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Should Job Fairs Be Part of Your Talent Acquisition Strategy?

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Before I jump right in and answer that question, let me put Job Fairs in some historical context. Do you know when the first Job Fair was held in this country? You should. You and millions of other people celebrate that day every year with family, friends and near and far relatives. You celebrate it with lavish meals, roast turkeys, gravy, stuffing, Aunt Mary's pumpkin pie and Uncle Willie's green bean casserole. You celebrate it with parades and football games and late night turkey sandwiches with cranberry sauce and mayo and plenty of Roloids. That's right, the first Job Fair was held as part of the First Thanksgiving. The Job Fair lasted for three days and since there were no restaurants to speak of in 1621, the Indians brought in food to share with the Pilgrims. And here is why.

The Indians were hosting the Job Fair because they were expanding into new markets and were looking for people with little or no experience in fishing, hunting, corn planting and agriculture. Most of the young braves in the tribes had been promoted to middle management, running small tribes and some in charge of raiding parties. With new markets opening up, there was a need to fill entry-level positions and implement the training programs required to build and sustain a growing enterprise and nation.

The Pilgrims were new to this country and were willing to take any job that would lead to promotion with a good organization. The dollars were not as important as the training and a chance for advancement.

A three day Job Fair was held outside of Plymouth, MA and a number of Indian tribes sent their chief hiring managers to conduct interviews. As a result of the Job Fair, 60 offers were made and 56 Pilgrims

accepted. The four who were turned down required relocation and moving expenses.

To celebrate the success of this first Job Fair, a small catered lunch was served to all participants and one Pilgrim was heard to say, "Thanks for Giving me this opportunity." Thus the First Thanks Giving.

Have Job Fairs changed that much in almost 400 years? Organizations still have needs and certain reasons for filling openings. Candidates have certain reasons for wanting to be hired. Job Fairs provide a venue where both parties can come together, meet, talk and establish a relationship that could lead to employment.

If you want to make Job Fairs part of your Talent Acquisition strategy just use the Indians as your model. What did the Indians do? The Indians promoted the event and their particular needs. The Indians had an agreed upon goal and every Indian understood the goal. The Indians were represented by people who could make a decision. And the Indians gave every Pilgrim something of value.

Let's discuss these four.

Promote the Event – The Indians had to rely on smoke signals and runners. You can use your web site, social media such as LinkedIn and Twitter and other forms of advertising to promote your participation in a Job Fair event. Encourage as much pre-Job Fair contact from interested candidates so that at the Job Fair something significant could happen, namely an interview.

Most companies even today do very little promotion of these events. Most rely too heavily on the sponsor of the event to promote them along with every other company attending. You would not rely on others to promote your product or service, why your employment brand? Promote your self.

Set Goals – The Indians had as their goal interviewing as many Pilgrims as possible in order to make some hiring decisions. The fact that 60 offers were made is more a reflection on the strength of the Pilgrim talent pool. Your goal will most likely not be to make x number of offers. Most would agree that the typical Job Fair talent pool is not deep in A players or best of the best. Your goal could be to identify and engage as many candidates who possess many of the success attributes you are seeking for current as well as future positions. To accomplish this it is critical that everyone representing your

organization is aware of requirements and the success profile you are using.

Sad to say that most companies send representatives with little knowledge of requirements and success attributes. Most companies still consider their goal at a Job Fair to be the number of resumes collected the more the better.

Send Decision Makers - The Indians sent their chief hiring managers who could make offers on the spot. You may not be able to send every hiring manager, however if the Job Fair was specific to a particular function or department such as IT or Finance then sending a hiring manager from that area to function as the SME on the spot would certainly move the candidate along more quickly through the process. You could also empower those representing your organization to make decisions regarding next step for the candidates or requests for further information from them.

Again today, most companies fail to take advantage of this opportunity. Candidates are asked to drop off their resume, are given someone's business card and told that someone will be in touch. Very rarely happens.

Give Something of Value – The Indians gave all participants the First Thanksgiving as well as the opportunity to be remembered by school children all across the land with construction paper drawings in the class room. You may not be able to match that, but you can give each candidate who comes to your booth or table something perhaps even greater. Give them all good information about your company, the opportunities, how they can engage with your company through your Talent Hub, how your hiring process works, when they should hear something and from whom with a name and number to call if they do not hear, and for those who have very little chance of ever being considered for any of your positions some good information regarding their careers and perhaps who they could contact regarding their own job search.

The majority of companies who participate in Job Fairs give brochures, business cards, pencils and the occasional coffee mug. Job Seekers are looking for more. Give it to them

So, if Job Fairs are not part of your Talent Acquisition Strategy they should be. But only if you follow the example of the Indians and that is the truth Pilgrim!

Happy Thanksgiving!