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Supplemental recruiting services: a viable solution in challenging times

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Abstract:

* The need to hire new or replacement staff, especially for hard-to-fill positions, does not disappear, regardless of the economy or budget constraints.

* Supplemental recruiting services can augment your hospital's existing HR and recruiting resources.

* To offset reductions in HR staff, bringing supplemental recruiting resources on board during an aggressive hiring initiative to fill the recruiting pipeline and augment existing HR resources is both cost effective and prudent.

* Using an external, expanding recruiting team can be beneficial for the bottom line and viable for a changing set of circumstances.

* Up markets and down, these services provide value, flexibility, and viable assistance.

Full Text:

IT IS NO REAL NEWS THAT nurse recruiting is in a harsh down cycle after a period of reasonably active recruiting, outreach, and growth. Within this arduous environment there is a remarkable paradox confronting nursing leaders, human resources recruiters, and health systems in need of talent. On the one hand, many staffing budgets have been seriously curtailed. Resources to find new and replacement staff, even for the most viable initiatives, have been cut considerably. Non-clinical hiring freezes are becoming a new reality, yet qualified nursing candidates continue to be in short supply in many areas across the country and, indeed, worldwide.

In a recent Society for Human Resource Management study (Zeidner, 2008), cutbacks in recruiting budgets ranked 4th among options discussed, proceeded only by morale and team building activities, professional development, and all staff training.

And let's not forget, within this highly charged environment, there is the ever present need to provide higher-quality patient care, for more and more patients, at a lower cost while striving to retain, manage, and motivate existing, stressed nursing staff.

The other side to the paradox is that when organizations are in a position to "publicly" hire (post a job online, place an advertisement, or develop a direct marketing campaign), the response to any outreach communications program can be overwhelming, stretching limited resources to the maximum, frustrating applicants, and impacting your employer brand negatively. "More active candidates will require more work for organizations. Large numbers of active candidates, due to layoffs and reductions, will add more volume to the candidate pool, which will require more vetting, due diligence, and overall work" (Sullivan, 2008).

A solution to this predicament may be found by using supplemental recruiting services--health care savvy outside firms who can augment your hospital's existing HR and recruiting resources--on a project by project and/or as needed basis. I am not referring here to "agency" or "travelers" temporary nursing staff. Rather, these are highly qualified recruiters and "sourcers" who can work virtually or on-site at your facility, on a fixed term, fixed contract basis, to assist your existing recruiting team with whatever may be required to ensure effective hiring continues apace.

Supplemental recruiting services may be an effective solution when considering the following key factors.

Organizations Still Need to Hire

The need to hire new or replacement staff, especially for hard-to-fill positions, does not disappear, regardless of the economy or budget constraints. The challenge for many health systems is that while there may be layoffs or freezes in one department or discipline, an urgent need exists to hire in another. To avoid both confusion and frustration with existing staff and recently displaced employees, it may be preferable to find new talent using hiring techniques and communications methods that are more "under the radar." Using search firms can indeed be a consideration; however, they are costly. An experienced contract recruiter, assigned to help hire for specific positions and using Web-based sourcing and social networking techniques, can provide a strong ROI but be a less visible solution with the target audiences you are trying to reach or placate.

An ironic advantage of the economic downturn is that the quantity of experienced talent available is increasing in all disciplines and also among diversity candidates. It is more of a challenge to move employees who are gainfully employed as they are fearful of taking what might be seen as a less secure opportunity. However, talented candidates who want to progress in their careers, regardless of economic times, do exist.

Organizations May Lack the HR Resources

Some health care organizations fortunately still have major expansion plans in the works and the need to find qualified talent, sometimes in large numbers, has not diminished. To offset reductions in HR staff, bringing supplemental recruiting resources on

board during an aggressive hiring initiative to fill the recruiting pipeline and augment existing HR resources is both cost effective and prudent. For example, a hospital system in Michigan recently determined an urgent need to have supplemental recruiting staff play "catch up" to help staff the first 100 of 200 new beds being opened up at their new hospital. An outside firm was brought in to assist with both direct sourcing as well as response management to a targeted media, public relations, and communications campaign. Within 60 days, more than 1,000 candidates were sourced and screened, days to fill were significantly reduced to 5, and candidate contact occurred within 24 hours. And, by the end of the contract recruiter's engagement with the hospital, over 325 RNs were hired.

