

Increase Your Firm's Employment-Offer Acceptance Rate

Take time early in the recruitment process to validate an individual's motivators for making a job change.

By *Jeremy Cepin*

Does this story sound familiar? It is the middle of August—prime “experienced candidate recruiting season”—and you are hiring for a critical position within your firm. The position requires the prospect to have expertise in a very specific area. A “perfect” candidate—at least on paper—is generated, whether internally or through a third-party recruiter, and you are extremely excited to interview and recruit this individual. After all, a candidate like this is extremely hard to come by, and your firm is losing money by not being able to provide a particular service to current clients. During the initial meeting with the prospective candidate, you quickly go through the particulars of the prospect's experience and skill sets. You hurriedly move on to the information-dump stage where you drone on and on about your firm's amazing client base, phenomenal marketplace reputation, opportunities for career advancement afforded to employees, and all of the other reasons why the candidate should work for your firm. Fast-forward several weeks to the moment where you extend an employment offer to the candidate, only to have the person turn down your offer and remain with his or her current firm. You throw your hands up in frustration and exclaim, “A month has gone by and I'm back to square one! Where did I go wrong?”

You are probably expecting me to say that you should have talked less and listened more. Although more listening and less talking is always a best practice in recruiting experienced professionals, the fact of the matter is you were so enamored with the individual's pedigree and experience—and you were so eager to sell the opportunity to work for your firm—that you forgot to dig deep into the candidate's reasons for making a job change.

Work with the right candidates

Individuals are compelled to seek new job opportunities for a spectrum of different reasons.

It is imperative that your firm has the ability to carefully, efficiently, and diligently qualify prospective em-

ployees at the onset of the relationship. Employing a replicable qualifying process that consistently poses thoughtful and insightful questions will provide you with two primary benefits:

1. *You will be able to distinguish which prospect should be considered for employment.* Separating prospects on the basis of how they respond to your qualifying questions helps ensure that you are working with real candidates, who have real motivations for considering change.
2. *You will save time.* By concentrating on working with the right individuals, you will save yourself a considerable amount of time and potential heartache, especially during the back-end phases of the recruitment lifecycle.

Career-change motivators

It is critically important that you pursue a distinct line of qualifying questions when you initiate contact with a prospective candidate to determine if the prospect is genuinely interested in considering your firm's opportunity. Skills, abilities, and other necessary characteristics aside, you must strive to understand the specific issues or factors that are compelling the prospect to entertain the possibility of making a career change. A partial list of motivators would include the following:

- belief that his or her career has stagnated;
- perception that advancement is largely tied to the departure or promotion of a superior;
- quality-of-life issues (*e.g.*, excessive work demands, miserable commute, or extensive travel);
- major life changes (*e.g.*, birth of a child, eldercare, or family health issues);
- perception that a clear growth path is not available or is solely dependent on a time in grade formula;
- perception that existing advancement structures and/or managerial factors are impairments to meaningful career growth;
- concerns about an employer's stability or viability;

- concerns relative to peers or supervisors; or
- belief that he or she is undercompensated for work performed.

Any of these factors could be regarded as a legitimate reason for an individual to consider a career change. There are other reasons as well. As a rule, you must determine the extent or degree to which prospective candidates have candidly addressed their particular motivators with their current employers. The reason that you must make this determination is because you are attempting to identify a “validated career-change motivator.”

Validated career-change motivators

A validated career-change motivator exists only when a prospective candidate has unsuccessfully endeavored to correct whatever he or she identifies to be lacking with a current role or employer. In other words, if a prospect tells you he or she wants to leave his or her current employer in order to significantly reduce the daily commute, you need to validate that the prospect has explored commuting alternatives with the current employer to no avail. You need to know that the prospect has inquired about working from home or requested a modified work schedule and has been told that this request cannot be accommodated. You need to know that the current employer is unwilling or incapable of offering the individual a remedy to whatever issue has been named as the catalyst for contemplating a job change in the first place.

In many instances, prospects will acknowledge that they have unsuccessfully attempted to address their issues with their supervisors. If this is the case, you theoretically have a validated motivator and can proceed knowing that a candidate has done his or her due diligence to resolve an issue with a current employer, but has not achieved an acceptable resolution.

If a prospective recruit indicates that an issue or multiple issues have *not* been candidly addressed, you need to encourage the prospect to do so for several reasons:

- *You lessen the potential for a counter offer.* You do not want to get to the offer stage with the prospect only to have the candidate tell you that he or she has decided to accept a counter offer from the current employer because “the firm was able to address the very issues that were motivating me to consider new opportunities.” This is a very common occurrence, and it is almost impossible to persuade the individual to reverse the decision.
- *You reinforce your firm’s value proposition.* If a prospect is unsuccessful in resolving a problem or defi-

ciency with his or her current employer, any counter offer that is subsequently put forth by the employer is going to seem disingenuous. The candidate will be forced to reconcile why it took resigning to obtain a resolution to a problem that had earlier been categorized as being unfixable.

- *You are in the trusted advisor position.* Sincerely recommending that a prospective recruit candidly communicate with his or her current employer about a career concern or issue keeps you in the advisor position. You present yourself as being legitimately interested and concerned about helping the individual make an informed decision that best serves his or her career.

Ask yourself three questions

As a rule, regardless of the prospective candidate’s stated motivator, you need to ask yourself three important questions:

1. Can this person’s issues within his or her current work environment be reasonably resolved?
2. Has this individual proactively attempted to resolve the issues that have been cited?
3. Do the prospective candidate’s motivators make sense?

A large part of being an effective recruiter is accepting that candidates will do what they perceive to be in their own best interest. This is why it is critically important that you and the candidate both understand and work toward eliminating any ambiguity around motivators. Failure to do so is an invitation for offer rejections, accepted counter offers, and wasted time.

Failure to achieve a resolution

Although there are no guarantees regarding job-change motivators, you want to hear a prospect indicate that no resolution has been achieved with a current employer despite multiple attempts to address key job concerns. To the extent possible, you want candidates to recognize and acknowledge that larger problems exist with their current employer and these issues are unlikely to miraculously vanish.

Beware if compensation is the primary career-change motivator

Be careful if the prospect’s primary motivation for pursuing a new job opportunity is to make more money. Many firms have concluded that making a salary ad-

justment to secure the ongoing services of a valued employee is a better option than allowing the person to leave the firm. If the candidate possesses specific skills or knowledge, the loss of this specific expertise is unnerving and something many employers will go to great lengths to avoid.

You need to understand the resolve of any prospect whose primary motivator for making a move is tied directly to securing higher compensation. You must know how he or she would react if the current employer matches or exceeds any offer extended by your organization. You have a counter-offer scenario in the making if the prospect cannot definitively state that he or she would reject a proposal to coerce them to stay at the current firm.

The sooner you can accurately determine the motivation that is driving a candidate to pursue a career change, the greater your odds of making a job offer that will be accepted by the prospect. If you do not understand exactly what the candidate is looking for—and whether

the new job satisfies those needs—you will run the risk of flying blind. And that's a frightening position to be in when you must find the ideal employee with specific expertise for a critical position within your firm.

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