

HELP WANTED

RECRUITING TOP TALENT IN A TIGHT LABOR MARKET BY MATT STILES



A CLIENT OF MINE ONCE REFERRED TO A STACK OF UNQUALIFIED, AVERAGE RESUMES AS A "PILE OF LLOYD DOBLERS," referring to John Cusack's character in the 1989 flick, *Say Anything*, who although universally loveable, lacked occupational direction: "I don't want to sell anything, buy anything, or process anything as a career. I don't want to sell anything bought or processed, or buy anything sold or processed, or process anything sold, bought, or processed, or repair anything sold, bought, or processed. You know, as a career, I don't want to do that."

SEARCHING HIGH AND LOW

If your business is struggling—like most South Florida employers—to recruit new employees, you probably need someone who can sell, buy or process. And you probably need an employee with some experience at it, too. Finding a qualified applicant, let alone the perfect applicant, is an arduous challenge. You've got job descriptions to write, advertisements to place, resumes and applications to sort, time-consuming and awkward interviews to conduct, and legal risk at every turn. But don't despair. By having a hiring game plan in place, you can avoid getting bogged down with average results and get the edge on your competition.

1. Don't place a job ad before you have a written, reasonable and accurate job description. If you've ever been on the receiving end of a lazy boss who asked you to write your own job description, you may have good reason to think job descriptions are worthless. But meaningful, written job descriptions are extremely valuable recruitment, management, discipline and legal defense tools for every business. That's too powerful a tool to be done sloppily or left in

the hands of the employee to write. For now, we'll focus on the job description as a recruitment tool.

Your written job description should cover three areas: responsibilities, business values, and qualifications. First, the job description should provide a summary of all major, minor and occasional job responsibilities. If you want to enlist employee help drafting the job description, get an employee to write down all of her responsibilities. The usual result is an exhaustive list of duties—an exhaustive, but reasonable and accurate list is what you want. Job responsibilities should be listed in descending order of importance. Second, spend some time thinking about which of your core business values absolutely must be embraced by the employee to meet the job responsibilities. If your business has a commitment to high quality products and helpful customer service, your job descriptions should require employees to perform with a commitment to high quality and courteous, helpful customer service. Nearly all jobs require employees to endure job-related stress, participate in team work, and get along with others. While these seem like obvious requirements, you still need to come out and say so in your job descriptions. Finally, review your listed job responsibilities and business values and determine which qualifications you require and which you prefer.

Required and preferred job qualifications are not only important to communicating the job to potential recruits, but they have legal significance as key criteria for analyzing your selection decision. Required or "minimum" qualifications must be absolutely essential to doing the job. For example, you can't require a high school diploma for a bricklaying job. You can only require qualifications relevant to being a bricklayer, such as prior bricklaying experience. Still, between three bricklayer applicants, each

with the same experience, the one with a preferred qualification of a high school diploma might break the three-way tie.

2. Write an effective job ad. Now that you've got your job description in hand, it's time to advertise your job. Gone are the days of "ASS. MGR. FF. FT/PT. 3yr- Exp Nec. N/S. AIP," which translates to "Assistant Manager. Fast food. Full time or part time. Three years of experience necessary. Non-smoker. Apply in person." There's nothing easy or eye-catching about that classified job ad and businesses are finally figuring that out. Still, if you absolutely have to abbreviate the words associate or assistant, spend the extra fifty cents for "assist." or "assoc." but don't use "ass." Nobody wants to apply to be an "ass. mgr."

Savvy businesses pay as much thoughtful consideration to their job ads as they do their consumer ads. It's possible to create an ad that is both easy to read and enticing without breaking the budget. The content is still the most important part. Your ad should list all minimum qualifications, and if you know you're going to be overwhelmed with responses, cut out some of the weakest responses by listing your preferred qualifications. These will come directly from your written job description. If there's something particularly alluring about your job, like free room and board, company-paid advanced training, flexible hours or meaningful opportunities for advancement, say so. Your Assistant Manager job ad doesn't need to be a treatise on employment, but it does need to easily communicate what the job requires, what it's about and what, if anything, makes it more spectacular than the other "ass. mgr." jobs listed next to it.

In tight labor markets, one of the most used but least successful recruitment >>

>> tools is the sign-on bonus. It works well if you just need a warm body in the job, but if you're looking for a quality hire, don't advertise a sign-on bonus. Businesses who advertise sign-on bonuses experience the economic principle of "adverse selection," meaning they end up with recruits who needed the \$2,500 sign-on bonus, not necessarily the job. If the new hire doesn't work out, collecting a repayment of that sign-on bonus frequently costs more than it's worth. If it's quality and not quantity you're trying to hire and you're going to offer a sign-on bonus, keep it to yourself until you've found the best-qualified candidate.

