



'TILL THEIR BUTT'S IN THE CHAIR

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Well, you finally did it! It took two long weeks, many months, or even longer to find the right candidate. You interviewed ten or more candidates and finally found the right one. You offered them the job. It was accepted. The new hire agreed to start in a couple of weeks. The search is over. Your position has been filled. You can relax and act on the other important business issues. **Wrong!**

Your search might be over, but don't think for one moment that you can relax and assume that your new hire is going to show up. We estimate that at least 20 percent of the new hires that commit to start dates don't show up! That's right, 20 percent. (If you were dealing with an experienced recruiting firm, that figure is more like 2 percent.)

Until their butt is in the chair and they've been there for at least four or five months, you cannot assume that position has been filled. New hires have all kinds of things happen to them that keep them from showing up on your job. They keep looking for a job even though they've committed to you. After all, those in motion tend to stay in motion. They use your offer to leverage other offers. They use your offer as insurance while they keep looking. They use your offer to leverage a counter-offer with their present employer. Even after they start, they might get a call from another hiring authority offering them the job they *really* wanted and walk out on you.

As professional recruiters, we spend a lot of our time making sure that candidates who accept one of the positions that we have helped them attain actually show up for the job. Now, you can curse the darkness and act appalled that people could do such unethical things, or you can take steps to ensure that it doesn't happen, or at least ensure that it's less likely to happen



to you. Don't waste your time getting all wrapped around the axle, wagging your finger, claiming that people shouldn't do such atrocious stuff...especially to you. Your preaching and teaching is not going to stop them from doing it, so you might as well learn how to deal with it. Here's how!

THE REASONS

The reasons that this kind of thing happens are many. Over the years, loyalty between employees and companies has been eroded by layoffs, mergers, buyouts, and business failures more often and more rapidly than at any time in history. The world is flat. Companies expand and contract more hurriedly than ever. Few people feel as though their job is safe.

Despite the expanding economy, a recent Conference Board study claimed that 69% of the American workers are fearful about job security and 71% are not engaged in their job. The average forty-year-old in the United States has changed jobs ten times. The average job in the United States lasts 2.5 to 3 years. Workers today feel that if they don't watch out for themselves, nobody is going watch out for them. Loyalty and commitment are not as ingrained as in past generations.

We've mentioned this before, but in 1973 the average company in the United States was 59 years old. In 2009 the average company was only 15 years old and in 2013 the average company in the United States was 12.5 years old. *Companies* come and go more rapidly than they ever have before and, obviously, so do the jobs of the people in them. The reasons for this erraticism don't matter as much as the fact that these kinds of "births and deaths" cause employees to think, "I need to think about me *first*. I can't worry about my company or



the company I might join. They have no loyalty to me. They would let me go in a heartbeat if they thought it was in their best interest, so I have to get the best deal I can for me, right now. Since ‘corporate America’ doesn’t give a damn about me, I can’t worry about any promises I might make to them today. If something better comes along for me tomorrow, I’m on it.”

Bluntly, people will do what they think is best for them and their families regardless of what they tell you today or tomorrow. The underlying reality is that since the job is only going to last 2.5 to 3 years, they need to get the best deal they can right now. So, they may commit to you today, but if a better deal comes their way tomorrow, they will opt for the latter.

(We think we have it rough as employers, but from what we understand, good job candidates in China actually “accept” three or four job offers at the same time and then simply show up at the one he or she decides to commit to. This obviously leaves two or three other companies in the lurch. Of course, since every candidate is doing it, hiring authorities expect this kind of behavior- go figure!)

In fact, a few years ago we had a regional vice president candidate that we referred to one of our better clients. She went through the interviewing process, got the offer and on a Friday accepted the job. She was supposed to start the following Monday. Simply by chance, we were working with another organization with a similar position, and in speaking with them the same Friday found out that the same candidate who had accepted our client’s offer, had also “accepted” an offer with this second firm... supposedly to start the next Monday morning. Obviously, we said nothing to this second company or anything to our client with whom she’d accepted the job.



