

The Marketer's Role in Workforce Issues

Author: Kriss Barlow, RN, MBA

“Our hospital used to be THE place to work. We were selective and the best nurses in the city wanted to be part of our team. Since then, what a change! Now, Marketing has been asked to get involved in recruitment. It makes sense, but what's the best way to help?”

Many hospitals across the country have faced significant challenges in getting adequate, qualified staff to meet their needs. Discussions about capacity are no longer simply about the number of beds; they now include staffing capability. And Nursing is not the only department with shortages; technical departments, especially Radiology and Pharmacy, also are struggling.

So, whose problem is it? Truth be told, this problem is larger than one department, and the most successful organizations see this as a system-wide challenge. While there are large national interests working to develop a platform for change, in the near term, marketing departments are proving a valuable resource for communicating the message and working to lessen the problem.

Why Marketing?

Everyone's plates are full, so does it really make sense to stretch the department in yet another direction? Of course—because Marketing is the area within an organization that's most comfortable with thinking from the vantage point of the purchaser. In this case, it's the purchaser of the new job. This customer-focused view frames a differential message and approach.

In many organizations, Marketing has a leadership role in customer service. Excellent models are in place to recognize the role of the staff in customer service. Good recruitment needs to be supported by good retention. Otherwise, talented staffs are brought in, and after expensive orientation and training, they leave disillusioned—a cycle of shortage. Marketing's involvement actually can enhance retention.

Getting Started

If given the opportunity to support recruitment in your organization, start by refusing to be the “ad person.” Take the time to do it right and you'll create a strong advantage:

Step 1: Do Your Homework

Not unlike any marketing task, find out what makes your organization special and different in the eyes of the staff you are trying to woo.

Determine who applies and how user-friendly the organization is with that first call or walk-in request for information. This is a huge area of vulnerability. Are potential staff forced to leave several messages or is there someone answering the phone who's not invested in making a positive first impression?

Before you spend marketing dollars, make sure a customer-focused response system is in place. You may accomplish this through mystery shopping or through conversations with the Human Resources staff. Often, you'll find that others' definitions of acceptable practices are different from your prospects'.

Step 2: Use a Variety of Marketing Tools

Consider a consistent branded message for promotion via your Web page, newspaper ads and any promotional materials/direct mail.

Test the variety of mediums available in your market and measure what works.

Step 3: Money is the Objective and Lifestyle Does Matter

Recognize that when they don't know you, they will use dollars to determine if your organization makes the cut.

But, dollars being equal or close to it, the professional is looking for a caring and rewarding work environment.

Use copy points that indicate you understand that.

If lifestyle is your goal, then your message needs to reflect WIIFM (What's in It For Me?) in order for prospects to switch to your organization.

Step 4: Ongoing Evaluation

Create a team that can review the exit interviews, or offer to sit in on them on occasion to hear why people are leaving.

Interview people after 3 months in the new position and ask them why they came, what they're thinking at this stage and what appealed to them during their job search.

Use mystery shopping to ensure that those you targeted through marketing efforts are getting into the system.

Step 5: Watch Data and Trends, and Adapt Accordingly

Work with Human Resources to track how new people are finding you, and the hire rate from each of the marketing sources.

Use employee satisfaction surveys to create ongoing messages.

Talk to employees who enjoy your workplace and use the feedback to create ads that will attract others like them.

As you work to learn more about what's working, shift your mix of marketing tools accordingly.

With all there is to do in Marketing, this may initially feel like just another responsibility on the to-do list. But realize that Marketing is the primary department responsible for image. And the people delivering the care are the human embodiment of the organization's image. They carry that message internally and externally to the people you serve.



Kriss Barlow, Corporate Health Group,
www.corporatehealthgroup.com, 1-888-334-2500