

[2015.02.02]

## Recruiting Professionals and Managers in the US and Canada

**David Creelman**  
CEO of Creelman Research



Recruiting professionals and managers in the US & Canada is challenging for most firms. A few companies like Google have more excellent applicants than they can handle, however Google is an exception. It is not that firms cannot get applicants for their jobs, just that it is difficult to find a really strong candidate with just the right skills. In today's very lean organizations there is a sense that every hire matters and that they need to be productive right away. Applicants that are good managers, but who do not have quite the right background, are not considered good enough.

There are two main levers American organizations are using to address the recruitment challenge: a new emphasis on finding talent and greater effort at crafting an appealing offer that will draw top performers away from other employer.

### Finding Talent

The traditional means for finding talent is known in America as “post and pray” firms *post* (advertise) a job then *pray* good candidates to apply. That old passive method is being supplemented by more aggressive searching for talent. Finding talent is now referred to as “sourcing” and it is seen as a specialized area, not just one of the things recruiters do.

One way of sourcing talent is to use the Internet, particularly LinkedIn, to actively search for good candidates. Recruiters in companies are acting a bit like executive search firms in that they contact people who are already working and try to entice them to apply for the job. Of course,

all major recruiters use LinkedIn so people whose skills are in demand get many offers.

While LinkedIn dominates the American sourcing landscape there are all kinds of useful tools and services. One of the most interesting tools is a program called Gild which specializes in finding programmers. It works by scanning the internet for information about individual programmers and then uses algorithms to judge their abilities. This works for programmers because most good ones have posted samples of their code on-line which the algorithm can then easily access. The algorithm won't have the same subtle judgment a human would, but it can judge tens of thousands of candidates, not just a few.

Another way of finding talent is to start building a relationship with promising people long before the opening. For example, an engineering company might give engineers a chance to sign up for a newsletter and use that newsletter to keep them interested in the company. When a job does become available, the recruiter already has the emails of a group of engineers, and those engineers already know something about the company so may be more likely to accept an invitation to apply for a job. Of course a newsletter is just one way to build a relationship with prospective candidates, and if talent is very hard to find, recruiters will get much more active in communicating with this talent pool. In cases of very specialized jobs, such as a top video games scriptwriter, the recruiter may target a specific individual and try to get to know them well in advance of needing to hire them.

The American recruiting business is sophisticated and there are endless of number of companies providing highly specialized services. For a recruitment function that is struggling, finding the right service providers may make a big difference. That said, not everyone who says they can find great talent for you actually can; even the best known global executive search firms have a surprising high failure rate where the people they place in jobs do not work out and have to be fired.

### **Crafting an appealing offer**

One of the cultural factors Japanese companies should be prepared for is that strong candidates may show little gratitude when invited to interview with your company. They need to be convinced that this is a particularly great deal for them, better than anything their existing

company or other competitors would offer. Companies need to treat the interview as a sales pitch and like any sales pitch you need both excellent communication and something really good to offer.

There are many reasons why someone might turn down a good job. Maybe they do not want to move; maybe the commute will be too long; maybe the company does not have a reputation as a great place to work, maybe their prospective boss does not impress them. Recruiters need to be very clear about what the positives and the negatives are, and then find an offer that will win over a skeptical candidate.

The best weapon a recruiter has is flexibility in what they can offer. If the recruiter can craft the job to the person's likings then they have a better chance of getting them onboard. For example, an advertising company recently recruited a VP by allowing him to spend one day a week running his own company. Once upon a time that kind of thing would have been utterly forbidden, now having the flexibility to make those unique arrangements may be necessary to attract the individual you want.

### **Smaller firms with bigger roles**

If a company has a poor reputation, for example a poor rating on Glassdoor.com, it can be very hard for even the best recruiter to convince a skilled professional or manager to accept a job. If a company is not an appealing place to work then HR needs to think about changing the reality, not simply improving their sales pitch.

One disadvantage Japanese and other non-American companies have is that there is some reluctance to work for a foreign firm. Candidates wonder if there will be issues around culture and language when interacting with top management. They also wonder how close they will be to where decisions are made. For an ambitious manager in New York it can be off putting to know that all the big decisions are made in Tokyo and they will have limited opportunity to influence those decisions.

Another challenge for the very big Japanese firms is that big firms are no longer seen as the best place to have a career. Many managers long for a chance to work for smaller firms where they can play a bigger role and there is a better chance for rapid growth.

There is no magic answer to the problem of candidates being hesitant to work for very big firms or foreign firms. It simply means these firms need to do an especially good job of crafting a proposition that will attract the candidate they want.

### The Future

One interesting shift is that U.S. and Canadian organizations are more open to hiring managers and professionals on short-term contracts rather than as permanent employees. There are websites like MBACo.com that specialize in providing managers on contract and staffing firms like Contingent Workforce Solutions that provide all kinds of professionals including senior managers, not just the traditional low-level “temp” workers.

Recruiting in America can be difficult, expensive and frustrating. Companies need to invest in a strong sourcing function and be flexible about how they approach hiring. Japanese firms need to accept that, like it or not, the American talent market is different, and so they will need to adapt.

#### **David Creelman / CEO of Creelman Research**

He does writing, research and speaking on the most critical issues in human capital management. Prior to founding his own company David was Chief of Content and Research for HR.com. As the first employee of HR.com David played an integral role in growing a successful dot com; one that continues to thrive. For many years David was a management consultant in Canada and Malaysia, most notably with the Hay Group.

He also taught Rewards and Performance Measures at the University of Malaya executive MBA program. Before venturing into human resources consulting, David worked in finance for Gulf Canada in Toronto and IT for Wood Gundy in London.

He has an MBA from the University of Western Ontario and a Combined Honours B.Sc. in Chemistry and Biochemistry from McMaster.

Profile

*This column has been posted to the website of Recruit Works Institute.*