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### **Problems Recruiting Qualified Candidates? It May be your Onboarding.**

I'm not telling anyone in recruiting anything new when I say that one of the best methods for finding qualified candidates is employee referrals. No company would have a formal employee referral policy in place if this were not true.

But did you know that a new employee is much more likely to have a large pool of potential referrals from their last employer and the many job-seeking networks that now exist both online and off? A tenured employee may refer people but probably not as proactively as a new employee. Or should I say a *happy* new employee. That's the key, and that leads us to onboarding.

Recently, Kelly and Renee - two colleagues of mine - were laid off. Both are terrific employees and it wasn't long before Kelly found a job, which gave Renee hope since she figured once Kelly started, she could refer Renee. Kelly, however, was so disenchanted with her new company within the first month that she dissuaded Renee from even applying and began updating her own resume. Two well-qualified employees lost.

One way to protect your company from a similar fate is by having a formal and well-developed onboarding process. Onboarding is the practice of orienting a new employee to a company by providing them the information, tools and emotional support they need. What's the difference between orientation and onboarding? Onboarding is a process over time while orientation is usually a one-time event (most often, a first day lecture on policies). Onboarding empowers a new employee by giving them easy access to information *when they need it*, rather than waiting for someone to have a spare moment.

In terms of its impact on recruiting, an effective onboarding program completes the Talent Acquisition Management Cycle. Employers spend thousands of dollars and resource hours sourcing, interviewing and selecting candidates. If an onboarding program is able to turn those selected candidates into motivated, engaged and satisfied new employees who are eager to recommend the company to others, employee referrals increase while recruiting costs decreases.

Onboarding also helps solidify your recruiting *pitch* by forcing you to answer sometimes difficult questions, such as what is the company strategy? What is the performance review process and development track? In what ways does the company culture show itself? These are all on the minds of all potential candidates, and should be included in any effective onboarding program.

Finally, onboarding is the first impression your company makes on a new employee and it goes a long way – some research suggests it lingers with an employee for two years.

What are some of the first impressions that companies far too often make? Lack of commitment, poor communication, no clear direction, disorganized or too busy to care. It's a good bet this company's employee won't be referring a candidate any time soon and – in fact – may do just the opposite. It's like having a bad meal. People are more apt to spread bad news than good.

So what can you do to make sure your new employees are not disparaging your company reputation? First off, find out what they're thinking - restaurants survey their customers all the time. From what you learn, build a program that meets your new employees' needs and makes them feel welcome and valued.

An outside expert can help orchestrate the effort and bring an objective perspective, while taking all the content that exists in various forms and synthesize it into a program that *empowers* the new employee through a *process* and an *experience*. A consultant also brings perspectives from different companies, which can help find the best method of onboarding for your company.

It's also critical to measure the effectiveness of your program, and make adjustments where needed. One way to assess the program is by comparing your employee referral rate and recruiting cost before the new program and six months down the road. If all is well, referrals should go up while costs go down. That's one recipe any restaurant would want.