



### **A Recruiter's Perspective: The Art of Negotiation**

*Ironside HR is a national healthcare recruitment firm that specializes in providing a personalized recruitment experience to address each of our client's unique staffing needs. Our highly involved and dedicated approach in helping facilitate strategic candidate placements has allowed us to be a selected collaborative partner to a large diversity of healthcare organizations across the United States since 2011. Written by Hannah Swei*

#### **Introduction**

The act of negotiation is more than just a series of back and forth discussions that may take place between a potential employer and candidate as the final act of an interview process. Although some may perceive negotiations and counteroffers in a negative light, negotiations can also help foreshadow the dynamics of a potential employer-employee relationship.

#### **A Strong Foundation**

The first step in building a strong foundation is the execution of detailed candidate assessment to determine if they are a potential fit to consider upon first review. If a candidate is a match for the requirements of the position, then how they present themselves are the next important qualifications to consider. If a candidate appears hesitant, indecisive, and is a poor communicator in the early stages of the process, it is very likely that even if they completed the interview process, they may decline an offer or leave little to no room for practical negotiations to take place. Time is money, a familiar phrase to many but by wasting time on an uncertain candidate will further prolong the need to fill a critical position. Therefore, it is essential to determine how serious a candidate is about an opportunity in the very beginning and whether they are the right fit to move forward with.

#### **Knowing Your Candidates**

Interviews are traditionally very formal, and while a degree of professionalism should be maintained by all involved parties, it is also important to provide a comfortable atmosphere for all considerable candidates. By presenting opportunities for candidates to have open dialogue with a potential employer, it highly increases the chances of critical details to be exchanged so that both sides have a better understanding of one another to make

informed decisions. When candidates feel at ease to be themselves, they will be more inclined to speak freely and elaborate on their responses, this in turn also benefits employers in seeing a considerable candidate as an individual beyond their qualifications.

However, it is highly unlikely an employer that is responsible for the operations of an organization, (such as HR Directors, C-Suite level Executives, and Department Managers) to have the flexibility to constantly be accessible to candidates. Therefore, by partnering with third-party allies, specifically recruiters, not only is an additional line of communication provided to candidates, but recruiters can build a strong rapport with candidates that will allow them to gather useful details to share with the employer while also creating a better candidate experience. The intel recruiters may obtain from casual conversations during candidate follow-ups can be extremely advantageous for an employer when crafting an offer. A candidate may likely become a future employee and should be treated as a unique individual, by considering their dreams and aspirations, a potential employer could evaluate what additional benefits and incentives they can offer a candidate to make an opportunity more attractive to them.

## **Transparency**

Transparency is key, from beginning to end, an honest presentation of an opportunity's benefits and expectations should be directly communicated to all considerable candidates. There is no sense in purposely withholding information from candidates that pertain to their potential success in a given role as it is counter-productive and may lead to issues such as high turnover rates and struggles in employee retainment. Transparency from the employer (and any involved allied partners, ex. recruiters) will streamline the process to be more efficient, weed out unqualified candidates before they reach the mature stages of the process, and further contributes to building a strong foundation for a successful negotiation to take place later on with promising candidates.

## **Creative Solutions**

Even if all critical candidate information was gathered throughout the interview process, candidates may still inquire about certain aspects of their offer after further review which may potentially lead to negotiating terms. And should a negotiation take place, all the steps that preceded arriving at this point will come into play. Typically, an offering salary is a common aspect of an offer letter that candidates would want to negotiate (first) if it was lower than what they had thought or if after reviewing the benefits, they desire additional compensation if insurance coverages are more than what they are used to. Most organizations, especially non-profit facilities, operate on limited funding and a strict budget so not much can be done in terms of increasing base compensation. However, in order to provide negotiable alternatives, an employer should not work against the system set in place but work with the system to explore creative solutions.

If the salary adjustment for a position cannot be altered, then providing additional recruitment amenities in lieu of increased compensation is the next logical step. Additional recruitment amenities may include a sign-on bonus, relocation assistance, a temporary housing stipend, and/or tuition reimbursement. Moreover, additional recruitment amenities can be strategized to the employer's advantage as well, for example, a sign-on bonus could be paid out in scheduled increments throughout a 2-year period rather than one lump sum so that it serves a dual purpose as an employee retainer.

In addition to recruitment amenities, employers can explore other areas within the organization to provide further incentives for the candidate. The possibilities of continued education assistance, professional development opportunities, and flexibility with certain benefits such as PTO (increasing allowance or incoming accrual rate) are additional creative alternatives that will also contribute to the overall image of an organization. For example, there are many forms of continued education assistance, such as licensure reimbursements, financial assistance in further education, or free in-house courses at no cost to employees that are all great ways to not only show how an employer contributes to the success of their employees but will go on to contribute to the continued growth of the organization.

Furthermore, negotiable terms can also address future benefits and incentives such as guaranteed annual merit-based salary increases, bonuses, and even sharing with the candidate any pending projects the administration team have been working on to improve employee benefits over a set course of time.

The art of negotiation is about exploring creative alternatives that matter to each individual candidate, if the effort was made to understand what matters to them early on, then the likelihood of both sides coming to agreeable terms and the *right candidate* filling an open position are very high.

## **Conclusion**

The recruitment of quality employees is always going to be a top priority for any organization. Employees contribute to the overall wellness of an organization as it is their talents and abilities that foster the success of an organization. The art of negotiation is more than filling an open position, it is the willingness of all involved parties to welcome open dialogue to ensure that the best fit has been made for *both* sides, so that a job is not just a job, but an opportunity for everyone's growth and development.

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