

# How to Design a Complete Recruiting Strategy for Passive Candidates



Attracting and hiring passive candidates requires recognition of a different mindset than the mindset of their active candidate counterparts.

They are not looking for a new position, and because of this, traditional recruiting tactics tend to miss them. Because most large companies' recruitment processes are geared towards active candidates and a surplus candidate mindset (weeding out those who aren't prepared to interview, ask for the job, etc.), hiring managers are less familiar with executing a process related to non-active job seekers.

However, there is a very good chance — if quality ranks high on your priority list — the candidate you want to hire for an open position is passive, not active. To find, attract and hire these candidates, your recruiting and interviewing process will need to be modified. Here are six changes you can make to optimize your results:

## Recognition

Passive candidates have to be identified. They are not looking for a

position and must be found. Posting a job description on the Internet and hiring the best of who responds isn't a viable strategy in total. The passive candidates have to be made aware of the company and position by using a variety of Internet sources, referrals, and confidential / purchased data. Candidate information is plentiful and accessible; however, to effectively process it requires skill and time — a lot of time.

The recruiting challenge of today is not one of candidate identification, as it was 10+ years ago. LinkedIn, resume databases, confidential data, and (even) Google have taken care of that. Today, passive candidate recruiting is dictated by the ability to recognize the top candidate's key competencies. In other words, the true job is to recognize the actual "**caliber of the candidate**" by translating their backgrounds (track record, experience, longevity, success, etc.) since they are not actively telling you about themselves and selling you on their competencies.

## Planned, Concise Interviews

Conducting thorough and efficient

interviews, which share information, making sure the candidate's interest is taken into account, are crucial when attempting to secure passive candidates. For many companies, no real plan to sell and educate the candidate exists through the interview process, keeping it from being effective and informative for both sides. A lengthy and laborious interview process addressing only the candidate's motivation and interviewing prowess (ability to sell themselves) will almost surely kill the passive candidate's desire to pursue the opportunity further.

When an interview process happens on a planned, informative, and concise schedule, with information being provided about the company, opportunity, quality of work, potential for making a difference, and overall growth potential, the candidate's enthusiasm level grows with each completed step. Enthusiasm, in turn, motivates the candidate to evaluate the opportunity in depth and potentially translates into accepted job offers.

The process cannot be impromptu or lengthy; it must be planned and

concise. As the process drags on, issues come up and things happen. Competition creeps in, interest level wanes as the stress level increases, and there is a greater chance that the person's situation, attitude or motivation will change.

### Trained Interviewers

Most interviewers do not spend a lot of their time interviewing candidates – at least when compared to those who do it professionally.

Training on developing questions, drilling down on answers to questions, uncovering / handling objections, and selling the candidate on the opportunity should be included if passive candidates are being introduced into the candidate pool. The education needs to include treating all candidates as if they were passive.

For example, questions need to be developed that help interviewers extract data dealing with the candidate's past performance, experience, competencies, motivation, and successful track record.

### Interviewers training needs to include:

“Peeling the onion” or asking planned questions, listening to the answers, and then quickly formulating appropriate follow-up questions designed to gather targeted candidate information.

- Not using the candidate's interviewing competence or the ability to tactfully and smoothly ask for the job as a metric.
- Suspending first impression interviewing, where the data acquired only supports the impression first made by the interviewer.
- Focusing on acquiring data necessary to make information-based decisions and not relying on subjective, intuitive, or gut-level opinions.

Many times, a “dance of assumption” occurs when management assumes

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that the staff involved knows how to conduct an interview for a passive candidate, and the interviewers do not correct that misconception, leading to a failed interviewing process for one or many candidates.

### Selling the Opportunity

All candidates should be thoroughly screened and interviewed, but it is important to sell both the job opportunity and company to passive candidates.

Make the “upsides” and “challenges” of the role crystal clear to passive candidates. Show or demonstrate what success / failure look like and how the person filling the role can make a difference and contribute. They are not looking for another job; the opportunity must be effectively communicated. The most important information to share:

- What they will be responsible for and what needs to be accomplished over the first year or two.
- What needs to get accomplished over the first year or two and what are the hurdles challenges.
- Manage expectation accurately. Don't minimize the challenges or maximize the ease of creating success.
- How success will be measured and how it will make an impact/a difference.
- What additional responsibilities and opportunities will be afforded them if they are successful.
- What makes the company and situation unique, attractive, or challenging and how does that translate to the candidate.

### Feedback Based on Data

Every interviewing process must have an effective calibration of candidates for interviewers to compare candidate rankings and feedback. This calibration meeting needs to happen quickly after each interview phase, while the interviews are still fresh in each interviewer's mind. To be effective and support accurate decisions, the conversations only need to include data-based opinions and insights focused around track record, past performance, depth of experience, motivation to do the job, and position competency (fit) – not opinions based on intuition and/or first impressions or personality traits. When feedback is provided with supportive data, decision making becomes confident, efficient and effective.

For example, teaching interviewers to dive into accomplishments and performance, developing an opinion about a candidate, will be much more effective in determining the caliber of the candidate than evaluating how well they interviewed, communicated, presented, or sold themselves, to form an opinion.

### Fair Salary Offers

Make more-than-fair salary offers when possible. Salary equates to value, and passive candidates need to feel valued if they are going to change positions and companies.

To hire top passive talent, salary offers will need to be above average. Very few above-average candidates are willing to leave a position where they are already well paid, valued and respected for an offer not incenting them to change. That puts respect and value in question.

It would be like leaving a happy marriage for the promise of a happier one.

Address financials, and make sure the salary ranges are realistic and equitable to make above-average offers for above-average talent.