
Your Guide to Securing the Best Senior Talent in Transport & Infrastructure



Introduction

As a Hiring Manager you are evaluated based on your ability to attract and land the top talent that exists in your industry. Regardless of what employment statistics tell us or what economic factors and trends we experience. The bottom line is that there is an ongoing and never relenting challenge for hiring managers in the transport and infrastructure sectors to make a conscious effort to evaluate and improve their approach to attracting and securing the best talent.

This eBook will share with you some top techniques and best practices to ensure you have a comprehensive and robust strategy to win the war for talent for your organisation.



Job Description

Developing a clear, well written job description including a person specification is essential to define the requirement and help sell the role to prospective candidates.

1. The job description should include input from all the senior managers involved in the interview process, it should not be written by the HR team alone. For external facing roles you may wish to ask a selection of your clients or key stakeholders their opinions on the type of person they would prefer to work with.
2. It is essential not to discriminate on grounds of gender, age, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, religion or beliefs, so avoid any inappropriate requirements, e.g., must have x years' experience or gender coded words such as driven or confident
3. Avoid jargon such as provide expert advice to the MPR board on the TCO and changes to the TCO. This will not have candidates queuing round the block to join you. Candidates will make a part judgement on the company culture based on the job description.

4. Don't over specify – be realistic on the skills and experience that you are asking for in comparison with the role and the salary package on offer. For example, recruiting for a senior technical expert and specifying “excellent verbal communication skills with the ability to influence staff at all levels” may be nice to have but unnecessary and unrealistic.
5. Prioritise – split the person specification into both essential and desirable requirements. This helps to communicate to candidates whether they are the ideal fit without putting off less experienced candidates who would be capable of stepping up to the role



Compensation

It is important to have a good understanding of what the market is paying for talent and how your benefits packages compare to competitors. It is not uncommon for candidates to receive 20%-30% counter offers as companies are keen to retain their best people.

1. Benchmark - it is a good idea to benchmark the salary and package you should offer from those in the know. This could include friendly contacts working within competitors, consultants, clients, your HR team, job advertisements and of course head-hunters. Do not rely on internal benchmarks of people who have been with your business for a long period, people who stay within one company for a long stretch are usually underpaid and you will not be able to recruit an external candidate for their salary.

Equally do not base your assumptions of what a role should pay on how much you were paid if you were in the role earlier in your career, you may be surprised how much salaries have moved on.

2. Incentivise - expect to have to offer a financial incentive for candidates to move; most candidates below board level within the transport and infrastructure switch for an improvement in package of 10-20% when they do move.
3. Flexibility – people have different financial motivations, and their motivations change at different stages of their career, a flexible compensation package will appeal to different types of candidate. Candidates earlier in their career may be highly focused on the guaranteed compensation for mortgage reasons, whereas a candidate later in their career may be more motivated by a good pension scheme that allows them to make additional voluntary contributions. Flexible benefits packages where employees can pick and choose from a range of benefits (including additional holiday allowance) are a good way to appeal to many different candidates.
4. Alternatives – if you can't compete with your competitors on salary you will need to be creative. Options include; bringing someone in from the same function but from another industry sector (that doesn't pay as well as your sector) or recruiting someone at the level below who can step up to the role, either of these scenarios are likely to require greater support in their induction and you should expect a longer learning curve.

Employer Brand

1. Look at your join us section. If you don't have one, it is advisable that you create one. Does it just list open positions with a quick paragraph on the history of your company or does it tell a compelling story of your organisation's culture, your value proposition and what others who have joined your firm have accomplished since joining?

Although listing vacant positions seems logical, consider the opportunity of talking less about what you need in a new hire and more of what you offer to someone in their career.
2. Consider sharing testimonials from recent hires who can attest to the significant benefits and advantages of your firm compared with the rest of your market.
3. Share newsletters or quarterly updates with photos from events, industry awards and charitable initiatives.

