

## Workplace Branding: A strategic approach to recruitment

**By Suzanne V. Benoit, LCSW**

*I attended an April breakfast hosted by the Northeast Human Resources Association where a management consulting firm presented a recruitment approach emphasizing employer branding. I had been considering a more strategic look at recruitment and this presentation solidified it for me. The following outlines one way of thinking about recruitment.*

### Recruitment as a sale

Most organizations realize that recruitment is, at least partially, a sales process. The question is: What are you selling? Many organizations conduct recruitment as if they were selling job content and salary. Some have progressed to understanding that the most effective interview is a two-way interview: the candidate sells him/herself to you; you sell your organization to them. But how do you know what organizational characteristics to sell? What is it about your workplace culture that would mean something to potential employees? Workplace Branding provides some answers.

### Why now?

There are two major problems in social service recruitment today. One is supply - there aren't enough qualified, experienced, licensed social work candidates for the number of openings in Maine. The second is advertising - how do you get the limited number of candidates working somewhere else today, to notice your organization or more specifically, your ad?

Recruitment efforts in the crowded social service field in Southern Maine has progressed from newspaper advertising to Internet posting, to hiring search firms, to search firms making random phone calls to organizations attempting to lure candidates from their current position. Not only is finding candidates more difficult, employers are vulnerable to these unsolicited calls: and premature turnover. Will your employees say, "No thanks," I'm happy where I am."

### Workplace Branding

I envision a world where all nonprofits know the workplace strengths their employees appreciate most, and who promote these strengths internally and externally.

Where turnover is low and candidates are attracted to employers who offer them a better fit. Workplace branding combines target marketing and sales with strategic planning and employee satisfaction. It strengthens the workplace in areas of most importance to employees. If you are a large organization, promote career paths and advancement. If you are small and can't pay well but are well managed, promote sound leadership and employee opportunities for rich experience. Consider promoting an innovative workgroup solution that allows employees to influence results. The bottom line—determine your strengths and leverage them.

### Steps

Survey your employees for what they like and don't like about working for your organization. Fix the things they don't like, as long as these changes are consistent with your mission and high quality. Create a workplace branding vision—sometimes called an "employment promise." Deliver on this promise at every employee relations opportunity. Promote your brand internally and externally. Sell the elements employees like best, during recruitment. Monitor key indicators to see how you are doing and continue improving over time.

### What employees want most

Several studies have identified the following 10 themes: Interesting work content; advancement opportunities; fair compensation; opportunities for enriched assignments; strong leadership; opportunities to be heard; high work standards; an employer with integrity/character; an employer known for quality service/products; and finally, the freedom to make decisions affecting their area.

### Will it work?

Right Management Consultants is having success with their copyrighted "PeopleBrand." Bavendam Research, Inc. uses these concepts successfully with very large for-profits. Both firms have demonstrated improvements in recruitment, retention, and productivity. I have personally employed these concepts in a variety of organizations with success.