Make sure your job ads are consistent with equal employment opportunity laws. If you're a federal contractor, chances are you're required to disclose in all job ads that you are an equal opportunity employer. You non-federal contractors shouldn't let the fed guys take all the credit for fair employment practices, so consider sticking it in your ads, too. Also, unless an employee of a particular gender is an absolute necessity for the work (for example, a female to be a female bathroom attendant), job ads should never specify a preferred gender, even if it may seem inherent to the work. Restaurant "hostess" may be what comes to mind, but you have to consider male applicants, too, so advertise for a "host/hostess." Likewise, a "stock boy"

is a "stocker." Practicing good equal employment opportunity and avoiding employment litigation starts with your job ad.


3. Locate your target. The traditional, classified newspaper ad is becoming less effective as a stand-alone recruitment tool. The Internet revolution, with its full spectrum of job seekers—many of whom aren't sincere or don't even meet the minimum qualifications for a job—has only compounded the employer's challenge of separating the cream from the not-so-cream. With Sarasota's unemployment rate hovering around 3.2 percent, employers need to be much more creative when it comes to locating the right applicant pool.

Before you fax in that tired classified newspaper ad, think first about your target recruit, what professional, service, or other industry organizations she might be a member of, where she might spend her down time, what special interest publications she might read and how to reach her with each. In this market, your potential recruit may not even be looking for a job today or she may be employed by your competitor. In the search for the best talent, you're one step behind if you fail to target these potential recruits.

Need to hire a UNIX operating system technician? Skip the newspaper ad and recruit at a UNIX blog like RootPrompt.org or in the UNIX forum at Nabble.com,

where interested systems technicians chat. Want to hire an engineer? Consider sending a creative announcement to the Tampa Bay Area chapter of the National Society of Black Engineers. Looking for a sales representative fluent in Spanish? Turn to *7Dias*, the Spanish language newspaper with a weekly circulation of 25,000 throughout the Tampa Bay area. Need to hire a new bartender? Rub elbows with potential recruits at Minxx nightclub's weekly Service Industry Employee Night.

Targeted recruiting must be consistent with the laws of equal employment opportunity, meaning that you give all qualified applicants the same opportunity, regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age or disability.

For your business to win the competition for talent, remember the goals of equal employment opportunity, but use some creativity and market to your pool of potential applicants with the same fervor you market to your potential customers. If you do, it will make the difference between hiring top talent and endlessly sorting through a pile of perhaps loveable but unqualified Lloyd Doblars. Next month we'll look at the Art of the Interview and explore more creative but easy ways to convert your newfound pool of talent into new hires. 

**BEFORE YOU FAX
IN THAT TIRED
CLASSIFIED NEWSPA-
PER AD, THINK FIRST
ABOUT YOUR TAR-
GET RECRUIT, WHAT
PROFESSIONAL,
SERVICE, OR OTHER
INDUSTRY ORGANI-
ZATIONS SHE MIGHT
BE A MEMBER OF,
WHERE SHE MIGHT
SPEND DOWN TIME,
WHAT SPECIAL
INTEREST PUBLICA-
TIONS SHE MIGHT
READ, AND HOW
TO REACH HER
WITH EACH.**

LEARN MORE

Creative Hiring: Google's GLAT

The industry-leading, cutting-edge businesses are using electronic media in much more creative formats to find qualified talent. Take Google, for example. In late 2004, the search engine company sent the Google Labs Aptitude Test (known as GLAT among tech geeks) to a number of colleges, universities and tech industry-related websites. The 21-question GLAT format mocked the standardized tests we all took in school, but asked its test-takers some of the toughest brain-bending questions, such as "In your opinion, what is the most beautiful math equation ever derived?" Another question provided a blank rectangular space and asked the test-taker to fill the space "with something that improves upon emptiness." The GLAT, which, according to Google, was a marketing tool and not a pre-employment test, became a recruiting phenomenon. Math, engineering, and computer science whizzes, allured by Google's elevation of brainy to cool, were practically beating down Google's virtual door to submit resumes.

Matt Stiles, born and raised in Bradenton, Florida, is chief employment counsel to Regions Financial Corporation and adjunct professor of law at The University of Alabama School of Law. In addition to practicing law, Stiles is a Certified Master Gardener, an ordained minister, and an amateur taxidermist.