

What Top Performers Are Looking for:

The top 10 factors you want job candidates to consider when evaluating a position in your company

By Lou Adler

There has been a wave of recent media coverage on recruiting, hiring, and developing top performers that sheds great insight into how to position opportunities in your organization.

For example, the lead article in the August 20 Business Week was titled "The Future of Work." It highlighted the idea that learning, the opportunity to grow, and the quality of life were more important than compensation when younger professionals were comparing jobs.

In the September 17 Wall Street Journal Online, there was a series on how major companies fared this past year in recruiting the best MBAs. One key point showed that more information was less important than more personalization. This reinforces the idea that both recruiters and line managers need to be more involved in order to differentiate themselves and their jobs in order to attract to the best.

The lead story in the October issue of Fortune magazine was "How to Become a Great Leader" and what the world's best companies are doing to develop their own.

Do you think a top candidate would be willing to explore a new opportunity that offered the chance to get on a faster career track with a company that was recognized as a leader in developing talent?

Even if your company is not one of the companies mentioned in these articles, don't you think that candidate should evaluate your opportunity from this same benchmark? This is one of the primary factors that the best people consider when comparing opportunities. You might want to use it as part of how you get candidates to look at the complete opportunity your job represents.

Done properly, you'll be able to position your offer as the best among the rest. You'll also reduce the potential of a counter-offer in the bargain.

With this in mind, here are the top 10 factors candidates often consider:

1. The job fit. It's important that the primary emphasis of the job taps into the candidate's real motivating interests. If the fit isn't right here, nothing else matters.
2. The job stretch. The new job needs to offer immediate stretch. For a manager, this could be a bigger team or a more critical project. For a staff person, this could be working on new technology or learning new skills. For an executive, it might be a chance to be in a new market or handle a new challenge.
3. Opportunity for future learning and growth. The long-term or strategic aspects of the position need to be directly addressed. There is a need to demonstrate that the person will be offered additional opportunities to stay on a faster track as long as the person performs at a high level.
4. The chance to make an impact. The work must be important. People will take lesser roles or offset compensation if they feel they're part of something bigger.

5. The manager as mentor. This could be the most important factor of all. Working for a mentor and true leader is a critical factor on every top performer's decision list. Proof is required as well as the manager's involvement in the recruiting process.
6. The quality of the team. The quality of the person's future co-workers, and likely new friends, is a critical aspect of on-the-job success and satisfaction. Emphasize this factor during the hiring process.
7. The company's prospects and strategy. Even if a company is not on one of the "best places" lists, it must still demonstrate it's a great organization with a strong future. If the job itself can be tied to a major company strategy, it's even better.
8. The company culture. While everyone can't be Google, make the comparison. As part of this, address your unusual approaches to work, any non-traditional benefits, and anything that makes you unique in your industry.
9. Work/life balance. You can't just talk about it, you need to prove that your company endorses it. This could be in the form of testimonials and open discussions. While people will work hard doing work they enjoy, quality of life is an important aspect of the decision-making process.
10. The compensation and benefits. As long as the compensation and benefit package are competitive, you don't have to overpay. In many cases, compensation becomes a bigger issue when companies haven't differentiated themselves on the other factors involved in the decision.

Recruiting top-performing passive candidates is hard work. Too many companies waste their time focusing on the wrong issues. Recognizing how top people make career decisions provides a roadmap on how to make the hard work involved productive and worthwhile.

Lou Adler is the Amazon best-seller author of Hire With Your Head (John Wiley & Sons, 2007)