

## **Blink Recruiting**

Malcolm Gladwell's latest book, *Blink*, extols the virtue of what he calls "rapid cognition," the power of thinking at the speed of light. In essence, he is both acknowledging that many of us make decisions without complete information and celebrating that seemingly illogical behavior. We may live in an era of omnipresent news feeds and online access to all of the world's knowledge, but more often than not, we go with first impressions and limited facts, even when we are making judgments about very important aspects of our lives. Gladwell thinks we can harness our reliance on rapid cognition to make better strategic decisions; I think we can use it to improve our yield. I call it a strategy of blink recruiting.

Blink recruiting is all about:

- proximity and
- impact.

It stimulates an emotional response by candidates, but one that is guided by a carefully crafted message. Blink recruiting influences a candidate's rapid cognition by leading with your organization's strengths as an employer. Said another way, it front loads the candidate's experience to increase the likelihood that they will—in the blink of an eye—decide that your organization's value proposition is just right for them.

How does blink recruiting work?

The first step is to identify the initial touch points your organization has with candidates. You must determine where in your recruiting process you can most quickly reach and influence the best talent. While these touch points may be different from organization-to-organization, I suggest that you include at least the following:

- the first four lines of every job posting,
- the first three minutes of every meeting you set up with networking,
- the first two minutes of every telephone interview, and
- the first page of the Career area on your corporate Web-site.

Ensuring your proximity to candidates is important for several reasons:

- First, our research indicates that the best talent has the attention span of a gnat. If you don't "sell" them quickly, you won't sell them at all.
- Second, early impressions often have more impact on a candidate than those formed later when the clutter of information can diffuse or dilute them. And, only a strong, clear impression can move a passive prospect to an active applicant.
- Third, what happens to a candidate first often has a very long shelf life in their mind. As a result, it becomes the only impression you will ever form with them and the one they pass on forever to their friends and colleagues.

The second step in blink recruiting is to redesign the initial touch points so as to optimize their impact on candidates. The goal is to stack the deck in your employer's favor by providing the best possible cues to candidate decision-making at the earliest point in the organization's interaction with them. In essence, you want to seed their rapid cognition in favor of the judgment you want them to make.

To do that, you must first know what cues to emphasize. You must identify the factors that will give the best talent such a positive first impression that they will:

- ignore the security of acquiring more information and considering other possibilities and focus on your opportunity alone, and
- rapidly conclude that they should immediately apply for it.

Acquiring that insight is most efficiently accomplished by surveying a select group of your own employees. Convene a focus group of top performers in the skills for which you are recruiting and find out what induced them to accept your organization's employment offer. Push them to get beyond "feel good" platitudes and articulate the specific attributes of your organization that sold it to them.

In a sense, you're looking for organizational qualities that carry a punch. You may be stimulating cognition, but your stimulant is emotion. Blink decisions are impulse purchases that matter. Unlike the Zagat at a cash register that you see and decide to buy on the spur of the moment, these decisions occur when a candidate receives just enough of the right information to arouse them to act counter-intuitively—to make an important decision without all of the facts.

To achieve that kind of impact, the information you provide must meet three tests:

- It must be real. The information must be believable to the high performers within your own organization in order to be credible to those outside it.
- It must be relevant. The information must be important to the high performers within your own organization in order to influence the decision-making of those outside it.
- It must be recognizable. The information must differentiate your organization in the minds of your organization's high performers in order to set it apart in the minds of those outside it.

Gladwell's *Blink* recognizes that all of us make quick decisions, and that those decisions often yield very satisfactory results. Blink recruiting puts that tendency for rapid cognition to work in your recruiting. It puts your value proposition in close proximity to every candidate's first experience with your organization and tailors that message to influence the best of those candidates to make the right decision right away.