

The Differentiator: A Passion for the Recruitment Process

Jim D'Alfonso

Associate VP of Surgical Services

Scottsdale Health Care

As nurse leaders, we are all too familiar with the challenges of recruiting talent in an ever growing world-wide shortage of unique, talented and highly competent nurses which we all actively, if not aggressively, competing for. Whether you have already achieved the distinction of Magnet status, are just embarking on the journey or simply applying industry standards and identified best practices; we all seek to recruit and retain the "best and brightest" to help us complement our teams and ultimately enhance patient care outcomes within our institutions. This is the nurse leader imperative today and we each have our own special teams and recruitment strategies that we believe are the ideal match for those vital few and increasingly rare star candidates. It is difficult to stay ahead of the healthcare industry curve, especially when it comes to truly innovative recruitment strategies, as competition for these resources drives change at lightening pace and with continued creativity in benefits, relocation and sign-on packages and a never ending expansion of pioneering perks for those nurses who eventually sign-on.

There are probably few recruitment packages and offers you have not encountered or read about, let alone actively developed and integrated within your own organization. With a high degree of probability, it is a given that there are few enticements or perks that will absolutely ensure you will appreciate favored employer status for long and that the best and brightest who do consider your hospital, will do so merely as yet another option out of many in their growing list of possible career options. Your recruitment package may prove successful in getting prospective candidates in the door, but it will take much more to get them to accept your offer and ultimately keep them there!

So, what makes for a true differentiator in the recruitment and ultimately the retention for these essential resources? It has to be something more than money, benefits, awards and recognitions, location or state-of-the-art facilities to seal the deal. Could the answer lie within you and your leadership team? In a world where benefits and recruitment strategies are becoming more and more homogenous, we must consider dynamic approaches that serve as true differentiators and that set our organizations apart from the competition. Whether you use a formal recruiter or interview candidates channeled through the world-wide-web, advertisements or word of mouth, the key differentiator is typically the first point of contact, which may be you or a designee from your leadership team. The level of passion you and your team convey regarding the unique differences between your institution and others, the culture you have established and sustain that sets it apart and the rationale why any candidate would feel privileged to consider themselves a part of your team, ultimately increases your odds of success and sets the tone for how subsequent interviews and the hiring process may (or may not) proceed.

Seeking a different approach to first contact, interview processes and overall candidate flow through your system requires implementing a few simple guidelines, credos if you will, and not check-lists or a formal marathon of group interviews that can, more often than not, dehumanize and exhaust a candidate. Personalizing the interview process

takes time and effort, which requires each leader to commit to key actions, such as prompt return of phone-calls, access to leader e-mail addresses for additional questions or concerns, personalized interviews with key stakeholders before focused staff interviews, and most important of all... follow-through with appropriate acknowledgements, answers to questions and unique acts of appreciation and respect.

If you believe that the person (candidate) is always more important than the process, then strong relationship and excellent communication skills, as well as an engaged and authentic presence, become the corner-stones of establishing an open rapport and a foundation of mutual exploration. If the interview process becomes one-sided, in either direction, both parties may sense there is a "fit" issue and then the process may simply fizzle out or end without adequately measuring true fit. Interviews can be nerve wrecking events, so it is incumbent upon you and your team to set the tone while alleviating potential anxieties and putting the candidate at ease so you get to know the true person and not the rehearsed or well versed candidate. Listening to the candidate takes time and genuine effort, as you may already know there are many self-help books available to help prospective interviewees recite the desired responses to behavioral styles questioning. If interviewing for the best and brightest is a personal journey between you, your team and the candidate, it has to be much more than a mere task or something to get through. Your ability to prioritize your calendar, establish a safe environment for relationship building, personalize the process and optimize the experience may take time up-front, but in-turn save the most important time you can dedicate... to sincerely finding just the right fit! Your ability to personalize, humanize and manage a values-based interview process for qualified candidates may be your best differentiator in a sea of opportunities awaiting today's best and brightest. Your personal touches can be the best recruitment tool you and your team have and the one thing no body else can copy or compete against.