

Scrap referrals in favor of 'talent scouts'

If you can't name one great new hire in the past six months who came in via your employee referral program, it may be time to try a new approach. Instead of urging everyone to refer their friends, turn specific employees into "talent scouts" for your organization.

Such a program is a largely volunteer effort in which qualified employees are selected to become designated scouts who recruit in their spare time. Choose talent scouts based on their performance, their passion for the organization, their jobs and access to a network of potential candidates.

This more targeted recruiting tactic differs from traditional referral programs in several ways:

- **Limited participation.** Employees are screened and selected to ensure that the right people are spreading your recruiting message. It's not open to everyone.
- **Formal training.** A designated talent scout shares company recruiting goals and tactics with selected employees so they're intimately familiar with the process, tools and instructions.
- **Volume targets.** Good scouts typically bring in fewer, but better referrals. Candidates are more thoroughly screened and pre-sold, easing the burden on HR.
- **Primary motivation.** Talent scouts are selected because they're motivated to build a great team for their company. They want to work alongside great co-workers. Financial rewards can be a part of the effort, but the primary motivation isn't money.

Follow these four tips to launch your talent scout strategy:

1. **Enlist top performers in critical jobs.** Market it as a chance to join an elite group. Target jobs that are hard to fill, require special skill sets or are in key business units.
2. **Encourage the CEO to participate** and lend support as the organization's "Chief Talent Scout." Getting top brass to back the effort will speak volumes.
3. **Consider opening up the program** to a trusted audience beyond current employees, such as recent retirees and employees' spouses.
4. **Offer awards and recognition.** Cash isn't the motivation here, but offering a bonus, a charitable contribution or a customized gift certificate helps recognize a talent scout's special efforts.