

Recruitment: looking beyond the salary package

By Christine Jones, (Dip Bus Man., Dip Bus HR)



Don't waste your energy and money recruiting if you haven't got a plan in place to retain your quarry!

The recruitment process does not end with the appointment of your new member of staff. You've advertised widely, short-listed, interviewed, reference checked, negotiated a package, assisted with relocation – how much did that all cost? Not to mention the down time as you wait for the new employee to come up to speed with your individual protocols, work flows, personnel and procedures. Enormous effort is outlaid by staff involved in this process but so often that is where the effort stops – and it must not if you want to retain staff, reduce the turnover and stop pointless repetition of the recruitment process. There is stiff competition for skills and most people are looking for more than just a salary, particularly the gen Xers.

Whole of life experience: Today, as with many retail and corporate sales pitches, selling a job to a prospective applicant relies as much on selling the concept of the 'whole

of life experience' as it does on the salary structure or career strengthening potential. Don't sell the concept without understanding the expectation of a potential applicant. "Come and live in our exciting community which thrives on its cosmopolitan nightlife, fine dining and extensive views of the coastal hinterland". If that is the whole of life concept how soon will the newcomer experience all your world has to offer? Chances are that it better not be too long or disappointment will set in, possibly delaying the decision to purchase a home (real commitment) and sowing seeds of doubt (maybe I should have taken the other offer – maybe I still can).

Involvement: Have a plan in place to welcome the new staff member. Meet informally with him/her and any 'significant others' to find out what their needs might be – education, sport, housing, shopping, medical, social connections, leisure, transport etc. Have a network ready to make contact with. If your new person plays tennis – make contact with the tennis club and set up a time for them to be introduced. Sounds basic, but in my experience so often overlooked.

Other measures might include:

- Inclusion (big word in my opinion) in work and work/social activities
- Welcome event – maybe not work based
- Regular contact to check on settling in (not just for the employee but their ‘significant others’). Offer assistance if any issues are highlighted
- Ensure personal invitations are extended for all possible events from a variety of sources – don’t just rely on the local newspaper/staff newsletter to provide the information and stimulus
- Provide every assistance to help secure employment for partners/family – even better if your community can score ‘two for the price of one’.
- Be mindful and sensitive to religious requirements – skilled migration is highlighting deficiencies, particularly in rural communities
- Continued – albeit gentle – monitoring of the well-being of the new employee and their ‘significant others’ until they are self-sufficient.

Case Study 1:

Phil was a Maths/Science teacher recruited from Melbourne to a rural secondary college, who arrived with his wife Judy and their two children. All the social and family side of the new appointment were well taken care of and the family appeared to be settling into the community well. However, Judy was finding it difficult to find meaningful paid work. She began to feel that her volunteering (to help her settle into the community) was being taken advantage of. About four months after his appointment to the college, Phil spoke to the Principal outlining the problem his wife was encountering.

At first, the Principal wasn’t that interested, not understanding that Judy’s happiness was central to the decision to relocate. Some time later, Phil felt compelled to make the threat that unless they received some help in finding work for Judy, they would look for an alternative location – someone needed to help open a few doors for them. In the end, it was the college itself that opened the door. The Principal invited Judy in for an interview and was able to offer employment in the college library, which, seven years later has seen that family integrate well into the community and has secured continuity in a difficult to fill teaching position.

Case Study 2:

Hakim, a mechanical engineer, his wife Sula and their three year old son arrived in a medium-sized country town after accepting a long-vacant position. They were shy and appeared to be content managing their own lives. It turned out that they were too shy to ask for help and direction. Sula was very polite but nervous in her new environment and her English skills were not too good. By the time key people realised their struggle, Hakim and Sula had already made plans to move back to their city-based community.

Case Study 3:

A large, regional health facility advertised widely to secure a professional with a particular skill set. Someone willing to relocate was found. His partner also required work, preferably full time. For these two professionals, however, difficulties were encountered in a number of areas:

1. Housing (rental) was almost impossible to obtain and no assistance (financial or in-kind) was offered. A house was finally secured two days before their scheduled arrival, entirely organised by the health professional and his partner – seeds of doubt now growing.
2. After arrival, the partner was contacted once to see ‘how things were going’. Issues such as inappropriate housing and no employment were identified. These were met with a metaphorical pat on the hand and a “don’t worry dear, I’m sure things will work out”.
3. The partner approached the health facility looking for an opportunity to work – excellent skills, great references etc – but was told the budget was tight and at best could only be offered some relief admin duties. Unfortunately, there was no offer of introduction to key employers in the area – no employment network.

In essence, these two were left entirely to their own devices and no-one particularly cared how they fared. No social structure was in place to meet their need to be involved in the community, to develop their sense of belonging and exploit the skills and social capital they could both offer.

How to overcome some of these issues?

The employer could develop a ‘committee of volunteers’ who will contribute their particular community knowledge. This committee, made up of work and community representatives, can utilise their networks to make contacts for new arrivals. This committee would be a resource and a point of reference to field enquiries and social requirements for the first few months. For example, one locality has ‘Friday night drinks’ for their young professionals so that any new staff members are brought into this group. Another locality has “Sundays at the flicks” with coffee afterwards – more suited to the empty nesters that have relocated.

From an organisational point of view, it is vital that major employers make each other aware of employment opportunities and reverse market partners of those they have employed. This may also assist with ‘gaps’ in the labour market and enhance industry recruitment processes. Whilst many will argue that ‘locals’ are the best people for the job, if a locality is trying its best to attract a skill in demand, then provision must be made for the entire ‘package’ that is attracted.

The message is simple! Whenever you see a stranger in your workplace, consider what part you can play to keep them engaged and integrated into your community. Ignoring their well-being comes at too great a cost.