

Paint an Accurate Picture for Prospective Employees

When you think about the employees you have had that didn't work out, how many of them were just fundamentally incompatible with your organization, and on a trajectory for that unfortunate ending right from the start? In order to hire people who are compatible with your organization and predisposed to succeed in your culture, you must paint an accurate picture of your company to prospective employees. This may sound obvious, but there are two reasons why this often doesn't occur:

1. Companies “oversell” to prospective employees – particularly to highly qualified top talent.

Overselling anything often comes back to bite us, but perhaps never more than when overselling to prospective employees who quickly discover what it is really like to work for your company. If it's different from what you portrayed, the trust that is fundamental to inspire employee loyalty is compromised before you even begin. The bigger the disparity between how you portray your organization and their actual experience, the less likely they are to apply their best efforts to your company.

2. You can't accurately portray what you don't understand. Many organizations don't really have a solid understanding of their own culture from the employees' perspective. I have interviewed employees in dozens of companies, and in every case, management has been surprised by findings that emerge. In many cases, the issues were plain to see, but management wasn't looking - or really listening, such as during exit interviews with unhappy employees who are leaving.

Overcoming the challenge

I recently worked with a marketing agency that suffered from high employee turnover and a demoralized workforce as employees grew frustrated with the last-minute culture of the organization and the anxiety it created. The principals were concerned that they had a culture that didn't foster happy, long term employees. But the solution in this case wasn't to change their culture, but rather to do a better job of *communicating* their culture to prospective employees – to communicate the “pending reality” of what it would really be like to work there.

We scripted an explanation that the partners began to include in interviews with prospective employees. It went something like this: “You know, we have somewhat of a last-minute culture around here. We meet our commitments to our clients, but we frequently burn the midnight oil when we are coming up on a deadline and things can get pretty frenetic. We've managed to build a team that works well in this environment, so if this sounds like a place that would energize you – great, let's talk further - but if not, well, it's better that we bring it up now.”

This scenario is a good example of a situation in which both factors described above came into play. The partners hadn't exactly been broadcasting their last-minute style, and they really didn't understand the full impact it was having on creating an environment in which people aren't motivated to do their best work. This small shift in approach was pivotal in helping them overcome their turnover and employee issues, and allowed prospective employees to sort themselves in or out based on a real understanding of the culture of the organization.

You may be thinking that it sounds crazy to “scare off” potential employees, but ultimately you won’t benefit from hiring people who don’t work out. Remember, hiring them – convincing someone to join your firm – is actually the easy part. The hard part is delivering on the promises you make (or imply) during your pre-hire presentation. When you consider the cost of hiring and rehiring, and the impact that underperformers and disgruntled employees have on the rest of the company, it’s best to let the incompatible ones get away – even the talented ones.

Ross Mitchel is President of *Implementations, Inc.*, a consulting practice that helps businesses improve their performance and profitability. Contact Ross at 401.632.4048 or ross@implementationsinc.com.