Now, this was not your average candidate. She had an MBA from a very prestigious Ivy League school and an absolutely stellar 20-year track record with some phenomenal companies. When we found out about her “accepting” a position with the second company, whom we did not send her to, we bluntly called her and asked her what the hell she was doing. Amazingly, her response was a very nonchalant, “The truth is I’ve even accepted the third opportunity today, due to start Monday and I’m going to decide over the weekend which job I should take.”

We might expect this kind of thing from an hourly warehouse worker, but you simply wouldn’t have expected it from a professional with a six-figure base salary and a rich pedigree. She ended up showing up at the company we referred her to and had a wonderful six-year run with equity in the company and a seven-figure payoff when the company was sold. We guess she made the right decision but it certainly wasn’t the right way to do it.

We know this kind of thing is fairly rare, but it illustrates the attitude that many people have in today’s business climate.

So, how do you protect yourself from these potential problems?

WHAT THE BEST HIRING AUTHORITIES DON’T DO

The best hiring authorities don’t assume the candidate is going to show up just because he or she accepted their job. They assume that if you’re making an offer to the candidate, three other organizations are doing the same thing. They also don’t put off the start date. They set a start date as soon after acceptance as possible. *The longer the period of time between*



acceptance of the job and the start date, the more likely the candidate/new hire won't show up.

They don't stop courting the candidate after they have accepted the job. They keep them engaged until they start the job and they've been there for awhile.

They don't lose contact with any runner-up candidates they might have. They inform them that while they have made a selection, they liked them also and, if for one reason or another the new hire doesn't work out, they'd like to call them.

They don't assume a candidate/new hire won't be aggressively pursued by other organizations that he or she is close to an offer with. In fact, candidates are sometimes perceived to be more valuable when someone else has offered them a job. They also do not assume an employee candidate/new hire is not going to be presented with a counter offer by his present employer. No matter how much the candidate/new hire insists that he or she is leaving their present employment, when their ego is stroked, they may change their mind.

They don't assume that just because the candidate/new hire has started the new job, that he or she isn't still getting calls from other recruiters or companies they were close to getting offers from.

WHAT THE BEST HIRING AUTHORITIES DO

They do keep the candidate engaged with their company between the date of acceptance and the start date. The further out the start date is, the more they personally involve the new hire before they officially start work. They take them to lunch two or three times, invite them to any company functions, i.e. Christmas parties, happy hours, or company picnics. They



have some of their potential peers call them, welcome them to the company, or take them to lunch. One of our clients gives a candidate/new hire an assignment to come up with a thirty, sixty, or ninety-day business plan the day they're hired and invites them to lunch to review it three or four days later. Any activity that keeps the candidate/new hire engaged with your company will work.

They send the candidate/new hire's family a "woo package" welcoming them to the company. A "woo package" can be anything from a basket of fruit, a bottle of wine, gift certificates to a fancy steakhouse, or T-shirts and trinkets for the kids. These should be sent with a personal note welcoming the whole family to the company. One of our clients a few years ago gave to our candidate and his son a half a day of deep sea fishing on one of the days the family was in town to house hunt. Another client sent our candidate and his family an expense-paid weekend ski trip to Colorado before he started the job. Another one sent press releases to their customers and local papers with the candidate/new hire's picture announcing his joining the firm before he started.

These efforts are worth every bit of the cost. (It's rare for a candidate to not show up to the new job when his or her family has been welcomed by some kind of gesture like this. Who is going to run the risk of having their twelve-year-old say, "Mommy, those people gave us a night at Six Flags. How could you not go to work there?")

The best hiring authorities assume that if employed, the candidate/new hire is going to be presented with a counteroffer. They discuss with the candidate/new hire the possibility of counteroffers. They know exactly what the probabilities of



him or her getting presented a counteroffer and what their reaction will be. They download our article on counteroffers and actually share it with the candidate at the time they make the candidate an offer.

They discuss with the candidate/new hire any other offers that he or she might have or is expecting to get. They find out, in detail, what the candidate/new hire thinks about each one.

They keep selling the “romance” with the candidate/new hire even after they’ve started the job. They reinforce the fact that the candidate made a great decision to go to work with them and help them to acclimate and to appreciate the newness they’re experiencing.

The best hiring authorities are prepared for Murphy’s Law . . . and he’s an optimist.