

Talent Acquisition in the Global Bio-Pharma and CRO Sector

Author: Ash Butt

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Introduction

The concept of an organisation marketing itself in order to attract top tier talent is one which has entered corporate consciousness over the last 15 years. However, in general, the reasons why this is done and how it should be done is often poorly understood.

This article sets out to provide an insight into why a company should, in today's competitive market space, ensure that it communicates clearly and effectively with its potential candidate pool.

1. What do we mean by "selling"? Why should you sell?

The last twenty years have seen a shift in the power balance between corporations and potential Upper Quartile Individuals (UQIs) in the labour market across a range of industries.

Essentially, this change can be seen as recognition that corporations can no longer look at recruiting as a function akin to purchasing. In today's business world recruiting needs to be handled with the same creativity, energy and vigour as marketing and business development.

UQIs are no longer passively leaving themselves open for the consideration of potential employers. There has been a collective epiphany amongst the world's skilled labour force, a realisation that "the price of talent is rising" and that "the differential value of highly talented people continues to mount".

The result of this has been that it is "no longer about selecting the best person from a long line of candidates; it's about going out and finding great candidates".

Therefore any "sales" approach regarding recruitment needs to be built around this new reality.

Hence "selling" in this context can be defined as the actions taken to ensure that an organisation is able to attract, retain and develop market leading UQIs which result in the company gaining a competitive advantage over its rivals.

McKinsey's seminal work "War for Talent" (2001, WFT) states clearly that in order for companies to "woo people in today's talent market they need to sell, sell, sell".

Additionally, this shift in approach needs to be driven by the understanding that "talent is now a critical driver of corporate performance and that a company's ability to attract, develop, and retain talent will be a major competitive advantage far into the future".

This then leaves open the question – how should a company "sell" itself to the leading players within the talent market?

The answer to this can be broken down into the following areas:

i. Issues of form and presentation

ii. Issues of process

a. Issues of Form and Presentation

There are various actions that an organisation can take to ensure that it sends out an attractive message to those it wishes to attract. Essentially, there needs to be a focus on the fact that people operate on the basis of several "drivers" or "hot buttons" and in order to excite and enthuse someone to leave a safe and secure position (potentially to relocate, change their children's school, leave behind friends and family) as many of these "hot buttons" need to be hit as possible.

Most individuals have a twin response to any given situation: emotional and intellectual. Therefore we need to ensure that both of those responses produce a positive result – only then will a candidate become viable.

i. Emotional Drivers

a. Title

Whilst often intellectually we can say that the title of a position should and does not affect our perception of it, emotionally we are not so controlled.

Candidates will want some recognition of their growth and development. If that can be reflected in the titles prescribed to functions then all the better.

b. Rapport with existing staff

Positions need to be made “real” for candidates. They need to feel comfortable in their surroundings – they need to be able to envision themselves working with the people they meet. Hence every effort should be made to ensure that all those involved in any interview process do what they can to make any visitors feel welcome.

They need to feel that they will be able to manage those below them (if required) as well as being managed by their superiors.

c. Ease of relocation

Relocation can be a stressful and distressing process. Not only are you leaving behind everything that is familiar but then you have added into this emotional mix the responsibility of ensuring a smooth and safe move.

This is particularly of concern to those with families to consider.

Hence the client needs to assume as much of the responsibility of this process – not only that but they need to ensure at the same time that the candidate is kept in the loop and provided with clear channels of information.

d. Salary Negotiations

Salary negotiations in our experience have often been the reason why individuals leave companies two or even three years down the line. Here the emphasis from the client side should always be on successful hire of those that will add value.

It is clear that salary structures etc are required but as highlighted in WFT – if required rules should be broken. The aim is always a WIN-WIN outcome.

HR units have often been tested and assessed by how much they can lower the cost of recruitment. That needs to be left behind – the real test must be the quality of recruitment.

Additionally, the actual negotiations need to be through an intermediary.

