

## Change in approach makes all the difference

### *Best practices in recruiting Aboriginal Peoples*

BY BOB JOSEPH

With a tight labour market, employers might want to consider targeting recruitment efforts to a niche market with potential applicants who have not been saturated with job postings — Aboriginal Peoples. Although this market has its recruitment challenges, these can be overcome by adapting an employer's strategy and following a few simple steps.

#### Setting the stage

Before investing in the recruitment process, take a look at what the organization offers employees. Is it an employer of choice and, therefore, the kind of place where Aboriginals would want to work? To be sure, a quick call to a local Aboriginal community employment counsellor is helpful. An employer of choice for Aboriginal Peoples would be an organization seen publicly supporting Aboriginal communities through outreach initiatives such as scholarships and donations, and attendance at community events such as powwows, sporting events and community career fairs.

To build a profile among potential Aboriginal candidates, companies can also leverage scholarships and co-op employment opportunities to attract people while they are still in school.

Employers interested in recruiting Aboriginal Peoples should also ensure they offer a

friendly workplace by providing training for current employees. Hearing the comment, "It must be nice to be native and be given a job just because you are a native" can make anyone uncomfortable enough to seek employment elsewhere.

The training should cover topics such as:

- the business case for reaching out to Aboriginals
- dispelling myths and misconceptions about Aboriginals
- taxation, housing, education, land claims and self-government issues for Aboriginals
- sensitivity training.

#### Recruiting

Before starting, look at the company's applicant-tracking system. Can HR ascertain when Aboriginals have applied to a posting? Is there a self-identification question on the application form? If not, incorporate that question because a good applicant tracking system can tell employers if marketing efforts are effective in generating employee leads.

Employers might also want to consider hiring an Aboriginal recruiter, internally or externally, who can help Aboriginal candidates through the application process by providing a tip-sheet with a range of information designed to help with the interview, including: Eye contact, handshaking, appropriate dress and acquiring knowledge of the company.

A common mistake in advertising to Aboriginal Peoples is the lack of an attractive message that piques the interest of

potential candidates. This could be as simple as incorporating the phrase, "We are committed to attracting and hiring applicants from a diverse range of peoples and strongly encourage Aboriginal Peoples to apply to our job postings." This uses the specific and inclusive terminology "Aboriginal Peoples," which includes Indian, Inuit and Métis.

Employers need to take advantage of the resources available. Consider partnering with organizations such as provincial Friendship Centres or Aboriginal Human Resource Development Agreement holders (employment centres) to help find candidates. Government ministries of advanced education may have Aboriginal education co-coordinators who can connect employers to highly skilled candidates. And another great marketing resource is found in current Aboriginal employees and their personal networks.

When it comes to advertising, consider the *First Nations College Guide* to reach high-caliber college talent. And make sure to place ads in Aboriginal publications — there are many across the country with reasonably priced rates.

#### Interviewing

Begin the interview process by assessing expectations of the interview and job. Will these require eye contact and strong "I" verbal communications? If so, this can actually be a problem for Aboriginal Peoples. As a col-

lective and oral society, it is not considered appropriate to "sell" yourself in such a way and eye contact is not always needed or appreciated. Be sure to share these expectations and consider revising your own expectations so as not to screen out potential great candidates.

And use appropriate terminology. Don't refer to Aboriginals as Indians or natives. Instead, use Aboriginal Peoples or First Nations, Inuit or Métis appropriately. A good rule of thumb is to always use the same terms people are calling themselves.

Avoid the use of colloquialisms, such as, "We should get together and have a powwow to discuss that issue" or "I can't help because I'm the low man on the totem pole." Powwows and totem poles are highly symbolic to Aboriginal Peoples and using them this way could easily offend and drive away potential candidates.

With a greater understanding of Aboriginal applicants and the communities that support them, as well as an evaluation of your hiring practices and a sound recruitment strategy, employers will be more effective in recruiting Aboriginal Peoples.

*Bob Joseph is president of Vancouver-based Indigenous Corporate Training, whose mission is to help individuals and organizations work effectively with Aboriginal Peoples through training. He can be reached at (866) 288-9428 or at [bob@inctinc.ca](mailto:bob@inctinc.ca).*