

"Buying Better Talent: How to effectively use campus recruitment to fill hourly and management track roles"

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In an economy where unemployment tops 9% it is hard to imagine an easier time for employers to find and retain talent. However, in the world of recruitment a greater number of candidates to choose from does not necessarily equate to superior quality. Campus recruitment, long the lifeblood of entry-level positions and management trainees, offers even greater challenges. Although college attendance continues to increase and graduates face a tough labor market, there remains a material gap between the availability of talent and their willingness to fill entry level and low-skilled positions. This article discusses how employers can more readily access campus talent to meet ongoing recruitment needs.

It is hard to imagine more of a "buyers market" than currently enjoyed today by employers. With unemployment running at over 9% and voluntary turnover at an all time low, employers are in the enviable position of having an ample supply of candidates. However, a greater supply doesn't necessarily improve the quality of candidates, nor make the selection process any simpler. This is particularly true in the case of campus recruitment, where enrollment is at an all time high, but graduates face huge debt obligations and a lackluster job market. But college graduates will continue to meet a key staffing need for entry-level hourly and management personnel as they provide an important component of any organization – freshly educated, lower paid, new talent. The difficulty in today's environment is that continued limitations on budgets and people investments have resulted in fewer potential hires, so each person brought onboard needs to be a "rock star". Campus recruits are notoriously fickle, with average turnover much higher than for their more experienced counterparts, particularly in the first 18 months of employment. Hiring and retaining these new potential employees requires a closer look at how to approach sourcing on campus, and to understand what new college graduates want from their first employer.

Whether you are hiring one or one hundred college graduates the process of finding, hiring and retaining campus talent requires a solid understanding of student demographics, the current campus recruitment process, and market dynamics.

Campuses are enjoying increased enrollment due to a perception of poor job prospects, and higher graduation rates from high schools. Almost 20 million students attend a four or two year college, with women now outnumbering men. Student enrollment is up across all institutions, but growth is clustered at community colleges, trade schools, and large public universities, which tend to have more open admissions policies and charge less tuition. Community colleges in particular have invested heavily in culinary, hospitality and related degree and certificate programs. Most of these schools employ very active placement offices, easing the campus recruitment process for employers.

Graduates today face not only a tight labor market, but also leave school with an average \$29,000 in loan obligations. These additional financial pressures mimic what happened with graduates after more recent recessionary events like in September 1987, and the technology bubble burst at the turn of the millennium, but the impact with the Great Recession has been longer lasting, altering the mindset of the average student by creating a greater degree of focus on more practical majors and an intensified openness to internships and temporary assignments. By casting a wide net with community colleges, more traditional four-year programs, and specialized certificate programs, businesses of any size will find a receptive pool of candidates who can readily fill hourly and management track positions.

Finding a motivated graduate may be easier, but campus recruitment has evolved quite a bit. Essentially the campus recruitment process has remained the same: post a position, select from interested candidates, interview on and/or off campus, and extend an offer. The method for meeting and selecting candidates includes the standard approaches of campus fairs, placement office coordinated events, and internships. But networking, either through social media or through other more creative methods has become far more important in managing an effective campus program. Posting on recruitment websites is how more than a third of all students land their first job, and employers can choose from university-sponsored sites, as well as more traditional outlets like MonsterCollege, or newer specialty sites like jobsforcollegegraduates.com. Technology allows employers greater access to a broader potential candidate pool, as recruitment can be extended to schools across the US and internationally. Programs such as BUNAC have sprung up to facilitate international recruitment, creating easier access to a newer pipeline of talent, particularly important where language or cultural skills are critical. Interviewing, once limited to a 6x6 room, now allows for virtual

experiences through SecondLife, or a more conventional approach like videoconferencing through Skype.

Technology facilitates the ease of access and delivery, and lowers the price point considerably, but also allows for employers to create a unique experience for the candidate. Employers do need to take a bit more time to develop messaging that reinforces their employment brand and market their career value proposition for campus recruits, but a well thought-out plan can yield considerable results.