Turn on. Turn off.

Using an external, expanding recruiting team can be beneficial for the bottom line and viable for a changing set of circumstances. As an example, a multi-hospital system in southern California was reorganizing from a decentralized to a centralized management model. Recruiting was to take place from a single location versus having recruiters spread across all the hospitals in the system. Some of the existing recruiting team chose to leave due to an egregious commute and other factors. A supplemental recruiting firm was engaged to help during the transition period. The scope of work grew from one contract recruiter to five as the reorganization took hold, then back down to one, and finally none, as the project eventually ended. This kind of flexibility not only provides resources on demand, it also contributes to manageable cost containment and effective uses of a contract workforce to get the job done. There are other tangible advantages as well. A supplemental recruiting team should have "reliable and repeatable processes." Because the sourcing team is external, its processes are also modular. This modular structure ensures that recruiters can handle a higher number of requisitions when needed, by outsourcing the (repetitive) sourcing component. And because the relationship with sourcers is ongoing, not transactional (over the duration of a given project), constant feedback flows through the process, allowing only a select number of well-qualified candidates to reach hiring managers (Sullivan, 2008).

Freeing up Recruiters to Recruit

In a recent study with HR professionals, 77% of recruiters who participated in the survey said they spend the majority of their time completing administrative tasks (Bernard Hodes Group, 2008). Frequently, supplemental recruiters are deployed to assist with administrative responsibilities. As well, they take on the repetitive tasks of database mining, and searching Web sites and job boards for hard-to-fill positions or in-demand candidates such as critical care RNs and many others. Short-term contractors can also help in the timely management of an organization's existing technology assets. Many recruiters, especially in health care, neglect to aggressively utilize their own applicant tracking systems (ATS) when seeking talent. There are many reasons for this including recruiter time constraints, "technophobia," administrative task "burn-out," etc. Mining your own ATS is the first place to look for candidates as these databases contain applicants who have actively pursued your organization and/or have responded to your advertising and communications campaigns. They are the "active" candidates, easier to connect with than the more elusive "passive" ones. Experience with health systems across the United States has consistently demonstrated that resumes of hard-to-fill candidates already reside in many organizations' ATS but no one had reviewed and responded to these "active," qualified applicants.

Embrace New Media and Web 2.0 Networking Skills

Twitter, Hulu, Facebook, YouTube, MySpace, Linked In, Ning, Xanga, and Virb are the fastest emerging social media and networking platforms for reaching qualified potential candidates. Although RN participation in new media is lower than other employment sectors, as with all new media, acceptance in the mainstream arena quickly gets adopted by health care professionals. Keeping abreast of innovations is challenging enough. Actually "working" the social networks in search of talent takes skill, resourcefulness, and, most of all, time. As noted previously, time is one of the scarce resources available to recruiters both in managing the allocated tasks on their plate and coping with diminished resources in their own departments. Many supplemental recruiters have embraced their profession because they really like the work. Many are self-employed or work within umbrella organizations. By their nature as good recruiters and Web enablers, they tend to be at the forefront of new technologies, new media, and emerging networking opportunities. These skills are in short supply within health care recruiting. By engaging experienced supplemental recruiters and sourcers on a contractual basis, you can increase the effectiveness of your recruiting initiatives, stay "below the radar," and free up time for your existing RN recruiting team to more effectively manage the interviewing and hiring processes.

In summary, there are many advantages to the use of supplemental recruiting services for your ongoing and changing health care hiring initiatives. There are certainly more options for using these services than described here. Most firms are both innovative in creating effective, targeted solutions for you, and eager to help your organization in whatever way you deem appropriate. Up markets and down, these services provide value, flexibility, and viable assistance--where and when you need it most.

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