

# Avoid Recruiting Disaster!

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**Improper recruiting** of call center management has cost firms tens of thousands and sometimes millions of dollars. Management turnover, increased operating costs, lost sales revenue and high turnover of clients as a result are relatively routine. One would think that with 8.5 million Americans looking for work, it should be easy to find the right person for the job.

Not so, says the *Wall Street Journal*: "...locating applicants with the right skills has proven as tough, if not tougher, than during boom times."

Reasons for this phenomenon are legion. In general, people looking for new positions are being much less selective and are applying for positions for which they are not really suited. Shifting through these applicants makes for difficult analysis. Those call center employers using Internet job boards are being flooded with resumes that don't fit the job openings.

Dan Kaplan, Director of Recruiting at mortgage giant Fannie Mae, says, "Our officers are getting inundated.... It muddles up your thinking. You may settle for



## Dos and Don'ts:

1. **Do** make hiring management your top priority. The quality of your management team affects revenues, expenses and virtually all call center performance. Sadly, however, most firms put recruiting at the bottom of their priorities. The list goes something like this: put out fires, close new business, and when you have time and get around to it, work on recruiting. Few understand that the right call center executive personnel can put out your fires and acquire new business.

2. **Don't** have inexperienced employees conduct the search. Get involved completely, especially if the position is a direct report. Most people do not have a good eye for judging talent and become enamored by folks that interview well, but have little substance. Being involved yourself ensures you don't let the really good candidates get away.

3. **Do** create precise, but reasonable, expectations. Think through the "must have" requirements vs. the "nice to have" ones. Often companies filling call center positions feel they need someone from their same industry to manage their call center. This

eliminates more than 95 percent of the potential candidates.

4. **Don't** hire by committee. Often a half dozen people are asked to conduct interviews on behalf of "the boss." Unfortunately, these interviews often get bogged down by logistics, time and a watered-down consensus. Interviewers may feel they are required to list their candidate reservations as well as strengths. After the committee gets done with their consolidated list of negatives, the ultimate hiring manager may not even meet appropriate candidates.

5. **Do** ask relevant questions and use the same evaluation matrix for all candidates. To ask one call center candidate one set of questions and another candidate an entirely different set is mixing apples with oranges. At the end, it's very difficult to compare.

6. **Don't** hire relatives, friends or former associates just "because." We've seen a lot of great call center management candidates passed over because of "internal hires." If things don't work out well, there are a lot of personal issues to deal with. A hiring man-

ager puts his or her own job on the line when upper-level subordinates fail.

7. **Do** check references yourself if you are the hiring manager. Don't depend upon intermediaries or search firms to do this for you. One CEO of a multimillion dollar call center service agency always conducts his own reference checks on vice president candidates that may report to him. He correctly believes that a mistake at that level could be too damaging to his company in both lost revenues and/or opportunities. Intermediaries may not ask the right questions or might interpret information incorrectly.



Search firms, even when trying to remain neutral, still have biases on behalf of their own candidates. To think otherwise is to defy human nature.

8. **Don't** lowball the offer. One of the worst things that a company can do after courting a premium candidate, often for a lengthy period, is to make a substantially under-market offer. The call center management candidate will often become exasperated and indignant and may not be open to further negotiations. He or she may think, "If the company is that stupid or cheap, it's not worth considering."

less than an ideal candidate because it's so easy to."

Other sloppy recruiting issues abound within our industry. The following "Dos" and "Don'ts" should help to delineate problem areas and what should be done about them.

Finally, remember that overall communications need to be stellar within your organization to properly and effectively recruit your management team. Too often poor communications—both internal within hiring companies and external between companies, search firms and candidates—can stall or squelch the deal.

Be sure that you have prompt, responsive voice communications and that your written correspondence is top notch throughout the process—from setting job specifications through accepting an offer. Since this behavior is the cornerstone of what we teach and train our phone representatives, it should be the foundation of how we recruit and select them as well. CP

9. **Do** hire the very best candidate, not the cheapest. Think best value. Many call center executives will subjugate great candidates because they're not local, are represented by a search firm, or cost \$10,000 more. This is a huge mistake when millions of dollars may be at stake. Businesses can often rise or fall depending upon the quality of their senior call center management—both in sales and operations.

10. **Don't** overlook a premier candidate who's a little different. For example, we've actually seen several call center service agency clients pass over a managing sales executive who had a verifiable pipeline of over \$1 billion dollars in outsourced call center business. Call center service agencies often try to slot their executive sales managers/ reps into one vertical or another, not realizing that a few can manage and sell across-the-board extremely well. Operations examples also abound. The ingenious, creative, multi-talented and brilliant call center candidates are often passed by simply because they don't fit the typical old organizational mold. Consider that even Albert Einstein failed in one of his math classes. He just was not conventional enough.

Improve  
first call  
resolution.

Improve  
up-selling.

Improve  
agent  
retention.