This lessens any negative impressions and lessens the opportunity for high ball/low ball situation to develop. This also requires some trust in us – we are here to ensure the best possible hire for our clients whilst ensuring that our candidates take on a position which will allow them to develop. Often companies in our situation have been accused of artificially forcing down candidate/raising client expectations in order to complete a deal. We have always stated that this is NOT our method and we will represent all parties fairly.

If required we will endeavour to highlight discrepancies on both sides to ensure a mutually beneficial outcome – only through this method can sustainable relationships be established.

It must be accepted by all involved in the recruiting process that talent acquisition is a form of investment not an “expense”.

Extend your best offer the first time – negotiating games create uncertainty and mistrust.

b. Presentation of company

It is fundamentally important that the client put across the best possible impression of their operation. That includes:

- Arranging interviews in an organised and timely manner
- Ensuring that any interview days are held in accordance with stated timelines.
- Late variation in schedules needs to be avoided, if possible.
- The number of interviews needs to be kept to a minimum and the process highlighted and clarified from the outset.
- Additionally, quality standards need to be maintained through out the process.

Additionally, away from those factors that can cause emotional reactions there are others which can trigger us to rationalise and logically assess any potential role.

i. Intellectual Drivers

a. Clear understanding of position and its challenges

Any new role needs to offer a potential candidate a chance to impact upon the company/team. They need to feel that the position is worthwhile and that their efforts will not only be rewarded but also appreciated. This is vital.

Moreover, a candidate must be shown that the position that they are going forward for will not be a static one but rather it will be a first step on a road which will allow them to develop and grow.

The developmental potential of any position needs to be clarified from the outset – in the “War for Talent” a position is defined not as a job but rather a step on a career ladder.

b. Location

When involved in relocating an individual to a new location the company must not present the advantages of employment with them. They must also research and present any advantages for the candidate of moving to that particular area – the selling must not be confined to the position or company but must encompass selling the proposition holistically.

Help must be provided with finding suitable accommodation and assessing locations.

The aim of this process is to make the whole process “real” for any potential candidate – helping potential incumbents imagine not only working in a new location but also “living” there.

c. Salary and benefits

Whilst it is vital that candidates need to understand and reciprocate our focus on making sure that the role in question is right, it is equally true that wealth creation opportunities must exist.

Hence remuneration packages need to take into consideration:

- o Current package
- o Cost of living differential factors
- o Market rates for any given role
- o Building in an uplift for those roles which will move candidates forward

If the client is positioning themselves as a global player, attracting global talent, they must be able to compete in the global labour market.

2. What is “selling” in this context?

a. Creating an Employee Value Proposition (EVP)

WFT highlights that a company looking to develop its talent pool must start the process of “selling” themselves at the very outset.

One way to do this is to establish Employee Value Proposition (EVPs) for each role.

This is defined as the:

“Holistic sum of everything people experience and receive while they are part of a company-everything from the intrinsic satisfaction of the work to the environment, leadership, colleagues, compensation and more”.

The question an EVP developer needs to ask themselves is “Why would a highly talented person choose to work here?”

McKinsey’s research indicated that talented individuals will look for the following elements in any answer to that question:

- o Challenging positions that inspire passion
- o Working for great companies who will develop them
- o Wealth creation opportunities
- o Creating a Work/Life balance

Additionally, having the answers is not enough – those answers must be readily communicable. The earlier that this holistic vision of a role can be built the better it will be.

This will help to build enthusiasm across all areas for the role and will mean that the power balance shifts yet again – headhunted candidates are notorious for sitting and waiting for a company to present themselves. However, if during initial communications the candidate can be enthused to the point where they realise that an exceptional EVP is being offered to them – they will start to fight for the right to take it on.

3. Sales Methods

There are a number of methods that can be employed by the Client to ensure a positive impression is left on the candidate.

The most important of these is to communicate effectively – there is no use having an industry leading EVP if the candidate does not understand it.

The company must use a “benefit-sell” technique in this situation: the question any interviewer or HR professional needs to ask themselves is “What will be the benefit to the potential incumbent of joining us?”

The answer to this question must form the central section of any “pitch” to potential candidates.

i. Sales Theories

a. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

One of the best known theories explaining the actions of people is that of Dr. Abraham Maslow (“Motivation and Personality”, 1954).

