



# THE COMPANY • THE CANDIDATE

Paul Pompeo

## GUESS WHO'S ON PROBATION?

In the first few months, it's often the company that's being evaluated, not the new hire

**W**e recently placed a candidate as a director of engineering—a very impressive, very bright candidate with a terrific future in lighting ahead of him. By his fourth day of employment, however, the company president placed his son (who had graduated from college and apparently had nothing better to do) in the department of our new engineering director. The son didn't want to be at his father's company in the first place and started giving our newly placed candidate trouble, as well as everyone else he interacted with. Luckily our candidate alerted us, we were able to communicate with the general manager who spoke with the CEO, and things got straightened out.

While this story had a happy ending, it demonstrates how employers often forget that just as they are evaluating a new employee during their first 30 or 90 days, a new hire is evaluating the company, as well. Here are some tips to make sure that you pass your new employee's 30- to 90-day probation period:

### 1. **Don't change from your brochure.**

You've heard the old joke about heaven and hell: The brochure for heaven portrays people lying on clouds playing harps. The brochure for hell portrays a wild and uproarious party. The person chooses hell and is then shocked to find it's not a party at all, but is filled with people being tortured, as the sounds of wailing and moaning in angst fill the air. When the person asks where the party is that he'd seen pictured, the devil laughs and says: "Oh, that's just our brochure." Make sure not to overpromise



to a potential candidate.

### 2. **Make the new member of your team part of the team.**

Properly introduce a new employee and make them feel welcome. Make sure that whatever tools they need to do their job—such as business cards, desk, computer, e-mail address setup, smartphone, tablet—are ready before they walk in the door. We've actually heard stories of a candidate arriving for work his first day with no desk set up for

him. Schedule a lunch for your new employee with the group one day the first week, discuss expectations for the position and targets for what has to be accomplished in the first six or 12 months. Remember, you have only one chance to make a first impression.

### 3. **Transparency goes a long way.**

There is nothing worse than finding out something negative about the company from someone other than the person who hired you. If you as the employer know that the employee will come across something sooner or later, why not bring it up first and use it to build trust, instead of uncertainty? Everyone who interviews with the hiring manager at one of our key clients raves about his transparency during the interview process. It helps him to develop an extremely strong rapport with candidates/potential employees right away. They almost see any negative points about the company as pluses due to the hiring manager's open approach.

### 4. **No bait-and-switch techniques.**

I'm not shocked anymore when hearing reasons why someone may be seeking a change. I recall a marketing director telling us how a position was described throughout the interview process as having a good

bonus program. When the candidate was hired at a slightly higher salary than the employer anticipated, the hiring manager snapped his fingers and the bonus program disappeared. The employee still took the job, but began his tenure with a low level of trust in the hiring manager.

**5. Give frequent feedback to your new employee.** Mary Lindenmuth (our recruiting director for Engineering, Design, Operations & Finance) tells a story of placing a controller for a CFO about 10 years ago. Once the controller came aboard, he never saw the

CFO again. The CFO would leave a note on his desk if he needed him to do something. When Mary called her candidate about six weeks into the position, he said, “This guy hates me. I think I need to start looking.” Mary asked what gave him that impression, and he replied: “I’ve been here six weeks and we’ve not had one conversation except on day one. He doesn’t come out of his office, say good morning, good night, drop dead—nothing.” Mary then called the CFO, who said the controller was doing a great job. When Mary told the CFO that the candidate was thinking

of leaving, he was shocked and wanted to know why. Mary reminded him that they hadn’t spoken since that first day on the job. The CFO said, “This is all my fault. We are in the process of acquiring a new company and I’ve been buried in due diligence. I should have told him about it.”

**6. If your candidate was placed by an executive search firm, give feedback to your recruiting partner as well.** We find that both parties usually appreciate hearing feedback from the placing recruiting specialist, and this goes a long way toward cementing the bond between employer and new employee during the all-important honeymoon period. Don’t hesitate to keep your search firm in the loop, even if the offer was accepted. Those employers who simply assume that their new employee loves the position and company are setting themselves up for a potential surprise down the line.

Mary’s controller/CFO story fortunately has a happy ending. The CFO called the controller in and explained what had happened, apologized and they’ve been together for 10 years. In this case, if not for your friendly neighborhood recruiter checking in to see how things were going, the controller would have left and the CFO would never have known why. The moral? Communicating with a new employee is key to having a happy employee.

*Thanks to Mary Lindenmuth and Travis Charles on our team for their contributions to this month’s column.*

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## DISCERNING EMPLOYEES

New employees evaluating their employer are much more prevalent today. Here are three reasons why:

- 1. Today’s candidate is much more cautious.** You would have to be working in a bunker to have not seen all the layoffs in our industry over the past 10 years (both from lighting conglomerates, first trying to appease investors and often making short-term decisions that affected employees, and from start-ups, which often offer a lighting professional a chance to be on the ground floor, only to see their VC firm lose patience with the company and move on).
- 2. We are in a candidate’s market.** The better the candidate is, the more opportunities she or he may have available to them (both within their current organization and outside it). Therefore, if an employer has started off on a less than positive note, rather than “grinning and bearing it,” a candidate may start to question their decision to join your team.
- 3. Millennials have different expectations.** The Millennial employee is a different breed of cat than those of past generations. One characteristic is a different view of work than that of prior generations, particularly than that of the Baby Boomer, who is often their manager. Millennials have a different view of work-life balance than people born 10 to 30 years before them, and often seek to find meaning in their work (read Lisa Earle McLeod’s *Selling with Noble Purpose* for more). If a company disappoints them, they don’t have the same predilection to “hang around” as the average employee did 20-30 years ago. While some Baby Boomers may think that’s the wrong attitude, it’s really just a different one, and it’s prudent for employers and hiring managers to recognize that.