

# FACING UP TO HUMAN RESOURCES



GO WITH THE GUT, UTILISE LEADING-EDGE TECHNOLOGY OR STICK WITH 'OLD FASHIONED' METHODOLOGY? KEVIN KEVANY'S BEEN CHECKING OUT SOME OF THE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS RELATING TO EMPLOYEE RECRUITMENT AND MANAGEMENT.

If you talk to the average small business owner manager about the issues which drive her/him round the bend, inevitably 'HR' – and everything which goes with that – follows immediately after the dreaded, seemingly-endless 'tax process'. Yet in the next breath, they will tell you how important their staff is to the success of the business.

Recruitment is a particular stumbling block for so many business owners. Disturbingly, most seem to 'rely on their gut' to make their choices, simply because of the time it takes to get to, and then go through, the interview process.

So, is there help at hand via the cloud and all that the modern digital world delivers? The ubiquitous Skype perhaps?

NZBusiness first sought the views of an experienced professional – the managing director of O'Neil's Personnel, Annette Sleep, who has worked on the agency side of this challenge for more than 20 years.

"While technology helps to manage our workflows better, do not rely on it to produce quality employees," she says. "Recruiting good staff remains challenging and time consuming; to do it well, effort is required.

"A throwaway comment made by a candidate I interviewed recently was an accusatory: 'Your recruitment processes are old-fashioned.' I suppose, in the context of social media sites, job boards and Skype interviews, you might think that. In terms of consistently producing quality employees for harried managers though, you may want to stop and reflect on the following:

- "We are constantly told – the latest technology will save you time and money. Does it? Increasingly over the last decade, all of us have been overrun with email applications, not only from candidates in Auckland and throughout New Zealand, but also from every continent except the Antarctic. "The disturbing factor with the majority of these 'out of town' applications is they arrive in your inbox with no explanation as to 'why' the candidate is applying

for your vacancy, while living in another country.

- "Then there are the candidates who make contact with you online asking for an appointment, revealing nothing more than a resume (and possibly a photograph). You are taking a risk with that leap of faith – no matter how good the resume looks. Do NOT email them back organising an interview time without phone-screening them initially.

"This is an essential quick and effective way of gaining an impression of the candidate's energy levels and attitudes. Better a ten-minute Q&A phone session than half-an-hour wasted with a candidate who you know is unsuitable the moment you meet them.

"As for Skype," says Sleep, "the feedback from most candidates and employers, who have used it, is not overly positive. The most common complaint is that it's very hard to get any sense of what either the employer or candidate is really like. And that's from both sides.

"There is something about the medium which is quite impersonal and, as any employer or candidate will tell you, they want the right 'fit'. If there is not a sense of personal contact in the interview process neither party will engage properly, resulting in an unsuccessful outcome.

"I have come to the conclusion that no matter how wonderful smart technology becomes, it cannot replace the keen insights offered by a structured face-to-face interview with an experienced recruiter," says Sleep.

#### In-house recruitment tool

Kirsten Clark, director of the Chilli Factor, believes that with a skills shortage a major issue across the board, it is essential for any business wanting to ensure its long-term sustainability to understand and confront these challenges by "implementing systems and processes which are efficient, effective and relevant to their business".

With a focus on saving employers time and money, Clark has developed a recruitment management tool to aid recruitment in-house.

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"I fully appreciate and understand the, at times, tedious and complex process which successful recruitment demands," she says. "While engaging the services of an external recruitment agency is the traditional go-to for SMEs, and may seem easier at times, it is not always the best option. Many companies have learned poor hires are expensive and can lead to a negative impact on the company.

"We believe it is often advantageous to manage recruitment in-house, where a suitably qualified applicant can be assessed within the company culture to determine if they are a good fit. With our cloud-based software, it has never been easier or more affordable to develop a recruitment process and implement a customised system in-house," Clark adds.

Their process starts by setting up the vacancy's recruitment campaign with a 'job brief'; creating an online vacancy advert and job-specific application form; setting and applying the job's recruitment process; and assigning tasks to relevant team members to share the workload. Users can customise candidate evaluation forms; select applicant update email templates; select advertising mediums; and track the source of

applicants. You can syndicate your job advert directly to major job boards and social media platforms.

