

ATTRACTING AND KEEPING TOP PERFORMERS – HOW TO BE AN EMPLOYER OF CHOICE

A framework for positioning your company to appeal to, and retain, the top people your business needs to flourish.

Good people are hard to find. The continuing steady growth in the economy and an ever increasing candidate short market means it's getting harder, not easier.

According to chief executives and industry recruiters there are three main areas on which to focus: the quality and market position of your product or service, environment, and compensation.

Leading edge technology, a strong brand or a high perception of quality will lure top technical and design people, salespeople and support people, all for different reasons. Technology people relish the challenge of developing something new, plus they need ongoing opportunities for skill enhancement to remain fresh.

As for top sales people, a strong product means they can earn bigger commissions, and their egos are fulfilled by being on the leading edge. And top support people are smart enough to know that a quality product or service makes everyone's job easier, and it enables them to earn their incentives. For everyone, superior products and services will earn your company better returns, enabling more reinvestment in R&D or growth, providing challenges and adventure for your technical people, and more and better product and services for your sales and marketing team.

What if your product or service is not cutting-edge or your quality not up to standard? Appealing to top performers is not going to be your only problem. Unless you control a mature market niche, your company will need to update and upgrade to remain viable - this requires high calibre people. If you want to survive in the marketplace you must concentrate harder on the next two factors.

Environmental factors - the corporate culture, the calibre of co-workers, the attitude of your management team, and your physical environment can be pivotal in finding and retaining talented people.

Corporate culture is one area smaller companies have an edge - that "hell-bent-for-leather" attitude makes it exciting and challenging to come to work, and there are fewer layers of bureaucracy people find so stifling. Real teamwork, where success is shared and the team affirms a common commitment, will draw other top professionals.

Having smart, talented staff will captivate smarter, talented people. So will a collegial atmosphere which values the opinions of the rank-and-file along with open-management policies keeping the troops informed on the state-of-the-company.

A training plan, designed career paths and professional conference attendance are more ways to attract and keep people. Other small but significant options include dress code, flexitime, telecommuting, offices with walls - these all help.

Last is the issue of compensation. The big salary problem is no matter how much you pay; a competitor can pay a little bit more. So in terms of salary level itself, you simply have to be at or near your market rate.

Pay-for-performance however, can take compensation much higher while avoiding salary inflation. A system of carefully designed bonuses and incentives will enable you to pay people for exceptional production.

Equity - stock grants, options and equity-like stock - is a powerful way for smaller companies to entice people at all levels. Plus, smaller companies can grant equity without the usual waiting period required by public and larger companies. (Just remember to include a forfeiture clause in case of early termination.)

PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST

What does all this mean in real terms? Some of the ideas in this article are harder to implement than others, and some describe conditions you simply can't achieve. Must you arrange for every item mentioned above? Of course not, but systematically providing your people with the challenge to be their best, the opportunity to learn, the freedom to be creative, the incentives to perform and produce, a feeling of ownership, and respect as professionals - these are the things that will make talented people want to join your company, and have them stay.

The following are examples of the questions that the best candidates ask. This list has been compiled by drawing on the experiences of Rusher Rogers' professional Consultants. If you want to hook the best then make sure you have the answers!

About the prospective employer

- Are they privately owned or listed?
- Where is the company's head office?
- What is the size of the company in staff and revenues?
- What is the situation in Australia including HO location?
- How long has the company been operating in Australia?
- Has the Australian operation been achieving its targets?
- Who are the company's clients in Australia and around the world?
- Who are its competitors and how does it rate against them in the market?
- What is the company's Value Proposition and how does it back that-up?
- What are some of the recent successes?

About the reporting lines and culture of the company

- Who does this person report to?
- What does the Manager expect in respect to:
 - Hours of work
 - Reporting requirements
- What is the general culture of the office?
- What is the personal style of the Manager?

The interview process

- Typically how many interviews and who are they with?
- Over what period will they be held?
- Who will ultimately make the decision?
- Will there be a requirement for Psychometric testing?
- What is the expected start date?

Details of the package

- What is the base package and what does it include?
- Any additional benefits inc. mobile phone, car parking etc.
- How is the incentive component structured and paid?
- Are there any travel requirements?

Turn-offs

- A dragged-out interview or offer process
- Slow feedback after each interview
- An unclear 'Value proposition' especially with a new business role
- A vague territory, target or where the business will come from statement
- A Non-Australianised Contract/Letter of Offer
- A complex commission scheme



About the specific role - for top sales people

- Is this a new or replacement role?
- If replacement why did the other person leave?
- If it is a new role is the position purely new business?
- Is there any guaranteed commission or other ways of compensating for a new business territory?
- What geographic territory, named accounts or vertical industries would this role be responsible for?
- What is the target for the first year?
- When the first orders would be expected?
- What number of calls/appointments etc. is expected?
- How does the company believe it to be achievable?
- What training is provided?
- What marketing programs or lead generation activities are in place?
- Is there a quota club or sales kick-off trips?
- Are there any clear career progression opportunities?

About the specific role - for top support and technical staff

- Is this a new role due to growth, re-structuring or a replacement role?
- If replacement why did the other person leave and how long was the last person in the role for?
- If a new role, how is the company experiencing growth or why has there been a re-structure?
- What are the mandatory and desirable technical skills needed to successfully perform this role?
- Does this person need specific qualifications and if so what are they?
- What are the duties this person needs to perform on a day-to-day basis?
- What are the key challenges this person needs to overcome or will face in this role?
- Will this person be working in a team environment or are they more autonomous and/ or client facing?
- Tell me about the structure, team environment and culture of the company?
- What is the staff turnover in the company?
- Who would they be reporting to and what is the management style of the manager?
- Does the company encourage training/development and/or progression within the company?
- Does the salary include parking, any additional super, salary packaging or benefits?
- How soon would you like this person on board?

About the specific role - for top office admin staff

- What is the company culture like?
- What is the management style of the manager?
- What are the people like?
- What is the company philosophy?
- What is the expectation of standard working hours for this position?
- Why is the position available?
- Why did the last person leave?
- How long was the last person in the role?
- Is this a newly created position?
- Is the role supporting a team, if so, how large is that team and what is the percentage breakdown in supporting each person?
- Does the company have a high staff turn over?
- What sort of reputation does the organisation have?
- Is the organisation a top or mid tier firm?
- What are the future aspirations of the organisation? Do they intend to grow?
- Does the company have any overseas interests?
- Does the organisation have any commitment to, or alliance with and NFP organisations?
- Does the company encourage staff development and/or progression within the company?
- What future opportunities are there?
- What sort of technology does the company use?
- Does the salary include parking, any additional super, salary packaging?

If any of the above looks a bit daunting then Rusher Rogers Recruiting can help you! We have experienced recruitment consultants who really care about providing the best candidates for you. Plus, we have partnered with highly reputable Melbourne based HR and business consultants to help you develop and execute your own business or HR plan. To find out more please call 03 9682 7044 or email enquiries@rusherrogers.com.au.

