The Myth Behind High-Touch Hiring

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Few would argue that a high-touch approach to hiring is a valuable tool in attracting high performers to an organization. Focusing recruiting efforts on high-value hires is absolutely a smart strategy, but the reality is more typically a one-size-fits-all recruiting process. Recruiters are overburdened and struggling to keep up with hiring demand. Their ability to nurture relationships with applicants is virtually nonexistent. Furthermore, a disproportionate amount of time and effort is devoted to unqualified candidates, causing potentially high performers to lose interest or be overlooked.

So how can the recruitment approach be transformed to high touch where it matters most? The solution is to take a more holistic approach. Then apply innovation, technology, and sourcing expertise to customize the recruitment process for different categories of hires. This creates more opportunities for high touch and allows greater focus and personalized attention on recruiting the candidates who have the greatest potential to drive results for the organization.

The Case for a High-Touch Approach
High touch offers a customized, personal approach that makes sought-after candidates feel not only desired but also appreciated for the time and energy they devote to the prospect organization, whether they are actively looking or passively considering a potential change. High touch establishes a relationship that represents an investment, both by the hiring company and the candidate. The recruitment process puts skills, knowledge, and experience under a microscope. However, companies can drive positive employment decisions by “touching” candidates early on in advance of recruiter contact.

The Reality of Recruiting
Few traditional recruitment processes are structured or supported in a way that facilitates a high-touch approach. Typical, one-size-fits-all processes offer little differentiation in how the vast majority of candidates are treated, especially in the early stages of sourcing. Decentralized sourcing processes equate to tunnel vision in terms of focusing on the overall needs of an organization. Sourcing is a numbers game; recruiters throw out a net and pull in high numbers of potential candidates in order to make a single hire. Using a “first in first out” approach and an applicant tracking system to cull best-match candidates, only a few of those “star” applicants make it to the point where recruiters can devote “quality” time to them.

The Elusive High Touch
Recruiters are typically overburdened and struggling to keep up with hiring demand. They may handle up to 20 active requisitions at any one time, which can translate into 4,000 applicants coming into their pipeline. This kind of volume is not only inefficient but also impossible to manage with any degree of high touch. As reported in Nursing Economics, one mystery shopping review of more than 150 health care organizations showed:

- More than half of all resume submissions went unacknowledged
- Three-quarters of the applicants doubted they would ever be interviewed
- Calls to the HR department went unanswered 43% of the time
- Only 13% of those who managed to connect with a recruiter expected to make it to the interview stage

Fighting against the tide of overwhelming numbers is unrealistic. Despite the impression that high touch kicks in at the narrowest end of the funnel as top candidates are identified, with a generic process for almost all positions, reality is quite different. There is little differentiation in how a recruiter sources for different types of positions, including those most critical to the success of the organization. The end result is no touch for the majority of candidates.
The Myth of High-Touch Hiring

As a recruiter cannot possibly nurture relationships with all applicants, high-touch hiring is a myth for all but a few. A disproportionate amount of time and effort is expended on unqualified candidates. In fact, up to 90% of a recruiter’s time may be spent with unqualified candidates. Even with the support of an applicant tracking system to narrow down the selection of best-qualified candidates, it is likely that potentially high performers may drop out of the process before ever connecting personally with a recruiter because they are not necessarily the right fit for the current opening. So how can the talent acquisition process be transformed in a way that allows the organization to provide a higher-touch experience to more candidates as it scales and focuses its efforts on the right candidates?

How to Transform the Talent Acquisition Process

Recruitment tends to be a series of discrete transactions. Each job requisition is distinct from the next, with no attempt to leverage efforts across multiple requisitions or multiple recruiters. Recruiters operate in silos, without the benefit of an enterprise view. By re-engineering the recruitment process to take a holistic approach to sourcing, an organization can address enterprise requirements in a way that leverages resources, drives greater efficiency, and facilitates a higher-touch approach for more candidates, especially those positions deemed most valuable to the organization.

Disassemble the high-touch hiring myth at your organization with these three steps:

1. **Realign the Recruitment Function to Eliminate Structural Barriers**
   Structure the recruiting function in a way that allows for an enterprise view of hiring needs, so resources can be leveraged more effectively, and recruiting strategy can be aligned with organizational strategy. When enterprise recruiting needs are aggregated across multiple business lines and geographies, volumes increase across job categories. That creates opportunities for recruiters to specialize by profession or function (such as engineering, accounting, or marketing). They can then network more effectively with professional associations and alumni organizations, and develop deeper relationships with the target talent pool.

2. **Identify High-Value Hires**
   Every organization needs recruiters to address ongoing needs to fill a variety of jobs resulting from natural attrition throughout the year. At the same time, however, there are likely to be strategic initiatives that can significantly contribute to revenue and gross profit growth. If, for example, a technology organization plans to grow revenue through the introduction of a new product, identify those positions critical to a successful product launch. These high-value hires may be in the areas of software quality assurance testing, marketing, sales, and technology deployment. It is for those position types that the highest-touch approach makes the most sense. Rather than scattershot sourcing that dilutes effort across all job openings, recruiting resources can be deployed strategically to more effectively engage candidates for the positions that can have the greatest impact on achievement of enterprise goals.