"We also provide a unique job board URL and formatting, linking directly to your website, and this is automatically updated with new career opportunities, as soon as you publish a new position."

Clark believes time-poor clients will welcome the fact that those applications are received directly into their 'applicant tracking system'. "No more dealing with applications from within your email inbox."

The software's workflow helps the user to manage recruitment application status and updates in a centralised database, instead of a standalone Excel spreadsheet.

"Part of bringing the recruitment process in-house is bridging the gap in recruitment expertise," says Clark. "These days a recruiter is a marketer, researcher, PR person, interviewer, candidate manager and database administrator. We also make this easier with comprehensive recruitment training guides; online helpdesk and system templates; and form wizards to quickly guide you through what to do."

Chilli Factor also offers backup recruitment support services like phone-screening or reference-checking, and a Talent CRM system which enables the building of talent pools, as you recruit, quickly searching your organisation's existing applicant database, adding prospects, and managing targeted email campaigns, all in one place.

The company can also, on request, provide a demo or set-up a free 14-day trial, says Clark.

#### Absence and fatigue

"Recruitment is a critical HR issue, with 91 percent of New Zealand businesses experiencing a lack of skills in the workplace," Leslie Tarnacki, VP and GM, WorkForce Software, reminds us. "So effective allocation of workforce skills is critical. But, presently, 64 percent of employees have skills which are not being utilised.

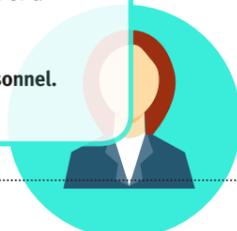
## JUDGING THE QUALITY OF CANDIDATES

**POOR QUALITY CANDIDATES** are cursed with poor memory. They never remember the dates they worked for a company or even who they reported to. They have 'busy CVs' – the candidate has moved about, not staying with any employer for long. Their reasons for leaving are always vague and upon further questioning they quite often become defensive. When pushed to give the name of a verbal referee they will often claim their referees are busy senior managers and are not prepared to give permission until they have a job offer. It begs the question; have today's candidates become so

accustomed to 'living online', they struggle with the concept of real-time face-to-face interviews?

**GOOD QUALITY CANDIDATES** have nothing to hide. They answer questions spontaneously and with good attitude. No question is too difficult for them to answer and they 'remember' the names of their former managers and supervisors – all of whom will give you a glowing reference at the click of a mouse.

Supplied by Annette Sleep, MD, O'Neil's Personnel.



"To ensure your business maximises the value of your people, you must achieve optimal work allocations and practices, and take into account factors like customer demand, individual work preferences, and fatigue management and employee qualifications. Technology and software have a growing role to play," says Tarnacki.

"The financial impact of employee absence is significant, and managing it is increasingly complicated, time-consuming and expensive. Automating absence processes across the organisation can help mitigate and reduce these costs.

"Each time an employee is absent from work there is a cost involved due to lost productivity on the day – having to cover the missed shift, and the impact of not being able to accurately track various absence and leave types."

According to Tarnacki, the Aberdeen Group found organisations not actively managing absence are subject to several overlapping costs.

"Managers spend approximately two hours per week on absence-related tasks, and supervisors almost as long on tasks such as finding last-minute replacement workers and communicating that employees have taken time off.

"The same study showed some firms call in temporary workers and some simply accept that the work won't get done. The majority, however, rely on existing staff or supervisors to provide coverage, which can result in unplanned overtime costs and fatigue."

She believes there are four key reasons why businesses should automate absence management: reduced manual processes; greater accuracy; reduced labour costs; and improved employee satisfaction.

"The chances of error are reduced with an automated system, preventing instances where employees continue to be paid despite using all of their allocated leave.

"Fatigue is becoming a common business problem. Increasing pressure to perform and a 'do more with less' attitude means fatigue is a growing problem for both workers and their employers.

"According to Navigo Research, 50 percent of organisations believe their workers are more fatigued now than in previous years and 69 percent of organisations believe fatigue has a major or moderate impact on employee performance.

