Recruitment and Retention in 2010

Natalie Bushell, HR Manager at Phillips & Cohen Associates (UK), Ltd, discusses Recruitment & Retention and why you should nurture your prospective employees like any new relationship.

If at any stage a relationship is unbalanced, it starts to fail. Mistakes are made in every relationship. At Phillips & Cohen Associates we don't always get everything right, we're human; however the saving grace is our ability to handle the situation effectively. Nevertheless, selecting the right 'partner' in the first place is part of our key to success.

It's 8am on Day 1 of our recruitment process, the telephone interview, our 'first connection'. We do our initial research, can this person communicate effectively? This is the point at which we decide whether or not we want to take the next step and 'go on a date!'

They passed! At our first meeting we sell ourselves as much as the candidates do because we want them to feel engaged. We need them to commit to the same goals that we have. We start with an introductory presentation which aims to give insight into what it is like to work for Phillips & Cohen Associates.

Deceased debt recovery is a sensitive business so a significant part of the recruitment decision comes down to whether or not we feel that a person can deal with others sympathetically and respectfully. This is at the hub of why we invest in the human relationship from the outset. If a person cannot demonstrate compassion, then they are not right for our company. We don't expect our employees to act as guidance counsellors or therapists, but we do insist that they be empathetic. Not just because of the nature of our business, but because we want to work with people who can connect with others and work positively together.

After this meeting candidates are encouraged to talk to their family and friends and to imagine themselves working for our company. They are also given their first deadline; candidates must call our office by 10.00am the next day if they are sure that they want to progress to the next stage. We want to ensure that they are self-motivated, so it's important that we handover this step to the candidate. When they call us, they make their first commitment and they pass the baton back. Our 'second date' is a more intense discussion, where we work out if we're a good fit for each other. If we agree that there is a good fit, we consider 'taking them home to meet the family', our current staff and clients. It's important that we feel that our new recruits will integrate into our existing successful team.

More than half of the retention battle is won if we make the right choice at the start, but we know that maintaining a healthy relationship is something we have to work on. Like any relationship, it won't survive on one single factor, so although remuneration is important, it can't be the only motivator. Our new buddy system aims to nurture connectivity amongst colleagues and encourages us to embrace our common goals. We don't want our associates to feel isolated in the relationship and we don't want communication to break down. Retaining the right people is imperative to our success. We use four key practical steps to enable communication opportunities on both sides:

- Progress Interviews with HR take place at the 3 month stage
- One to one meetings between staff and their line manager occur every month
- Refreshers and ongoing training opportunities facilitate continuous development
- Monthly incentives to reinforce commitment and compassion

However, we don't retain people 'at any cost'. We must maintain a balance between when someone is worth holding on to and when to let go. Our recruitment process is simple, we're specific in the outset about what we want and we encourage prospective employees to be specific about what they want too. If we find a 'good match' (after all no relationship is perfect) we seize the opportunity and thereafter we never take their commitment to our company for granted.