

# Keeping Candidates Interested

BY TIMOTHY R. JOHNSON

**The economy won't stay down forever, so it's a good idea to maintain relationships with potential employees who are waiting on-deck for when work picks up.**

**WHEN WORK SLOWS DOWN**, firms subsequently slow down hiring. No surprise there; it's simple business math. Less work equals not only fewer projects to keep employees busy and productive, but also less money in the budget to pay new hires. So, yes, even though there are benefits to recruiting when work is slow, many companies hold off on hiring new staff members.

Sometimes a slowdown in work is foreseen well in advance. But sometimes it happens all at once. And sometimes it happens when in the midst of actively recruiting new top-talent employees. When that occurs, firms are faced with a tough decision. Let's say you have a great candidate whom you've recruited for a key position in your firm, one who is both highly qualified and seriously interested in joining your organization. Then your firm loses a big project unexpectedly. Work dries up faster than anticipated, as the scorching rays of a slow economy beat down from every angle. Do you hire the candidate even though the work and the finances are no longer there? Do you turn down a top-notch prospective employee and let him or her stay on board with your competitor, or even lose the candidate to yet another competitor? Though this may seem like an "A" or "B" decision, the best approach is option "C." That approach is to keep the candidate interested in the opportunity with your firm—without seeming to simply string him or her along—until work picks up again and you can safely make that key hire. Here are some things to consider:

## **Schedule additional interviews.**

If an initial interview has already taken place, set up a day and time a week or two out to have the candidate come back and meet with you again. Include additional decision makers in subsequent interviews and allow the candidate to meet one-on-one with peer employees as well. Not only will this keep the candidate in the process and interested, it will also allow the candidate to learn more about your firm in a rewarding fashion—and allow you to learn even more about the candidate.

## **Keep in regular contact with the candidate.**

One of the biggest mistakes that I've seen many firms make is to let too much time lapse between communications with a candidate. This gives the impression to the candidate that he or she has been forgotten, suggesting that the company is not interested in him or her, even when that is surely not the case. The easiest way to avoid this is to maintain regular contact. Place a call or simply send an email to the candidate every week with an update or just to touch base. This lets the

prospective hire know that you're still thinking about him or her, and thus are still interested. Do this in a professional but friendly approach, and don't be afraid to, as some say, "show some love" in letting the candidate know that his or her time and patience are greatly appreciated. Quite simply, this will help to keep the candidate interested, as well.

## **Give the candidate further information to review.**

During an additional interview or in an e-mail, give the candidate more information about your firm for his or her perusal. This information can be an outline of your firm's benefits package, notes on an exciting project your firm is currently handling, details on your strategic plan, or simply results from a client or employee survey. Again, this helps to keep the candidate well informed and maintains his or her interest as time passes.

## **Offer an approximate timeline.**

If trying to buy time, be sure not to waste any, be it the candidate's or your own. If you anticipate your firm will win a new job and allow you to make the new hire in a month, let the candidate know that he or she could expect an offer within a month's time. If you honestly don't know when you will be able to make the hire, be honest with the candidate. Usually, gainfully employed recruits will not be in any rush to jump ship, so make it clear that you are still interested but also not in a rush.

## **Explain the importance of the hire.**

Let the candidate know that the position for which he or she is being considered is of high importance to your firm—as every key hire should be. Make it clear that while you do want to see the position filled, you want to assure that due diligence is followed to be certain that both sides are satisfied.

Following these steps can go a long way in maintaining the interest of a top-talent individual who would surely benefit your firm. Beyond that, it can also help to create a positive image of your firm within your industry. When firms ignore recruits whom they've interviewed or try to rekindle forgotten relationships with prospective hires, this can eventually create bad feelings. Understandably, when work dries up, companies focus their time and efforts on winning new jobs, as they should. Just don't neglect promising recruits during such situations or you may lose great potential employees once you win new work. **MSC**

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