Our analysis of successful campus recruitment programs has identified the following best practices, which are a great starting point for developing and customizing a program that meets the specific needs of your organization:

Embrace technology: use social media to drive home your brand message, market to potential candidates, and gain access to a more diverse population of students. Sodexo, for example, has had some success using the virtual reality game site SecondLife, interviewing potential candidates in a virtual office. Marriott uses a game similar to Farmville on Facebook to provide a realistic job preview of the hospitality space, while engaging future employees. Additionally, specialty sites like collegerecruiter.com allow employers to target candidates across multiple sites and contact with customized through postings, texts, and email blasts.

Maintain the personal touch: hire on-campus representatives like Teaching Assistants or current students to act on your company’s behalf to recruit and market career opportunities. A good relationship with the placement office is helpful, as is a solid rapport with professors who specialize in your field of interest, but personal contact with students through classroom experiences like case studies, projects or strategic games is an even more effective way to connect directly. Use email, social media and conferencing to connect students directly with other employees in your firm to provide a human face to recruitment efforts and provide the students with an insiders view to your culture.

Target the right schools: given the significant expense of campus recruitment, it makes sense that focusing in on schools with programs and a culture that fits your own will drive stronger results. It is more important that you go to a few schools that align with your particular business needs than to recruit at ones with high rankings or a certain level of prestige, and find a poor fit with hires. Here is where community colleges or

certificate programs can work as part of the pipeline for hourly positions, with top performers tracking into management positions or programs over time.

It's all about execution: the campus experiences is predictive of how an employer will treat a recruit upon hire, so what you do with candidates matters. The recruitment process, from dinners to communication should closely align with what the candidate experience will be inside the company. Most importantly, send the right people on campus; knowledgeable, personable recruiters who can realistically sell the company are a must.

Market dynamics are now such that schools and students are even more flexible in the placement process. This provides a unique opportunity for employers “try before they buy”, while still filling necessary productivity needs. Onsite ambassadors programs are active on campus through companies like the creative agency MrYouth, Kaplan, and HP that allow for employers to create a pipeline of talent, reinforce their brand/market approach to target consumers, and vet future employees. Disney offers a robust intern and co-op program, engaging students from around the world across their wide array of businesses. The hospitality industry has the advantage of 24/7 labor pool needs, and can use part time and flexible work schedules as well as creative breakdowns in roles to engage and test college students. Financial programs to encourage retention are easily provided through pay, bonuses, tuition reimbursement, and the potential for full time employment upon graduation.

Like any new hire, current grads are focused on salary and benefits. But almost more important than compensation is the role that development and future career opportunities play in attraction and retention. Students are looking for an opportunity that provides for a stable business model, future job growth, and a work environment that aligns with their social interests. Use of mentor programs and realistic job previews is important in the screening process, but so too is communication before and after the campus hire joins. Both Costco and FedEx promotes from within about 98% of time, a fact well understood by candidates and employees. Both provide clear career tracks and training to ensure candidate readiness and engagement, but get the added boon of higher productivity and enhanced customer service in the process. Costco finds that as people progress into management roles the experiences they had working the floor and learning the business from the ground up serves to attract and retain a better quality candidate, and reinforce the managers' commitment to developing their own staff for

future management positions. Chipotle Mexican Grill's Restaurateur Program represents an excellent development program that effectively develops and promotes top-performers who have worked their way up from hourly crew positions. Chipotle began its Restaurateur program five years ago, and it has had a significant impact on the company's ability to identify outstanding restaurant managers who can build great teams while outperforming their peers operationally. Through a combination of recognition and financial incentives, this group now oversees more than half of all operations. This program helps build talent from the bottom up, effectively reinforcing a culture of high performance and talent development.

Campus recruitment provides a great opportunity to build a pipeline for future management talent in your organization, but requires a stronger investment in the recruitment process in building a relationship with the campus, and proactively recruiting. Employers who approach the recruitment talent on campus with a little creativity and some strategic forethought will find themselves ahead of the talent curve for years to come.

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