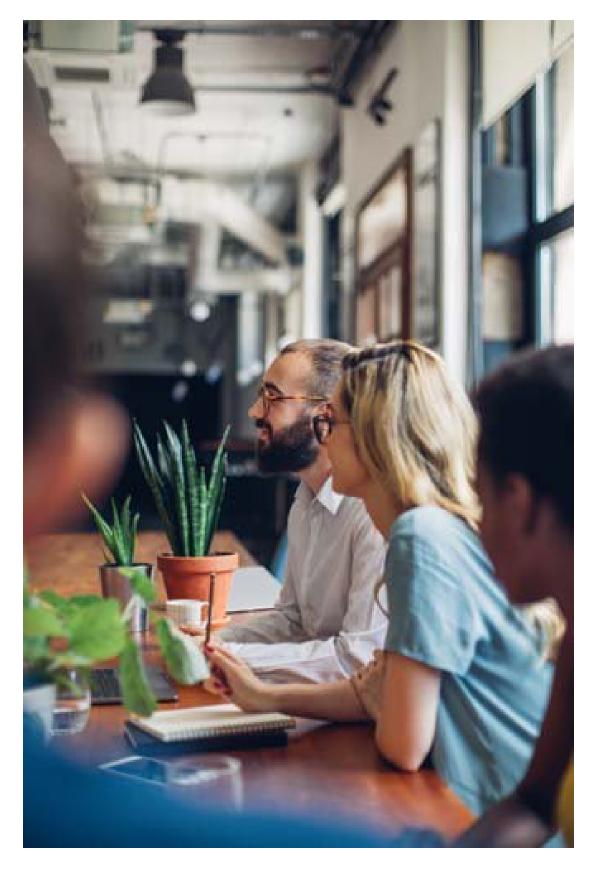


Great CX Depends on Great Employees: here's How to Find Them



By MICAH SOLOMON

Perhaps the most essential element of providing great customer service is to have great customer-facing employees. And to have the best, you need to make sure you're picking the best of the best. Selecting the most promising applicants who just happen to come your way may not cut it here; if this haphazard applicant pool is small, you may be forced to take, say, the entire top 10 percent of those who apply, and there may not be a single potential customer service star among them.



But if you invest in continuous outreach and in deepening that pool, you can succeed in giving your organization the chance to select perhaps only the top 1 percent of applicants—the best of the best. The secret here is to always be scouting (ABS), as Brad Black, an expert on employee selection and president and CEO of HUMANeX Ventures, puts it. You pull off "ABS" via an initial screening tool (30 to 40 questions, for example) available 24/7 in a format that can be answered online. Those who make it through this automatically scored screening should be invited to sign up for step two of the process: a telephone interview. This means that someone who is working two jobs at present and can only find the time at, say, 11 p.m. to apply can receive immediate and sincere interest from your company in the form of an invitation to take the next step toward coming to work with you.

If you're screening 24/7, and getting back to prospects in a timely manner, you'll be picking your best from a much deeper and wider pool than if you only recruited whenever it was convenient for you. And this can make all the difference.

It's also valuable to involve your entire organization in scouting for the potential employees who are, or can grow into being, as successful as your best current employees. Involving your entire organization in recruiting is beneficial once a selection is made as well. You can now involve your "recruiters" (your employees who referred the new employees) in the orientation process so that new employees are essentially being brought on board by their friends.

Once you've expanded your applicant pool, you'll still need to know how to select the best applicants from that newly-deepened pool. When you're selecting applicants to be future customer-facing employees, experience and technical skills aren't the most important considerations. Rather, what you need to be looking for are the personality traits that will allow a future employee to succeed in providing great customer service, day in and day out, when working with the public. You can tease out whether an applicant has these traits by buying an off-the shelf profiling tool (which you can subsequently refine based on your own experience), or by engaging a science-based company like Gallup or TalentPlus. If you're not going to go to these truly-scientific lengths, you can use my shorthand method to get a feeling for the traits that you're looking for. These traits (and, again, this is a broad generalization) spell "WETCO," and a mnemonic device that makes these traits easy to remember is to picture a wet dog shaking itself off outside of PETCO:

W is for Warmth: Simple human kindness.

E is for Empathy: The ability to sense what another person is feeling.

T is for Teamwork: An inclination toward working together, as opposed to doing things alone.

C is for Conscientiousness: Detail orientation, including an ability and willingness to follow through to completion.

O is for Optimism: The ability to bounce back and to not internalize challenges.

Obviously, hiring the best of the best only gets you started. The selected employee needs to be onboarded, trained, reinforced, coached and inspired to sustained customer service success. But it's an essential place to start.

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