3. **Apply Innovation, Technology, and Sourcing Expertise**
   Recruiting ROI can be significantly enhanced through a more innovative sourcing and screening approach. Use technology to incorporate early-stage candidate assessments. Leverage social media tools to connect with candidates in a dedicated talent community. When recruiting changes from start-stop transactions to a continuous process of relationship building, there are countless opportunities for high-touch engagement. Candidates in a talent community can be pre-qualified. They are available for future opportunities and can be matched to multiple roles. Through the online community, they can easily learn more about the organization, gain a better understanding of its goals and strategy, and essentially prep themselves to be hire-ready as soon as the right opportunity is presented. All of this promotes a more positive experience for the candidate and builds loyalty to the employment brand.
Traditional Hiring Offers Limited Returns, Residual Consequences

While the majority of organizations engage in workforce planning to forecast annual needs, recruitment continues to address short-term, often local, requirements as discrete transactions. A recruiter pursues a sourcing strategy specific to filling a single open requisition. Once that requisition is filled, the recruiter starts the sourcing process all over again from scratch for the next open requisition.

This type of traditional, transactional hiring represents an investment with limited returns and residual consequences. For instance:

- Despite all the time and effort expended for resume review, applicant screening, and candidate interviews, the end result is a single hire.
- Candidates not hired are lost to the organization. This includes those who may be high-potential hires edged out by a slightly stronger candidate for this particular position, but who still represent ideal hires for the organization.
- Those who are not hired may feel abandoned, often with little idea of why they did not make the cut.
- The typical lack of follow-up leaves candidates less than impressed with the organization and less likely to consider it as a potential employer in the future or to recommend it to other candidates.

Create High-Touch Hiring Reality

Implementing a high-touch hiring approach can result in positive candidate experiences, employment brand loyalty, a hire-ready talent pipeline, more referrals, and faster hires.

To make high-touch hiring a reality at your organization, follow these steps:

1. **Focus on Enterprise Hiring Goals**
   - Develop a sourcing strategy with the end result in mind. Start by taking a more holistic approach to sourcing and screening.
     - Look at enterprise hiring needs rather than requirements that are siloed by geography or line of business organizational structure.
     - Consider the total number of hires, by category, over a 12-month period.
     - Identify areas of focus where recruiters can specialize by position and leverage their efforts across multiple hires rather than single transactions.

Beyond separating out executive-level positions for special handling by an executive recruiter (often representing external agency spend) or grouping hires into the two major categories of hourly versus salaried (or non-management versus management), this approach allows for greater refinement of the recruiting strategy and more streamlined processes based on job groupings.
2. **Balance High Tech with High Touch**

Find the right balance of high touch with high tech through the more effective application of sourcing expertise, innovation, and technology. Create customized sourcing strategies based on higher-value, transformational roles. To target the right candidates, both active and passive, take an innovative approach, powered by technology. For example:

- Apply CRM principles
- Pursue search engine optimization
- Employ mobile services
- Conduct assessments early in the process
- Explore the power of digital interviewing
- Leverage social media tools

Transform the recruiting process from a transactional basis to a relationship basis. Create a talent community. Connect with candidates in advance of hiring needs for high-demand skills and unique capabilities. Build a hire-ready talent pool to pre-source requirements.

3. **Build a Flexible, Customizable Process**

Build flexibility into the recruiting process so that efforts can be scaled based on hiring goals. Customize the recruitment process for different categories of hires to facilitate greater focus and more personalized attention on key hires.

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**Never Assume Reality Matches Expectations**

Customized sourcing and screening strategies for higher-value, transformational roles allow you to provide a high-touch experience and build a relationship.

One large financial institution carefully tracked how much time every stakeholder spent on the hiring process for two specific roles. It discovered that while it took 46 hours to hire a branch manager, every teller position required very nearly the same degree of effort at 45 hours. Since it cycled through thousands of tellers on an annual basis, that left little opportunity for a high-touch approach with any candidate.

Mapping the process for each position can identify specific areas where technology can streamline tasks and free up recruiters to focus on the highest-value positions.

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**Reap the Rewards When Myth Becomes Reality**

The result of these actions? A holistic approach to recruiting that allows for flexibility and customization, while balancing high touch and high tech to create a more positive experience for more candidates, while attracting and landing a greater number of potential star performers.

Most important, the recruiting process fulfills its potential to make a larger impact on the business by successfully capturing a greater number of performance-ready new hires. And at that point, high-touch myth becomes high-touch reality.
About Aon Hewitt Talent Acquisition Solutions
Aon Hewitt is transforming the way companies acquire talent. Its strategic talent acquisition solutions integrate the most innovative recruitment technologies and processes to quickly and more effectively deliver engaged, performance-ready employees to empower better business results. From workforce planning to new hire engagement, Aon Hewitt end-to-end RPO solutions drive more than 74,000 hires annually. For more information about Aon Hewitt’s talent acquisition solutions, visit aonhewittrpo.com.

About Aon Hewitt
Aon Hewitt is the global leader in human resource solutions. The company partners with organizations to solve their most complex benefits, talent, and related financial challenges, and improve business performance. Aon Hewitt designs, implements, communicates, and administers a wide range of human capital, retirement, investment management, health care, compensation, and talent management strategies. With more than 29,000 professionals in 90 countries, Aon Hewitt makes the world a better place to work for clients and their employees. For more information on Aon Hewitt, please visit aonhewitt.com.

About the Author
With a proven track record in implementing enterprise transformation in talent acquisition and HR management in highly dynamic and complex environments, Melissa Mounce is responsible for the implementation of all client engagements.

Melissa previously held a number of senior leadership roles in talent acquisition for PNC Financial Services Group and Capgemini.