

Talent in Recruitment: innovations and issues

Friday 3rd December 2004

Attendees:

Paul Byford – Osborne Clarke
Charlie Statham – Eversheds
Holly Bayliss – Herbert Smith
Amber Christmas – Clyde & Co
Annabelle Lawrence – Cripps Harries Hall
Jackie Webster – Trethowans
Victoria Edwards – Olswang
Sandra Caddock – Simmons & Simmons
Janette Wallace – Beachcroft Wansbrough
Maxine Lawrence – Mayer Brown Rowe
Sarah Jones – Lester Aldridge
Lesa Fallowfield – Jones Day
Rebecca Clarke – Hammonds
Julie Bounden – Stevens Bolton
Paul Robinson – Watson, Farley & Williams

Speakers:

Clare Harris – Lovells
William Bale – Turbervilles
Alison Gill – Getfeedback

Presentations

Clare Harris, Lovells

Clare shared her experiences of building the 'employer brand' through the new Lovells website. This was a huge project for Clare and Lovells and has resulted in a cutting edge, interactive website that informs, and prepares graduate applicants. Her aim was to lead the field in law employer branding and target students very specifically. Part of the challenge was to produce a site that would appeal to students by creating a rich media experience, but also a site that was aspirational and took the career offering seriously. From the feel of the website through to the leading edge interactivity, the network wholeheartedly agreed that the website achieved this goal.

The website uses very different language from the usual recruitment jargon, instead of words like "challenge"; "drive"; "innovation", Lovells opted for more original words like "envy", "Yen", and "wanderlust". These serve to draw in visitors to their site, and each word is synonymous with something unique about Lovells. Lovells have used the interactive element of the website to talk personally to their prospective employees by using video clips of existing employees talking about their own experiences of working for the Firm. In doing this they hope to put forward a very real flavour of life at Lovells, showing that Lovells' lawyers are personable and encapsulate the lifestyle of the lawyers and trainees.

Clare is hoping to see the 3000 strong pool of graduate applications received by Lovells become more selective and to see the graduates themselves better prepared for interview and ready to meet the requirements of the Firm.

It was extremely interesting to have a tour of the new graduate site and there were many questions for Clare on how to approach such a project and what impact she had seen on recruitment at Lovells so far.

Please visit the site at : <http://graduates.lovells.com/> to experience the innovative, interactive site first hand. Clare also kindly provided copies of the Lovells Graduate brochure that accompanies the website, we still have a few copies – if you would be interested in receiving one please contact talentinlaw@getfeedback.net

William Bale, Turbervilles

William spoke to the group on the problems and issues faced by small and medium-sized Firms and how they can capitalise on their flexibility and agility to ensure they are recruiting and retaining the top talent.

He identified the advantages of a smaller Firm and talked about their ability to offer work/life balance and to ensure that their employees can have a voice that is heard. By nature of the size of the Firm they can allow their employees greater involvement. William reiterated that Talent is a precious commodity in today's market and that it is vital that firms provide reward and empowerment, and to make this work they need to start at the top by replacing leadership with good people management.

To emphasise this point William spoke about the unpredictability of human nature and how more than ever Talent is on the move; "Goes where it is welcome and stays where it is happy". It is all about attracting and keeping the right people, interestingly William made the point that we give farewell parties when people leave but we don't welcome people with "joining" parties.

He felt that Firms need to make sure they move with the times and remain forward thinking. Senior Partners need to have an adequate understanding of all the different jobs within the Firm and therefore the differing needs of the employees. Coaching and training need to be maximised to retrain and educate employees and allow them growth within their role.

William asked many questions of the group and inspired much debate leaving us with the message that smaller Firms need to listen to their employees; address their HR

strategy to provide long term fixes and results; promote innovation at all levels and to have the courage of their convictions.

Alison Gill, Getfeedback

Alison discussed the approach traditionally used by Law Firms to recruit new talent and highlighted some of the pitfalls. She talked to the group about the different processes involved in selection and some of the innovations Firms could be implementing to ensure that they successfully attract and select the right people for the job.

Alison focused on the ways in which Firms identify the top performers and high fliers from the huge selection pool. She posed the question “do Firms always go for the same type of candidate and is there a lack of recognition of the whole person?” If this is the case it would seem Firms are in danger of creating a homogenous employee base which is highly resistant to change and ultimately stifles attempts at creativity and innovation.

Alison encouraged Firms to really understand the whole person when making recruitment decisions, this whole person would include not only their academic ability but their personality, motivation, emotional and moral intelligence and their degree of cultural fit. Several members challenged Alison, arguing that most forward thinking firms look far beyond just academic records, but that these were still a prerequisite for performance in a law firm given the complexity and volume of information that lawyers are required to process. This resulted in an interesting conundrum:

1. One member described one of their top performing lawyers who had achieved BDD at A-level and would not normally have been selected by a firm. All members agreed that these people were difficult to spot but well worth finding.
2. However, the members felt strongly that academic barriers should not be lowered for recruitment or other factors considered more important.

Alison went on to explain that the law needs to be accessible to a huge variety of people and that in turn Firms need to make sure their employees are able to relate to this diversity; innovation needs to be valued and recognised as a tool for reshaping the business into a more competitive organisation.

To do this Alison talked about the importance of using tools to accurately measure and create a process for funnelling the right candidates at each stage, and how technology plays a vital role in moving this forward. She discussed the various tests that are available to measure intellect; emotional intelligence; moral intelligence;

motivation and cultural fit and touched briefly on how Getfeedback can assist Firms to implement this innovative process.

One member pointed out that the recruitment process is 50% finding the right candidate and 50% selling the firm to that candidate. Therefore, it is not always possible to use several different evaluation tools, for lateral hires in particular, as the process would become too onerous and off-putting for the candidate.

Finally, Alison left us with the message that “recruiting is the foundation of engagement, development, career progression and Firm success.” Alison’s controversial and candid style prompted a great deal of debate and discussion amongst the group, which made for a lively end to the morning.

In between the speaker presentations we asked the group to discuss amongst themselves the issues facing them on a daily basis and what questions they had brought with them specifically. We then went round the group and noted the key issues/questions that were raised:

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of flexible benefits and what is the impact on retention?
2. How do we define the selection criteria at the first cut?
3. What role do assessment centres really play in graduate recruitment?
4. Looking at the latest recruitment drives by Firms, how do success rates compare?
5. How can individual law Firms differentiate themselves to help graduates make an informed decision regarding application?
6. What happens to new graduates post qualification and what support do they receive if any?
7. How can we pinpoint the motivational factors in graduates?

Most of these points were covered by the discussion and debate throughout the morning, however Talent in Law will make a point of addressing any unanswered questions at future seminars.

Thank you to all those that attended for making it such an interesting seminar, we look forward to seeing you again. The 2005 seminar programme will be announced shortly, if you have any ideas or topics you would like to see addressed we are all ears! Please contact Elizabeth Kee at talentinlaw@getfeedback.net or 01491 845 535.