

Use the Socratic Method in Candidate Email

Email may seem old fashioned in these days of social media, but the research shows it's still the preferred method of online communication. In a survey of 1,100 association members – people who are committed to improving themselves in their profession or what we colloquially call “A” and “B” level performers – the majority reported that they prefer to be contacted by email.

Among all of the survey's respondents, 89 percent said they favored email, while just 8 percent favored social media. And in the cohort of respondents thought to be most committed to social media – those 24 to 34 years of age – the numbers were almost the same. An astonishing 87 percent said they favored email, while 13 percent gave the nod to social media.

Given this preference for email contacts, it's critical that we understand how best to structure such messages to ensure they are successful. What's the definition of success? It has two components:

- First, we must get the prospect to refrain from hitting the Delete button and reply to our message.

and

- Second, we must pique their interest enough to turn that reply into the first iteration of a conversation.

Getting Prospects to Answer the Mail

The most effective recruiting email messages have three components:

A Personal Greeting. The email must begin with a salutation that addresses the recipient by name. The best talent abhors being treated as if they are a generic candidate, so such greetings as “Hi There” or “Dear Colleague” are an immediate ticket to the dump. Instead, do your homework, learn the person's first name and begin your message with that. Simple as it sounds, using “Hi Jim” or Hello Jane” helps to establish you as a peer rather than yet another vendor trying to sell them something.

A Value Statement. The best talent are never interested in a job, but most are always on the lookout for a career advancement opportunity. So, don't use a bureaucratic job title or position description to introduce your opening. And, don't use words – such as Requirements and Responsibilities – that only an employer could love. Instead, focus on describing “what's in it for them.” Tell them what they will get to do, what they can learn, what they will be able to accomplish, whom they will work with and how they will be recognized and rewarded.

A Socratic Trigger. Our culture teaches people that it's impolite to ignore a question. So, stimulate a reply by ending your message with one. It won't work with every prospect, of course, but it will induce

many to reply to your first message and then to every message after that. In your first message, keep your value statement short and sign off by asking if they would like to know more. Then, in subsequent messages, add more detail and ask them if such an opportunity would be right for them at this point in their career or, if they feel as if their current job lacks such challenge and rewards. And, then, keep asking until they hear what they need in order to apply.

This iterative messaging based on questions from you and answers from the prospect is a version of the Socratic method. It educates the message recipient by getting them tell you what they want (or need) to know. As a result, it transforms the interaction from a sales pitch into a quasi-counseling or coaching experience that will help them see your opening as an opportunity they can't pass up.

Thanks for Reading,

Peter

Visit me at Weddles.com

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