting.com Winner of the Best Recruiting Research Blog Award for his blog, Cybersleuthing.