"Managing fatigue is a complex and multi-faceted issue which needs the focus on measuring the mental fatigue of workers – a joint responsibility between employee

and employer," says Tarnacki. "Fatigue management should include tactics such as proactive monitoring; tracking hours worked; conducting risk-scoring to manage scheduling; and implementing programmes and policies to minimise fatigue.

"HR technology can ensure businesses are compliant with government regulations, governing workplace health and safety, worker awards and more."

#### Consultancy style

Dunedin-based Human Connections Group believes it offers "more of a hands-on, holistic approach to recruitment and HR, without the price tag of big fees or the need for a full-time HR/recruitment person".

"When I say we offer a holistic approach," explains MD Emily Wheeldon, "what I mean by this is that we don't just take a job, go to market, fill it and move on. Our consultants are generally retained by businesses who want a much more involved and ongoing approach to recruitment support.

"This means more than just 'making a placement'; it involves getting close to the business and its people, understanding exactly what it's like to be part of that team, so we can effectively go to market and speak about a company culture, and are therefore more likely to get the right

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## HOW TO RECOGNISE AND REWARD YOUR STAR EMPLOYEES

From bonuses to a big pat on the back – what works most effectively in motivating your best people to keep performing at the top of their game and ensuring a high level of employee engagement?

Material rewards may include bonuses, company shares, or gift vouchers, for example. You may have a system that formally documents the process or might have a less structured approach to rewards, which are given on a more ad-hoc basis. For instance your company might provide a morning tea for the team after a big project milestone is completed.

If you're not sure what your people really want – ask them.

Eliciting this information could be through a short employee survey or could form part of one-on-one discussions with your team members.

Your findings may yield surprising results and reveal interesting information about your employment culture, how valued people feel and where there might be gaps to be addressed.

Having a reward and recognition structure in place (e.g. creating a policy outlining the steps of the process and any specific requirements, such as who is/not eligible) can help ensure the system is equitable and that managers and employees understand how it is used.

You might decide to have a system where individuals can nominate their workmates for rewards, as well as having a more traditional 'top down' approach. A clearly defined, straightforward strategy works best.

Conducting a survey may reveal people want other types of recognition (aside from, or in addition to, material reward) for their contribution. This might be as simple as a few words of thanks for a job done well.

Showing your appreciation of employees who have worked hard to get a job completed is always likely to be well received. It's surprising some (uninformed) managers still think this is not necessary. Everyone likes to be genuinely thanked for their time, effort and commitment.

**By Emily Wheeldon, MD Human Connections.**

person in the right role, first time.

The Human Connections Group was established by Wheeldon, who'd had some 15 years of international agency recruitment experience and internal HR experience in senior management roles, including eight years in Sydney. She says she brought with her a passion for offering more than just the typical 'transactional approach' to recruitment.

"We do see companies getting recruitment wrong; if they weren't, we wouldn't have a business. Our role as consultants to our clients is to find out 'how' they have been recruiting and then measure 'how well' that process has been working for them. From there we can make improvements by tightening the process to close the gap on the likelihood of a bad hire.

"Often our clients are business owners who are time-poor people and not focused on recruitment. It is either an inconsistent approach to hiring or one which merely scratches the surface when it comes to screening, testing and, in particular, referencing candidates.

"We also see hires made from internal referrals, 'the friend of a friend approach', with little or no checking completed on work history, ability or credibility. We have seen whole teams built on internal referrals, often with little or no recruitment process involved. This can be a cost-effective way of recruiting, but it can also be very destructive.

"Our advice to start-ups and SMEs is that even if you know good people in your network, you have to ensure that they have adequate skills for the job and are a good fit for the team."

Last year Wheeldon was approached to help create a new kind of online support for job seekers in the region.

"We quickly saw the potential for offering 'real life' support, providing a new type of online service for those job seekers, and set about creating Stepping Stone NZ, supported by Otago Polytechnic DoBetter and endorsed by Dr Heather Carpenter, author of the best-seller *The Career Maze*.

"What we'd noticed was a number of organisations offering traditional career support or websites offering cheap, automated or template resumes, a one-size-fits-all approach. What Stepping Stone NZ offers is the speed of online purchasing, with a personal approach to job seeking. All of our clients have specific wants and needs and unique skills and experience so we aim to represent those skills in a way which is individual," says Wheeldon.

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