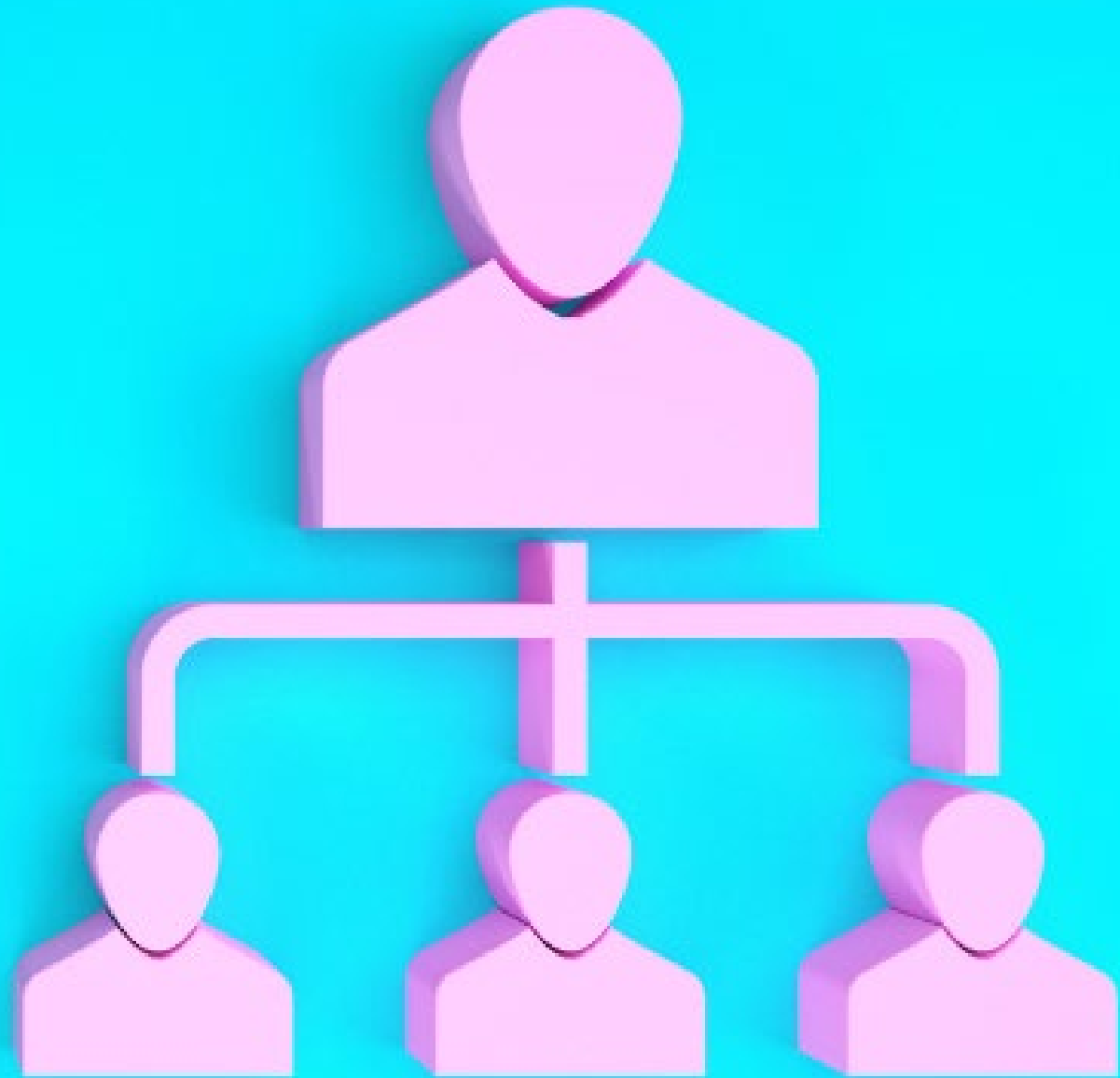
4. Take photos of the interactive events you host in your company. Things such as bring your kids to work day or group volunteer efforts or sports teams.
5. Consider creating a video with clips from around the company and spotlight on superstars. This can be an effective way to share your firm with any prospect considering applying to your organisation.
6. Job adverts - is the posting of a job description that includes specific requirements for the position like the number of years of experience or the type of degree someone needs, or the listing of soft skills that are desired. However, consider replacing that information with information that highlights the challenges or responsibilities and authority to be experienced by the individual who fulfils this role. Successful adverts sell first and screen second.



