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The role of a Talent Acquisition (“TA”) leader is critical in healthcare—we speak from experience, having both held the position prior to becoming executive search consultants. But the TA leader is often pulled in many different directions and it can be a highly rewarding and thankless job at the same time. When a TA leader answers a call from their internal client, it’s most likely not to tell them, “Thank you for giving me the right candidates more quickly than I expected and we have no needs.” (It’s kind of like nobody calls IT to tell them that the network is running great.) In short, it’s a demanding job.

Therefore, in this article we look to examine what keeps these TA creatures motivated to keep plugging along. From system selection to implementation to job fairs, to phone screens to interviews to meetings about “staffing strategy”, the TA leader’s day is usually a mix of project work and firefighting. To learn what makes these leaders tick, we reached out to several current talent acquisition leaders to ask more about their role and how it has changed. During our interviews several key themes began to emerge related to what’s really important right now. We took away the following:

Keep tech in check: *Technology should be leveraged to reduce variation in simple processes, but will not be a substitute for personal connection between recruiters and candidates.*

We all know technology will be increasingly important in healthcare and specifically how human resources leaders do their work. Cathy Henesey, Executive Director of Talent Acquisition for AdventHealth, believes success in the

future will come from constantly improving and doing things differently. She says, “The status quo will not suffice. Technology will play a significant role and staying ahead of the curve is critical. Recruitment will progress to a day when the application itself is no longer part of the process. How we find, attract, engage, and hire talent will completely change. Companies will need to speak to their value proposition keenly as a differentiator.”

Technology can be a complement in helping make recruitment processes more efficient, but recruitment is very people oriented and therefore depends on trust and connection between recruiter, candidate and hiring team. Mason Quackenbush, Director of Recruitment and Workforce Planning at Gundersen Health System, realizes technology is important and can be helpful, particularly the analytics. “However, recruitment is all about relationships,” he says. “Over my 17 years in recruitment related positions, trends come and go, but the connection with candidates – truly listening, understanding, and developing a relationship that may not result in a candidate today but can add value somewhere in the future – doesn’t change.”

As it relates to technology and the future of talent acquisition, David Crawford, Vice President Talent Acquisition of NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital, states, “I firmly believe that while technology and artificial intelligence (AI) may help with analytics and simple processing, the most effective recruitment efforts will continue to have a ‘personal touch’ and that recruitment will always be about people. Technology will never be a substitute for personal relationships.”

Find inspiration in multifaceted work: Second, talent acquisition leaders are always working on a variety of strategic initiatives, all of which have a huge impact on the business. It is this impact that motivates TA leaders to engage and strive for excellence.

Recruiting and hiring isn't the only work that TA leaders are focused on in today's fast-paced changing healthcare environment. Helping internal talent grow and make the right moves is a focus of many organizations. "I believe a dedicated focus on internal talent and development of high potentials will pay off in the long run as we know these leaders are already aligned with our culture, have proven track records, and they understand how to work in complex environments to get things done," says Russell Podgorski, Director of Executive Recruitment for Providence. "Yes, we need to know the external market for a particular job, but just as importantly, as trusted advisors, we need to understand internal talent to ensure the right leaders are recruited into roles which will enable organizations to achieve its strategic objectives."

In addition to his role as Vice President of Talent Management at eviCore, Kevin Richie is also responsible for the diversity and inclusion programs and initiatives, a responsibility he takes very seriously. "Our society is rapidly changing and there is an absolutely appropriate focus on diversity and inclusion on leadership teams," he says.

Jeff DeMordaunt, Vice President of Talent at Ardent Health Services, is engaged at every juncture of Ardent's leadership talent acquisition and promotion. In addition to his role of leading a team he is also working on system-wide initiatives focused on executive development and frontline clinical leader development programs. Part of what keeps DeMordaunt motivated is being able to help leaders grow and support the organization with the core values and principles Ardent is founded upon.

Prioritize passion: Third, people considering a career in TA leadership should be energized and passionate about the organization and the industry and should be students of that industry. They should be inquisitive, creative, engaging and should enjoy the opportunity to sell their organizations to others.

Leaders commonly tell us that recruiting in healthcare is different. It's important to find talent professionals who are energized and passionate about the work. Everyone wants to work for an organization with meaning and those most successful have a passion for the healing that happens within the walls of a hospital.

