

# Inside Leadership

**You never wrote,  
you never rang,  
I don't love you  
anymore.**

**Niamh Grist of HRM shared services says how you manage your direct recruitment applications determines much about your employer brand.**



Despite these challenging economic times and high unemployment levels, this is no time to forget about your employer brand. How you manage your recruitment application and selection process has much more resonance when people are anxious about work.

You don't have to be a consumer brand to be concerned about how people see your organisation. Candidates have long memories and are more likely to share a negative experience with family, friends or colleagues, than they are a positive one. It just may be that the friend or family member with whom they share their experience, is the person you have been trying to attract.

We live in an age of instant digital communication. Social networks, job boards and recruitment blogs provide an opportunity for applicants to tell others about their experience having applied for a job with you. No company can afford to be the star of these particular shows.

Despite the current high rate of unemployment in Ireland, we actually live in a very competitive market for talent. Organisations are looking to hire the top 5% of any talent pool and so reputation is key to bringing that talent in. Aside from the obvious moral obligation and basic courtesy that should be applied, treating applicants well is good business. Whatever your organisation's activities, how many

potential customers are you losing if applicants are having a negative experience with your application or recruitment process?

Many leading companies already get this and apply Best Practice in this area. In effect, they understand that great talent management begins by treating candidates as customers. If applicants have a good experience in the application process they are more likely to refer others. If they feel good about the process, they will feel good about the company, no matter what the outcome.

HRM's shared services business conducts regular surveys of job applicants to gain a continuously live

benchmark against which to map our service experiences for candidates, applying to our client companies.

In the most recent of these, 514 candidates shared their personal job application experiences from the previous twelve months up to the point where we met them for the first time.

**63%** of candidates surveyed said they had submitted an application to a company and “not heard anything back from the company”. (81% of these said this had a “negative” or a “strong negative” impact on their perception of the organisation. Sadly, the balance felt this lack of communication was the norm)

**57%** of candidates surveyed indicated they had been regretted by a “generic single line, automated response”. (61% of these cited the experience has having a “strong negative” impact on their perception of the organisation)

**48%** of candidates surveyed had interviewed with an organisation and received a “generic single line, automated regret response” (94% of these cited this as having a “negative” impact on their perception of the organisation. All respondents felt constructive feedback was a reasonable expectation for the time given to attending interview)

**57%** of respondents said they had waited four weeks or more for feedback to an interview they

attended, despite attempts to expedite it. (76% of these cited the experience as having a “negative” impact on their perception of the organisation. 90% of these said it was the lack of any communication from the hiring company, rather than the actual delay that caused the frustration)

In truth for many of the organisations that are getting this process wrong, they simply are overwhelmed with applicants and/or badly understaffed in their resourcing departments. In short, they wish it would be different. But being out of work is a big knock to a person's self esteem, it simply is not acceptable for an organisation to solicit an application and not give an appropriate response. Here are a few ideas to help improve the experience of a candidate when they next apply to your job ads.

**Tip 1.** Many large organisations simply have no choice but to use online applicant tracking systems. If you use an automated system of managing candidate applications, set yourself up as a candidate and go through the full cycle of your recruitment process. Review the messages your company sends as if you were an out of work applicant. How would it make you feel? How would it make you feel if someone personally important to you, was looking for a job, received these responses?

**Tip 2.** If you do not have an automated system for managing your recruitment, set up a series of email signatures in

the format of emails which you can insert easily and only need to enter the applicants first name at the beginning of the mail to create a personal and more considerate response. It just might make a difference to how that candidate feels.

**Tip 3.** Be up front when delays occur. Everyone knows HR is fighting on many fronts right now and getting Line Managers to prioritise recruitment decisions is tricky. Keep candidates appraised by phone or email if there is to be a delay. Use a spreadsheet to track applicants and record your last contact date.

**Tip 4.** Design relevant categories to apply to all your job applicants on a simple database and attach their CV. Automated (key word) search functions are great when the candidate's CV uses the precise word or vernacular under which you are searching. If they are using a term in their CV that you have not linked or used, you may not meet them. Simple categories including function, responsibility level, specific skills relevant to your organisation, can be far more effective and save you the expense of a recruitment fee for a missed candidate.

**Niamh Grist is a Business Manager in HRM shared services, the recruitment back office support division of HRM.**

[www.hrm.ie](http://www.hrm.ie)