Internal Referrals

Take a look at your internal referral programme. With most internal programmes, success does not rely on the prize associated with the referral, but rather the consistent reminder that the programme exists.

How frequently are awards distributed and how public is the announcement that hires were made due to a referral? Most employees do not refer friends and colleagues because of a cash reward, but due to a deeply rooted belief in the opportunity that exists for those friends and colleagues once they've joined the firm.



Interview Experience

Whether or not the candidate gets the job, they're going to tell their friends and colleagues about you. If you treat them with respect and manage the process well, they'll be your advocate. If you don't, well, they might rant on social media. But regardless, a good experience can be the difference between winning them over and driving them away.

Don't underestimate your role in ensuring that the candidates have a good interaction with your company. If you follow these tips, you'll be well on your way;

1. Interview process - deciding who will interview and be involved at each stage is important. If there are two interviewers at each stage look to ensure they complement one another, for example an enthusiastic, verbose character coupled with a more detail focused colleague. You need to strike a balance between assessing the candidate, taking good notes, building rapport and marketing your business and the role to the candidate.

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2. Greeting - how does your business look to a first-time visitor? Candidates will draw impressions on your company as soon as they arrive, the greeting at the security gate and reception all help to form the first impression. It is useful to brief reception staff on how to welcome candidates arriving for interview.
 3. Prepare - read the candidate CV and the invaluable candidate summary report your executive search firm will have provide. Know what is important to the candidate, their aspirations, and why they are interviewing with you.

Use this to share relevant personal experiences and tailor the conversations to the candidate, rather than conducting a complete cookie-cutter interview. An element of standardisation needs be present within your interview structure to ensure fairness and consistency, but don't be afraid to explore each candidate's uniqueness. At the very least ensure you get their name right.

Interview Experience

4. Be punctual – if you keep a candidate waiting twenty minutes beyond their scheduled interview time, they will draw a negative impression of you and your business before the interview even starts. If you are running late, make sure a colleague speaks to the candidate to apologise and let them know you will be with them soon.

Better still get a colleague to give the candidate a ten-minute brief on the role and the company while they wait.

5. Don't ask dumb questions - keep interviews focused on questions related to the work. Interviewers who ask oddball interview questions like "If you were a tree, what kind of tree would you be?" will annoy candidates and plenty will decide they're not a good fit with a hiring manager who hires this way.

Great candidates want to spend the interview talking about their background, the job and what they might bring to it.

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6. Interview format - remember that interviewing is a two-way street, since the best candidates have options, they'll interview and evaluate employers right back.

Employers who assume that the assessment process only goes one way and forget to care about how they're coming across to candidates - or neglect to give candidates opportunities to ask rigorous questions and do their own evaluations - will generally turn off strong applicants.

First interviews consisting entirely of generic competency-based interview questions can come across as stilted and can make it difficult to build rapport, as do panel interviews with three or more interviewers. Put some thought to how many questions you ask and how you ask them, candidates giving feedback such as "I survived the onslaught" does not present the company or interviewers in the best possible light.

Interview Experience

7. Be joined up - if there are multiple interview stages ensure candidates don't have to answer the same questions repeatedly. A little question overlap is fine, but total redundancy is draining. Assign roles to the interviewers and map out who is going to ask what.
8. Ask this question every single time – “Is there anything you didn't get a chance to tell us today that you think we should know?” Even if they don't get the job, this question lets candidates walk away feeling more satisfied because they know they gave it their all.
9. On feedback - Remember, most people you interview won't get the job, and that could translate into hundreds or thousands of people a year. How you reject people will have a profound impact on your brand. When giving unsuccessful candidates negative feedback, it's easy to say, “You did well, but the job just wasn't a fit.” What's much harder to say is, “There were concerns about your ability to collaborate based on XYZ reasons.” However, this is much more valuable to the candidate and being honest with them gives them a positive experience to take away. As well as areas for them to develop or work on to perhaps reapply to you again in the future.