Dr. Maslow hypothesized that people are motivated by a hierarchy of needs. The hierarchy he described may be drawn as follows:

Maslow’s theory requires that:

- o Each individual’s needs must be satisfied at the lower levels before they progress to the higher, more complex levels.
- o When low-level needs are satisfied, individuals are no longer motivated by them.
- o As each level of needs is met, individual’s will progress to higher level motivators.
- o All the needs are always present.

Maslow highlights that Knowledge Workers must be looking for motivation from the highest levels of the triangle – Self-Actualisation.

Maslow described the characteristics of the Self-Actualized Person as follows:

- o Are realistically oriented
- o Accept other people for what they are
- o Are spontaneous in thinking, emotions, and behaviour
- o Are problem-centred rather than self-centred
- o Need privacy and are autonomous, independent, and able to remain true to themselves in the face of rejection or unpopularity
- o Have a continuous freshness of appreciation
- o Have mystic or oceanic experiences although not necessarily religious
- o Identify with mankind
- o Have deep meaningful relationships with a few people
- o Have a democratic structure and judge people as individuals
- o Have highly developed ethics
- o Resist total conformity to culture

These characteristics, coupled with the motivational needs described by Maslow, provide some tools for understanding how to motivate Knowledge Workers.

Most Knowledge Workers have no need to worry about their physiological, security, and safety needs, so these basic, low-level needs no longer motivate their actions, although the needs are always present. Many people are today motivated primarily by social, esteem, and self-actualizing needs.

b. Spin Selling

This approach is based upon the research carried out by Neil Rackham for his book “Spin Selling”.

SPIN is a method of asking questions that allows you to identify needs and develop an urgency to address those needs.

A number of different types of questions are employed in this process.

For effectiveness, the questions fall into a particular order, as follows:

Situation questions focus on facts, or the current situation. For example, “Tell me about your current position.”

Problem questions begin to identify the areas of dissatisfaction. For example, “Are you satisfied with opportunities for career growth with your current employer?”

Implication questions focus on the effect if the problem goes unresolved. In recruiter speak, “What effect has this had on your ability to advance professionally?”

Need/pay-off questions focus on the outcome if the problem were resolved. For example, “Suppose you had regular opportunities for skill development, what could that do for your career growth?”

You can see clearly that through this process what we have done is to highlight implicit needs, turned them into explicit needs and have then provided a solution to those needs through effective presentation of our EVP.

ii. Sales Process

Whilst there are specific sales theories that can be supplanted into recruitment it is often worth remembering that procedural changes can ensure that the impact of the application of these approaches is intensified.

a. Interviews – Point of Maximum Motivation

The “Point of Maximum Motivation” can be defined as the point in the recruitment process when the enthusiasm of the candidate in question is at its greatest.

At each stage of the process the candidate’s enthusiasm will rise, however, there will also be a significant fall after the end of each stage.

What this tells us is that we need to ensure that the TIME lag between each interview is minimised and additionally, the process needs to be defined at the outset so that the candidate is aware of what they need to do in order to achieve their aim.

If an offer is to be extended it should be done as soon after the final interview as possible – hence if a candidate looks likely to reach that stage the client should ensure that details such as contracts and package information are ready. That way the process can be closed off quickly – rather than allowing indecision to enter into the equation.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion we can see that there are real and definite reasons why a company looking to garner long term growth and development in today's competitive market space needs to focus on strengthening its "talent pool".

As stated in WFT "excellent talent management has become a crucial source of competitive advantage", and that "companies that do a better job of attracting, developing, exciting and retaining their talent will gain more than their fair share of this critical and scarce resource and will boost their performance dramatically".

Once this assumption is built into the fabric of any company the next step must be its execution.

Creation of a communicable and attractive EVP is highly advantageous but this must then be coupled with candidate contact which is centred around attracting talent and managing the recruitment process effectively.

Everyone involved in the process must be clear that in a market where UQIs are being sought and constantly tempted the proposition offered must be effectively delivered and the candidate enthused. With this approach you will be able to ensure control of the process.