



# High-Tech, High-Touch Recruitment: An Oxymoron?

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- ▶ A combination of factors has diluted the recruitment experience and created a confluence of elements similar to a perfect storm.
- ▶ Recruitment has morphed from a high-touch experience to a high-tech process.
- ▶ Though we can't go back to those halcyon pre-Internet days, we do need to find a better approach than our current technology-based, fragmented recruitment process.
- ▶ The ideal recruitment scenario would be a marriage of high tech and high touch.
- ▶ We must drive the technology, not let the technology dictate our process.



Karen A. Hart

**O**UR COMPANY WORKS closely with clients on recruitment process issues, consulting on those processes through onsite assessments, and Mystery Shops of the recruitment process. Our many years' experience in this arena has convinced me that although each institution's issues may be organizationally specific, the overall big picture is common to the

majority of organizations. And although my group concentrates on health care, our findings are certainly not limited to health care, as our experience transcends the health care industry.

We have lost our way. A combination of factors has diluted the recruitment experience and created a confluence of elements similar to a perfect storm. Recruitment has morphed from a high-touch experience to a high-tech process. And we have lost the most basic premise, that people should be treated with dignity, care, and consideration.

### A Little History

I was in a local emergency room with a family member recently, and was struck by a couple of things. One was a lack of warmth on the part of the staff. The other really striking observation was the

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nearly total lack of human touch. My family member was experiencing chest pain and was immediately connected to the pulse oximeter and cardiac monitor. An EKG was taken an hour or so later and a heparin lock attached after blood was drawn. At no time during this process did a nurse or a physician perform a hands-on physical evaluation. All professional eyes were locked on the monitor screen, not the patient. *High tech — low touch.*

Musing on this experience led me to draw some comparisons to today's standard recruitment process, in which an applicant submits a résumé or application online and then hopes for the best.

In the "old days," before the Internet, an applicant might have spent a good deal of time crafting a résumé, selecting appropriate paper, and drafting a cover letter. This hard copy résumé and cover letter were then sent via "snail" mail or by Fax to the recruiter at the health care facility or facilities the individual was interested in. Occasionally, individuals actually dropped off the résumé in the recruitment office.

The recruiter then read the cover letter, "touched" the résumé, doing a quick analysis and comparison to openings and applicant skills, background, experience, etc. If the applicant's education, background, and skills fit an opening or openings, an interview was set up with a recruiter followed by an interview with a hiring manager. These interviews were scheduled on the same day.

At the time of the interview, handshakes were exchanged, the recruiter noted the candidate's dress and demeanor, and a person-to-person exchange occurred during the interview process. That human connection was made immediately. The applicant had a face and a history, likes and dislikes, a personality. If background and reference checks were good, and the recruiter and the hiring manager conducting the interviews found the experience and skills they were seeking, a match would be made. And the entire process could be completed in a few days, depending on schedules and background and reference checking. *Low tech — high touch.*

How different the process is now. And though we can't go back to those halcyon pre-Internet days, we do need to find a better approach than our current technology-based, fragmented recruitment process.

### How It Works Now

The majority of companies now accept only Web-submitted résumés or applications. If you mail a résumé, you will likely be told you have to resubmit electronically in order to be considered.

## Every day that a position sits vacant, your organization is losing money.

From finding the facility or system's Web address and career pages to completing an application, the process is replete with challenges. Sometimes applicants have to sign in as a "member," filling in a number of fields and creating a password, before they can access the open jobs database.

Once one is able to view postings, more challenges arise, as descriptors often include internal codes or jargon around the unit in which the position "resides," including letters/numbers and organization-specific acronyms. Some organizations require applying to every position by job number, not as an overall staff nurse, med/surg, for example.

We have worked with processes where applicants were required to submit sensitive information such as social security numbers, driver's license numbers, dates of birth, etc., and to "sign" page after page of agreements electronically. Many processes are duplicative, with the requirement of submitting a résumé *and* completing an application.

After completing the application process and hitting the "submit" button, sometimes an auto-reply is received indicating success. However, often there is no way of knowing whether the process has been successful. And then the waiting begins.

