

# Conscious Careering

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**Looking to attract top candidates into your organization? Focus on the little things...**

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Unless you happen to be going through a job search at the moment, yourself, let's engage in a quick round of make-believe. Put yourself in the shoes of an out-of-work professional, arriving in the lobby of a company that has invited you in to interview for an attractive job opportunity. You're nervous. You're out of practice. You're not sure if you're overdressed, underdressed, or whether or not you're going to make a positive first impression. And you're also stressed out because while you're confident you could ace the job responsibilities in question, your parents raised you right—and you shudder at the thought of having to "brag" about yourself and tell an employer how great you are.

Suddenly, however, things start looking up. As soon as you walk into the lobby, the receptionist smiles, greets you by first name, and inquires whether you were able to find parking okay. He or she then offers you coffee and tells you that the manager you're there to see will not only be right with you, but is looking forward to meeting you. All of the sudden you're feeling much more at ease, the butterflies have left your stomach to go find a much more inviting (and less acidic) place to hang out, and you're thinking you just might be able to pull this off. What's more, you're sensing that this might be a pretty cool place to work, given the red-carpet treatment you've received and the amount of warmth and professionalism you've already seen radiating from the front desk.

The moral of the story? If you're a company looking to hire top professionals, and to consistently have your choice of talent begging to work for you, it's often entirely possible to raise your "candidate closing average" without spending a dime. All it takes is to inject a fresh layer of warmth, humanity, and professionalism into the hiring process—since these qualities, at least according to my clients, are extremely rare when it comes to how most companies go about hiring people these days.

This advice, in fact, was the main thrust of a presentation I recently delivered as a panelist to the Northwest Recruiters Association, a fantastic organization that invited me in to share some thoughts on how local companies could do a better job of "wooing top talent" into their organizations. Given the chance to address over

200 corporate recruiters and staffing professionals, I encouraged them to focus on getting the little things right instead of trying to entice job seekers by throwing more money at them or attempting to lure them with shopworn platitudes such as "we're a great place to work" or "employees are our greatest asset." Not only did most job seekers stop taking these statements at face value a long time ago, but it's always more powerful to "show" rather than "tell" such qualities by demonstrating them consistently throughout the course of the hiring process instead of just giving them lip service.

For example, in the pseudo-fictionalized account I shared earlier, the receptionist had been briefed by management on which candidates would be coming in to interview that day and was asked, specifically, to greet them by first name. This simple step costs nothing to implement, but instantly makes a candidate feel welcome and special upon arrival. Additionally, I've seen companies go out of their way to give candidates a copy of the interviewing agenda, up front, as well as those who advise candidates on what attire will be most appropriate for the meeting, given the common confusion around dress code etiquette these days. All of these little steps make a positive impression and help a company brand themselves as a desirable place to work. And whether you actually end up extending an offer to the candidate in question, or not, one thing's for sure—if you treat an individual poorly or disrespectfully, they're going to tell all of their friends, including many of the top professionals your recruiting department is trying so desperately to woo!

As for the formal job offer stage, one of the most effective "closing" practices I've seen is when the CEO of the company calls the final candidate and personally invites them to join the team. That's a pretty hard "we want you" message to ignore. I've also heard of companies routinely sending gift baskets out to candidates, as well as those who have written offers waiting for people on their way out the door—in cases where the candidate has hard-to-find credentials they don't want to let get away.

These professional, personalized touches may not make the difference in every case, and there are definitely job seekers out there who are still all about the Benjamins, but in a close race for a top candidate, a few inexpensive and thoughtful gestures is often all it takes to tip the scales in your company's favor!

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