Speed

You snooze you lose! Recruitment can be a slow process for all parties. From getting approval to hire, to writing a job description, advertising the vacancy or engaging head-hunters, reviewing candidate CVs, interviewing candidates...

With so many balls up in the air at any one time it's inevitable that, occasionally, momentum can stall and what you thought would only take a few weeks ends up taking months.

We see and hear it all the time: employers (with the best of intentions) missing out on their preferred candidate because they took too long with the process or to make an offer and, in the meantime, that candidate has found another position with a company that moved faster to secure their employment.

Now, we're not suggesting you loosen your recruitment process to accommodate candidates you really like. It's important to have some formal structure when managing what can be an overwhelming number of tasks, paperwork, people and diaries. That said, it's just as important to recognise that when the right candidate has come along, act fast!

Acting fast can simply mean letting them know that you felt it was a positive meeting and outlining the next step to keep the candidate motivated and in the loop. Provided it's not financial pressure driving their job search, a good candidate that's excited about a job opportunity will wait a few weeks while you go through the process: chase feedback from line managers, conduct interviews with other candidates, check references, take annual leave...

But it's important to keep them warm. Managing the candidate's expectations is central to a smooth recruitment process. While this may be common sense, you'd be surprised at just how many employers let this simple element of the recruitment process slip when they're in the eye of the storm. It's a small thing. But it goes a long way.

A slow recruitment process makes your organisation look slow, indecisive, rigid, and anything but agile and entrepreneurial. Act fast. Hire fast. And at the very least, communicate promptly to manage the candidate's expectations and keep them informed.

Use the Experts

1. In-house recruiters are directly employed by a company for the purpose of finding and qualifying new employees for the organisation. An in-house recruiter typically covers multiple departments or regions, as such they can be thinly spread depending on the demand within other parts of the company. It is unlikely they will be an expert on all functions or levels of seniority, so it is advisable to find out about their experience in your area and ask whether they feel they can cover your requirement.
2. Recruitment Agencies - typically used to find candidates for junior to mid-level permanent roles or short-term contract positions. Recruitment agencies don't have an exclusive relationship with the client, and they are operating on a contingency basis with a fee paid only if the company hires a candidate introduced by the agency.

They will typically source candidates via their database or through job boards. They may phone screen candidates before recommending the best candidates to the client. Recruitment agencies will often prioritise the vacancies they feel are easiest to fill. Recruitment agencies fill on average c20% of the vacancies they take on.

3. Executive Search – often referred to as head-hunting or retained search. It is typically used for senior management positions. The Executive Search firm is retained by the client usually on an exclusive arrangement. The fee is paid normally in three stages; a proportion of their fee upfront, a proportion on shortlist presentation and the balance paid when the search is complete.

Executive Search firms will research an agreed market or target list of companies to identify potential target candidates, approach candidates briefing them on the role, interview candidates in person and then recommend a shortlist of candidates to the client. They will also provide salary benchmarking advice and help shape the job description that is required.

A key differentiator is they are finding and attracting the best candidates in the market (who are often not even considering a career move) rather than the best candidates on a database that are actively looking.

Executive search firms complete on average c65% of the assignments they take on, Newsom Consulting by comparison completes 96% of the assignments we take on.

Get in touch

Newsom Consulting is an executive search firm that focuses on the Rail, Aviation & Maritime, Highways, Utilities, Energy and Buildings sectors. Since we were founded in 2010, our team has successfully placed over 500 experienced industry executives – from executive leadership to senior management and leading technical experts.

Our clients include many of the leading infrastructure asset owners and major projects, contractors, public sector bodies, manufacturers, consultancies, and technology suppliers.

We are dedicated to fostering diversity within the industry and continually strive to enhance diversity in the senior teams of our clients. In the past two years, 33% of our placements have been either gender or ethnically diverse, and we remain committed to increasing the diversity of the industries we operate in.

For additional ideas on how to secure your next senior leaders get in touch. We look forward to talking with you soon.

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