### Response Management

Just as my recent ER experience found health care professionals' eyes glued to a monitor screen, a similar phenomenon can be seen in the recruitment arena. After completing the requisition and posting process, which can also build delays into the overall process, recruiters wait. Then the deluge begins. As wave after wave of résumés hit the system, recruiters can potentially receive thousands of electronic résumés a month, depending on their areas of responsibility. We have health care clients who receive 30,000 or more unsolicited résumés a year! It is not uncommon for one position posting to yield 45 to 50 résumés. And for the sake of space, I am not even including internal transfer requests and the issues around them.

Therefore, the very individuals who presumably became recruiters to recruit and interface with people become sifters of résumés, staring at a computer screen for hours on end. If there are no criteria questions in place to sift the wheat from the chaff, the unfortunate recruiter must visually review résumé upon résumé, selecting those who fit the general job requirements and the needs and wants of the hiring manager, and make a quick decision as to the viability of a candidate.

The sheer volume precludes any in-depth analysis. The natural inclination is to move the résumé forward, whether that means that the recruiter contacts

the candidate for a telephone screen or simply forwards the résumé to the hiring manager. This process is akin to finding the proverbial needle in a haystack. Small wonder a non-health care client conducting a robust media recruitment campaign

and receiving 250,000 responses ultimately filled the positions with individuals whose names were all in the beginning of the alphabet! Recruiters had to prioritize somehow, and did.

The most organized recruiters do at least a telephone screen and many do provide a face-to-face screening interview. But the volume of résumés coupled with processes that are broken make this a daunting task.

All of these issues prolong the time to respond to candidates and even respond to hiring managers. It is not uncommon for response time back to candidates to exceed 2 weeks or longer. And some candidates will never hear whether their applications/résumés were even received, much less where the résumé might "sit" in the process.

Once the interview is scheduled, references and background checks completed, and the offer made, various other processes may protract the offer-to-hire continuum, including scheduling appointment(s) with occupational/employee health, completing paperwork, and then slotting the new hire into an orientation. *High tech — low touch.*

### Aggregate Data

Our aggregate data from Mystery Shops of over 150 health care organizations show that 55% of résumé submissions never received a personalized response and only 25% of shoppers representing these résumés felt their experiences would have led to an interview. Our telephone shops found that a call into HR/recruitment was answered by a person only 57% of the time, shoppers connected to a recruiter just 35% of the time, and only 13% of callers felt their experience would have led to an interview. These statistics give one pause.

### Implications and Solutions

The nursing shortage is well documented and there is no light at the end of the tunnel. Allied health shortages have become more and more of an issue in the past few years. Our patient base is aging and chronicity is an increasing factor. Patients are sicker and stays are shorter. Every opening is cause for concern and affects both patients and remaining staff. Every day that a position sits vacant, your organization is losing money.

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## Human Resource Solutions

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In view of all of this, can we afford not to address the issues around successful recruitment of our scarce human resources in health care? A few solutions follow:

- Partner with HR/recruitment to establish processes that work. A partnership will ultimately make mutual expectations clear and shorten the time to hire.
- Review your Web site and make changes to smooth the application process and ensure interest.
- Redesign the online application and determine what information is critical and what is not.
- Consider conducting a Mystery Shop to measure your organization's recruitment processes from your Web site to the interview process.
- Establish and adhere to response time guidelines.
- Pay attention to and refine communications back to candidates.
- Address the volume of résumés. How do you deal with increasing numbers of electronic transactions? Is there a need to assign one or more individuals to assess these applications/résumés? Do you need to add "knock-out" questions to winnow out the unqualified?
- Educate all those candidate touch points (from system telephone operator to recruiter and hiring manager) about customer service and sales. Recruitment is sales, no matter how you slice it.
- Measure the recruitment process through offer-reject and post hire interviews.

### Looking to the Future

The ideal recruitment scenario would be a marriage of high tech and high touch, where candidates find Web sites that are intuitive and easy to use, where human intervention is available for those experiencing difficulty finding an open position or submitting a résumé, and where one gets immediate and frequent feedback as to the status of one's résumé. In this perfect world, every candidate would get an immediate auto-reply indicating success when submitting a résumé, a personal response within 48 hours of submitting his résumé (either yea or nay), and qualified candidates would have a face-to-face interview with a recruiter and hiring manager within a few days of résumé submission. The entire process from résumé submission to hire would be completed in 3 weeks.

It is time to harness the really incredible technology developed for recruitment and make it friendlier. We must drive the technology, not let the technology dictate our process. Finally, it is crucial that everyone involved in recruitment provide excellent customer service to those we are seeking to hire. We can do better and we must.\$