# Should I Stay or Should I Go?

Employee Engagement is clearly one of the most discussed and studied topics of the last few years. As the pace of technology and innovation continues to increase and the demographics of the workforce shift from baby boomers to millennials, engagement has become a critical sustaining factor for employers. In fact, it's difficult to find an organization where employee engagement is not something being discussed in the C-Suite and even within the board of directors. Interestingly, the term employee engagement makes an underlying assumption that the person you are trying to engage is already an employee. However, this article explores the position that employee engagement starts before the person ever becomes an employee. It begins with the talent acquisition process.

## Candidate Experience and Impact on Engagement

According to the Talent Board North American Candidate Experience Research Executive Brief: The Business Impact of Candidate Experience, candidates who have had a positive candidate experience will definitely increase their employer relationships.[1] On the other hand, those who reported a negative recruiting experience will take their alliances, purchases, and relationships elsewhere. But what determines whether the candidate has a positive or negative experience?  As with most things relating to the workforce, the answer is in the eye of the beholder, or in this case, the candidate.

In order to engage candidates (future employees), it is critical to look at what is important to them. While there is still some tolerance for poor online recruiting experiences, most active applicants can quickly become frustrated with these experiences once they have been through a more positive experience. Millennials in particular are sensitive to the online experience. According to the Global Human Capital

Trends 2016 report by Deloitte[2], millennials now make up more than half the workforce. It can be argued that the rest of workforce will only become more sensitive to online experiences as well. In today's ultra-competitive recruitment market, employers must develop recruiting and onboarding experiences that will address the increasing importance of a sophisticated and easy-to-use online experience.

These experiences should easily translate (from the candidate's point of view) to onboarding and other HR processes. Employers need to provide their talent with clear development plans, opportunities for promotion, and the tools to drive their own career progression. Today's top talent places a high premium on flexibility, creativity, and purpose at work. If this is what is expected, how can organizations deliver?

## Recruitment Optimization – Is Your Strategy Up-to-Date?

The first step is to conduct a Recruitment Optimization Assessment (ROA) for talent acquisition improvement opportunities.  An evaluation of the overall function, recruitment optimization looks at talent acquisition as a whole to identify gaps and minimize risks. A few of the questions to ask are: Is your talent strategy aligned with your business strategy? Have your processes been recently updated and do your technologies support your processes? What about your employment brand? Do you have assessments in place to provide predictive analytics? Data? When does onboarding begin? Do I have a roadmap to my future state? While it may seem daunting, this optimization will provide the foundation to move your business forward. A project of this type is comprehensive and understandably time consuming so if you don't have the internal bandwidth to take this on, bring in a consultant who specializes in this area.

Recruiting has changed dramatically in the past few years – the way recruiting was done a few years ago will not work in today's market. It is difficult to attract the top talent you need if your recruitment strategy and practices are not up-to-date. The attraction, recruitment, hiring, and onboarding stages each affect the employee's perception of the organization and, in the long-term, their engagement as well. Organizations should look through the lens of their candidates while conducting this assessment. A great source of information is the experience of recent hires. Make sure that you tap into these employees and get answers to critical questions: What did they find appealing about the process? What could have been better? How did their experience with your organization compare to other organizations? Ensure that you dig into process and technology. In addition, you should reach out to top candidates who chose to go to another organization. Ask for a debriefing on their experience with your organization. In most cases, these candidates are very forthcoming with their opinions. Remember, finding a quality candidate in a candidate-driven market is more challenging – and it takes longer. Therefore, it's in an employer's best interest to proactively optimize recruiting practices and focus on retention to have a positive impact on engagement – engaged employees produce better business outcomes than other employees. In this time of talent shortages, engagement isn't a nice to have anymore, it is a requirement to meet and exceed business goals.

Once you have good data, take a look at your processes. Are there opportunities to streamline? Traditional process redesign methodology can help in this effort, as well as researching leading practices in the marketplace. The next area to analyze is your technology. What type of user experience do you want your candidates to have at your site? Do you need a full replacement or will a "face-lift" do the job? A key resource in the redesign of your processes and technology is the hiring manager. As you think through your future state processes and technology, engage your hiring managers and build in their perspectives. They can turn into your "change champions" when you are ready to roll out your new process.

