

How to create a winning candidate experience

By  Celeste Sirin

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Opportunity knocks for SA companies that recognise the importance and strong impact that candidate experience can have on your company brand.



Take the [Aberdeen Group](#) in the US. They've confirmed that 45% of companies over there said that significantly enhancing this experience proved to be the major talent acquisition priority for 2016.

So why is not enough attention being given to this big game changer?

Sure, companies can mount sustained recruitment marketing and employer brand-building campaigns, investing huge amounts to promote their company and career opportunities to tempt top talent to their table. But what's really behind the success of such initiatives is not the overall razzmatazz but the manner in which companies engage with and manage prospective talent.

Brand perceptions are always at the forefront of a candidate's thinking on entering your world, so the manner in which you deal with his or her expectations from the very start will either enhance or fragment your reputation as an employer right up to its journey's end.

NOTES FROM A JOBSEEKER

To companies, before you place a job ad, think carefully about what you need.

Don't call me back for a third interview when you know it's a BEE position and you know I'm white. Don't question whether you really need this position as I sit in front of you. Also don't question what a candidate previously earned. It's none of your business, frankly.

Stop advertising for positions that require candidates to be "junior" but with 20 years' experience. It makes you look silly. Rather say you have a small budget but you need someone experienced.

The person coming for your interview has spent time researching your company. They have carefully selected their outfit and did not sleep the night before in anticipation of what could potentially be an income source and a career for them. Companies should take the same care.

FRUSTRATED JOBSEEKER, EMAIL

NO JOBS TO BE FOUND

I agree with Frustrated Jobseeker (YOU Say, 8 September). I've submitted my CV about 70 times for jobs I thought I'd be eligible for. No reply.

I'm beyond frustrated. To make matters worse, my ex is getting away with not paying maintenance and the little my mother, a pensioner, can afford doesn't cover two sets of school fees.

Recruiters, I've given up on you, but emailing my CV directly to companies gets no response either.

ROCK BOTTOM, EMAIL

Excerpts from the You Magazine, South Africa

Here is your basic formula for creating an exceptional experience for your exceptional candidate:

1. Outline your recruitment and selection process on your career website, setting out timelines and what candidates can expect upon the submission of their particulars from day one.
2. Insist that your recruiters live their brand promise; that they have a clear understanding of their key deliverables: speedy acknowledgement of applications, turn-around times, follow-ups, clear guidelines on appointments/regrets etc. Like all intelligent HR departments, make sure they're marketing/promoting all attributes of their positions as they relate to the company's employer value proposition: role expectations and satisfaction, positive opportunities for advancement, benefits, insights into the company and much more on the understanding that the tables have turned and that candidates are king!
3. Make sure there's consistency throughout the organisation in terms of the time and effort you've invested in reaching that point at which you are presenting candidates to your hiring managers. Challenge and overcome the blatant disregard that many hiring managers have towards the lack of commitment to and/or postponement of interviews. Make sure he/she holds a complete understanding of the importance and relevance of his/her contribution in upholding the candidate experience and the company's brand reputation.
4. Bear in mind that the implementation of a candidate experience survey will always provide you with an accurate understanding of candidates' sentiments towards your brand, highlighting hotspots for improvements. Once you've diagnosed your biggest challenges, rapidly develop an action plan to address them and, thereafter, to measure and quantify your success.

- Equip your talent acquisition team and hiring managers with the tools to assist them in promoting a seamless approach towards the candidate experience. Mobile technology can play an important role here in providing companies with an opportunity to create a unique personal employee experience. Text messages confirming appointments, together with directions and maps, welcoming messages upon candidates arriving for interviews, letters of thanks for attending interviews, etc. are just some 'we are thinking of you' differentiators that companies can introduce to keep the top talent warm prior to appointment.

Emphasise the enormous impact that a positive or negative candidate interaction, experience or engagement can have on your holistic brand. Don't overlook the fact that social media channels provide freedom of speech where candidates can comment on and share their likes, disappointments and overall experience openly. It's a powerful vehicle that can harm or promote your employer brand.

Global insights are stressing over and over again that prospective candidates highly rate the opinions, reviews and criticisms in the open job market via social media, job review websites and through traditional word of mouth. (Friends and family will accept or reject a job offer based on this.) [Glassdoor](#) reports that 96% of job seekers say they are influenced by employee-provided reviews and ratings with 90% of them likely to read reviews about a company before accepting a job offer.

Redefine your candidate experience journey

Companies striving towards improving their customer service in order to increase sales need to start focusing on how they intend revolutionising the experience that candidates have when embarking on a journey through their organisation from start to hiring or shelving.

This should be viewed no differently than the corporate experience, because candidates are also 'buyers' and can encounter good and bad experiences along the way. Whether an individual is engaging with your organisation as a consumer or candidate, their experience should be consistent as you strive towards building your holistic brand reputation.

ABOUT CELESTE SIRIN

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