

WALK IN THE SHOES OF AN APPLICANT

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If we have been listening to the stories job seekers tell us, most of Corporate America still doesn't get it. In a highly competitive labor market, applicants are our customers. But too many of us who occupy the recruiter's desk continue to act as gatekeepers, herding them like sheep through our cumbersome processes at our convenience, not theirs.

Many who have tried to reinvent their employment processes have just created new gauntlets for applicants to suffer. Perhaps we are too close to the forest to see the trees. When we look at our processes from within our own shoes, we don't see what the applicant sees or experiences. So, why not take a walk in the applicant's shoes?

Before you tinker with your own process, try to go out as an applicant and apply to other firms in your area or industry. Get yourself and other members of your team invited to interviews with your competitors. See what they do to make you feel special and wanted, and what they do or don't do that turns you off.

With an applicant's eye, evaluate the timeliness, responsiveness, friendliness, professionalism, and courtesy with which you are treated. Ask yourself these questions: Did you feel like a VIP or just another person in a parade of many? Did anyone describe the work role they would like you to play or do anything to get you interested in or excited about the job? Did any of the interviewers ask about your needs and expectations, or did they just talk about themselves? Did they give you a chance to see where you would be working, who you would be working with, and any of the amenities the company offers its employees, or did they just give you a general written description of these things?

Pay attention, as well, to what happens after the interview. We often put our professional credibility at stake when we promise to "be back in touch" within a few days, but then take a week or two before we actually get around to it. The courteous and professional thing to do is to communicate within the time frame promised, whether we are saying, "Sorry, no thanks," or just asking for a little more time. Surely, it only takes a minute or two to send an email or leave a voice mail. Unfortunately, many recruiters drop the ball here. Truly, from the applicant's perspective, any news is better than no news.

By gaining the perspective of the real customer of our processes, we should be able to make changes that can significantly affect our fill times, recruiting costs, and acceptance rates.

Making changes to a process that may have been in place for a long time will take courage, conviction, and cooperation from the entire recruiting team. There may be several people who will feel threatened by proposed changes because, in many cases, their roles in the process have provided them job security. However, in the increasingly competitive labor market, we put the future of our companies at risk by maintaining the status quo.

As I see it, we have two choices: live with our old process and keep getting the same old paycheck for a little while longer, or change and improve it and be recognized, rewarded, and—possibly—promoted for it.

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