## Assessments During the Selection Process

One area that needs special attention in the selection process is candidate assessments. According to findings from the Talent Board's Candidate Experience Research Report,[3] 78% of the Candidate Experience Award winners are using assessments to improve new hire performance. In fact, a recent Aberdeen[4] study shows that businesses that use pre-hire assessments are not only 36% more likely to be satisfied with their new hires, they were also 36% more likely to see improved employee performance and 22% more likely to see an improved revenue per FTE. Assessments serve a number of purposes, including providing relevant objective data about candidate skillsets and competencies and insights into motivational and cultural fit resulting in a reduction in turnover and ultimately impacting performance, engagement, and retention. However, from the point of view of the candidate (and in terms of future engagement) the key to assessments is ensuring that they will fit with the culture within the organization and ensure their success. Most recruiting professionals and hiring managers base much of their hiring decision on subjective data such as résumés, LinkedIn profiles, face-to-face interviews, and phone conversations. In some cases, references are checked as well. But research shows there are many limitations and biases associated with these screening tools. Becoming more scientific and utilizing assessments such as DeGarmo or Profiles International in the selection process will provide insights needed to build the best prepared and engaged workforce possible.

Leading organizations are now using technology to help make better hiring decisions by assessing the following:
- Cultural compatibility / fit,
- Individual motivators and derailers that may impact retention, and
- Insights into key strengths and growth opportunities that impact performance.

The outcomes that these assessments provide are:[5]
- Increased engagement,
- Improved retention rate,
- Reduced time from hire to desired level of productivity,
- Increased hiring manager satisfaction, and
- Decreased turnover.

## The Next Step: Structured Onboarding

Once the offer has been made and accepted, a critical process of engagement begins. Onboarding is the process of hiring, integrating,

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and socializing a new employee into a company and its culture. This is a strategic process and one that heavily influences engagement and retention. The critical nature of effective onboarding has become increasingly important to organizations looking to retain a competitive advantage in an increasingly mobile and globalized workforce.

A poor first impression leaves the candidate wondering, "Am I making the right decision?" An integral part of the recruiting process, getting it right enhances employee engagement, retention, and productivity. According to an Aberdeen Onboarding study,[6] 90% of companies believe their new hires decide to stay or leave a company within the first year of employment. However, it can be argued that new hires actually make this decision within six months on the job.

Key recommendations in this area include:
- Streamline and automate the process – implement onboarding technology to streamline and automate the tactical aspects and enhance onboarding overall;
- Begin onboarding before the first day – don't confuse onboarding with first day orientation. Onboarding should begin at the offer stage and build the right mix of relationships and experiences early to facilitate performance, engagement, and retention;

- Involve managers and team members – utilize training mentorships and buddy systems to facilitate assimilation and engagement; and,
- Focus on using recognition early and often – recognize excellence in your employees. Some of the most important factors in driving employee engagement are feedback and recognition given by either managers or peers.

Ultimately, the onboarding process should flow seamlessly from the recruiting process. Nothing is more unsettling to a new hire than to find out that their excellent recruiting experience is not what they can expect now that they are a part of the team.

## Conclusion

Employee Engagement has become a critical success factor and is recognized as such by the top leaders of many organizations. However, "employee" engagement actually starts before the candidate ever accepts an offer. By looking at the entire sourcing, recruiting, and onboarding process from the candidate's (and future employee's) point of view, leading organizations can design a solution that begins to develop engagement from the first "click."

### Endnotes

[1] 2016 Talent Board North American Candidate Experience Research Executive Brief: The Business Impact of Candidate Experience, 2016, www.thetalentboard.org.

[2] Global Human Capital Trends 2016: The new organization: Different by design, Deloitte University Press, 2016, www.deloitte.com.

[3] 2016 Talent Board North American Candidate Experience Research Report, 2016, www.thetalentboard.org.

[4] Pre-hire assessments: The first test to understanding the candidate, Aberdeen Group, February 2017, www.aberdeen.com.

[5] See www.degarmo.com/Statistics and Pre-Hire Assessments: An asset for HR in the age of the Candidate, Aberdeen Group, May 2015, www.aberdeen.com

[6] Onboarding 2013: A New Look at New Hires, Aberdeen Group, 2013, www.aberdeen.com.

### About the Author

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