

TAYLOR OSBORNE
Executive Research



Spark, a New Zealand telecom company, recently suffered an internet blackout, nothing unusual there, but what was unusual is that affected customers were defending the company on social media, a company which wasn't even providing the service they were being paid for!

The Golden Goose

Most recruiters are guilty of one core sin. Recruiters have been known to place all of their efforts, energies and resources on the golden goose, the one candidate that we feel can give the best, immediate return on our time. Unfortunately this results in poor service for the 99% of candidates who don't get the job. Rather than solely annoying most of your candidates, a poor experience can act as the antithesis of the brand image a company is trying to build. For Airbnb 53% of job applicants only had their candidate experience on which to base their view of the company. Failure to provide a positive experience can alienate your customer base and useful potential talent of the future. Candidate experience is frequently referred to in the abstract, vague notions of what should happen, when it should happen, but with no concrete pillars to support the construction of significant improvement.

The key factors

Alterations to the hiring experience cannot be centrally orchestrated, rather they must be influenced by the individuals who have journeyed through the process. The best people to give this feedback are your new hires, essentially a candidate onboarding service. Acting to discover why these people chose your company and describe the process allows for feedback on the process from those who have most recently been through it. All data in relation to maximising the effectiveness of your candidate experience must come from this population.

The most important underlying themes for creating this experience are streamlining the process, communicating in a manner appropriate for your company, giving feedback to rejected clients and allowing candidates to reflect on the experience. Ideally the fulfilment of these criteria will lead to satisfied, rejected candidates, who are not just neutral towards the company but believe in it and its message.

From the start of the process it is vital to ensure that the correct expectations on both are set. There is nothing worse than losing candidates half way through the process because one of you didn't ask the right question. To do this focus on ensuring that job specifications are clear as to the required skill set or years of experience required, generic descriptions are not useful when specifics could be used.

The process itself should be as straight forward and customer focussed as possible. It is necessary to view candidates as customers and put as much time and effort into the recruitment process design as

other product channels. Great candidates are frequently oversubscribed and are unlikely to devote time to shifting through a poorly designed and complex application process. Great processes include rapid responses to candidate applications alongside the easy availability of information related to the process. Both of these criteria relate strongly to setting candidate expectations from the beginning of the process.

Avoiding common mistakes

Unfortunately most companies use standardised formats for applications received or rejection templates, meaning that there is no individual personality associated with the company. For attracting high calibre candidates who value the employment culture this is the most deleterious part of the experience. Cooperative communications are a key method to make your company stand out. Avoid plain uninteresting documents, instead focus on engaging material which sells your company's mission and values. Frequently it is the employees themselves, rather than recruiters who do this the best, allowing the candidate to really understand if employees are passionate about the organisation. Leverage the personal stories that your employees have, talk about how the company came together as one team and do in video format, allowing for a much more organic and natural delivery. Focus on making the candidate have certain feelings and knowledge, rather than a prescriptive criteria and remember that while every candidate is unique it is vital to always sell the company.

Every candidate, at every stage of the process must have the chance to express their opinion, through open ended process feedback. Essentially if candidates are able to state their views on the company, they are less likely to post negative views online. Not only does the negative aspect of their experience remain internalised, but the open nature of the commentary allows for improvement within the process. Identifying the outcomes and how candidates feel about the experience can allow for assessment of where and how the process is breaking down, perhaps people do not object to being declined but may object to the use of a standardised template or timescale.

Giving candidates useful feedback

It is important to bear in mind that the process of constructive useful feedback must flow both ways. Generic communications simply stating cultural incompatibility are not helpful to candidates, rather feedback should be specific and tailored to the individual. Constructive feedback outlining why a candidate was not suitable tends to be much better received, and lends the company well to future applications once such concerns have been addressed.

The culminations of these actions creates a positive, clear process tailored to suitable applicants. Rather than attracting inappropriate candidates through an unclear job posting, clear and concise information reduces the applicant pool but allows for the most suitable individuals to be targeted. Emphasising the company culture allows for the attraction of candidates who share in the cultural norms and values of the company. This maximises the efficiency of the process and allows for candidates to proceed through the recruitment cycle at a greater rate, with up to 50% drop in the time from application to hire. All of these steps improve the journey for the candidate, but also for the company. Giving and receiving feedback allows for a two way flow of information, leading to an improvement in the company's process but also in candidate perception. Unsuccessful candidates with a focus for improvement have a much brighter view of the company in the long run.

Final thoughts

Ultimately a great candidate experience for the 99 people who didn't get the job gives the company 100 brand ambassadors instead of just one. If done correctly customers begin to advocate for the company, based solely on positive candidate engagement, so when you make mistakes they are not as fatal as they may once have been.