"Recruitment can be an unrecognized job," Henesey shares. "Time spent making calls, sourcing candidates, and prepping interviews can often times go unnoticed. Hiring managers reach out most when problems exist not when things are going well. Because of this, a recruiter needs to love the thrill of the hunt and the reward they get when they find a candidate their dream job." When looking for the right recruiter, Henesey focuses on finding someone with passion for recruitment. "It's a difficult job, but also very gratifying, and without passion for the work it can be discouraging when you are recruiting in a tight labor market."

DeMordaunt suggests that anyone interested in talent leadership as a career should stay energized and connected and active in the market. He states, "The minute you are satisfied is the minute you are no longer motivated." Recruitment and talent development are ongoing processes and activities that have no true "end."

When considering a role in talent within an organization, one must be customer focused. "A recruiter at Gundersen needs to be able to balance two sets of customers – applicants and hiring leaders," says Quackenbush. "This requires the ability to understand and manage relationships at every level – housekeeping through executive. A recruiter needs to be able to sell a culture where intrinsic motivation is a priority. Not all positions will be easy to fill – sourcing a position may require thinking outside the box and problem solving beyond traditional recruitment strategies."

Remember that the candidate is king. Lastly, candidate experience is and will be the differentiator for successful recruitment at every level of an organization. Inevitably, the experience a candidate has in interacting with an organization will translate to overall brand reputation. TA leaders should inspire their teams and their organization to fully commit to providing an exceptional candidate experience.

Intermountain Healthcare's TA leadership team took a unique approach as they focused their strategy on improving the candidate experience. Using a continuous improvement approach, they identified their vision, three to five year critical strategies, key performance indicators (metrics) that show success toward goals, and implemented weekly huddles to involve the team in the work. "It hasn't been easy," says Keri Perrigot, TA Director who oversees their candidate experience strategy. Her manager, Damon Vitangeli, states, "We've been wanting to move toward a more standardized approach focused on the experience of the candidate and hiring manager for years." By implementing weekly huddles they have seen a dramatic change in goal achievement. Since 2017 the team has decreased their "time to yes" metric from 46 days to 29 days...a whopping 17-day reduction that puts them within the top quartile nationally. In addition, they were a Talent Board's Candidate Experience award winner in 2018 as well as 2019.

Crawford of NewYork-Presbyterian emphasizes the impact recruitment has on the brand and reputation of the organization. "The experience a candidate has with us in the recruitment process will inevitably impact the organization's reputation," says Crawford.

Richie of eviCore notes that his favorite aspect of his role is developing team members. He describes the role of a talent leader by saying, "I ensure candidates have a good entry into the organization and then ensure they are developed when they arrive." While broad and complex, Richie's depiction captures the essence of what the primary objectives of the TA leader should be.

Almost every TA leader we speak with tells us that people and talent are the most important aspect of their business. We believe the insights gleaned from the talented leaders mentioned in this article reinforce the necessity of focusing on winning the battle for talent. The role of talent leader is broad and exciting and hugely impactful on an organization's talent agenda as well as the brand and reputation of the organization. We suggest that the role of talent leader will continue to evolve and encourage organizations to focus on hiring leaders into these roles that are customer-focused, curious, tech savvy and highly relationship-oriented.

To discuss the exciting role of talent leader, please reach out to Dan at dyoung@wittkieffer.com or Luke at lpmorris@wittkieffer.com.

About Our Sources

David Crawford is Vice President of Talent Acquisition for NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital. Crawford has led the talent function across multiple industries for many complex organizations for over 30 years.

Jeff DeMordaunt is Vice President of Talent Management at Ardent Health Services ("Ardent") based in Nashville, Tennessee. DeMordaunt has been in the healthcare talent arena for over 25 years with some of the largest hospital systems in the U.S.

Mason Quackenbush is the Director of Recruitment Services and Workforce planning for Gundersen Health System. Quackenbush is based in La Crosse, Wisconsin, and has been a recruitment leader for over 15 years in the healthcare industry.

Kevin Richie is Vice President of Talent Management at eviCore and is based in Nashville, Tennessee. Richie has been a leader in the talent space for over 15 years, with the majority of his career in the healthcare industry.

Cathy Henesey is the Executive Director of Talent Acquisition for AdventHealth and is based in Orlando, Florida. Cathy has been in the talent and recruiting for over 20 years inside and out of healthcare.

Russell Podgorski is the Director of Executive Recruitment for Providence and is based in Renton, Washington. Russell has been leading recruitment teams for the past 15 years and hires hundreds of C-suite executives every year.

Keri Perrigot is Talent Acquisition Director, and Damon Vitangeli, Talent Acquisition Manager, for Intermountain Healthcare. Collectively they have approximately 50 years of HR and talent experience.