

2020 Candidate Experience Manifesto

To land top candidates, you must provide an excellent experience – to all candidates.

83% of candidates will share a positive interview experience with their inner circle*, but 66% will also share a negative experience – a figure which is growing year-over-year. Either way, how you recruit impacts your brand – your reputation spreads among candidates and influences their decisions. What are hard-to-reach, passive candidates hearing about your company?

In our inaugural Candidate Experience Manifesto, TLG provides the 10 keys to an excellent candidate experience, complete with helpful tips which you can begin to implement today.

10 keys to an excellent candidate experience

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1 – Consider your brand

How you recruit and select new employees impacts your brand.
Does the experience reflect well upon you?

How many leaders have said that recruiting great people is their greatest challenge? It's true. But many also neglect to consider the experience of their candidates as they recruit them.

Candidates talk. Many believe the interview process is a direct reflection of how a company operates. You can bet that top candidates will hear about the experience of their peers and – for better or for worse – that information will influence their decision to interview with you and may influence how they respond to an offer.

How you recruit impacts your brand, so you must consider it when designing your recruitment and selection process. Providing a great recruitment experience will enhance your brand and drive talent to your door.

TLG Tips – identify candidate experience pain-points. Create a basic outline of your recruitment process and ask yourself where breakdowns might be occurring. On the other hand, where can you shine?

2 – Communicate, communicate, communicate

It's the #1 thing you can do to provide an excellent interview experience.

The greatest source of dissatisfaction in the candidate experience is lack of communication. Comments like "I'm not sure how long the process will take," "I haven't received any feedback," and "I'm not sure if they're interested in me" are shockingly common even for executive searches and symptoms of poor communication.

Don't risk creating dissatisfaction as you work to attract great people – adopt a policy of frequent communication. Above all else, just make sure you are reflecting on your process and communicating with your candidates at each opportunity.

TLG Tips – incorporate weekly touchpoints with active candidates and make a commitment to delivering swift feedback (more on that below).

3 – Identify bottlenecks

How long does your recruitment process take?

Whether your time-to-fill metric is a major pain point or bright spot, seek to identify and eliminate bottlenecks.

A close second to poor communication, a great source of dissatisfaction in recruitment is the length of time it takes to make critical hire. You need top talent to power your business. The best candidates have multiple demands on their time (including other suitors) and will expect an efficient process.

Examine your interview process – where are bottlenecks occurring? Can you reduce or eliminate them?

TLG Tips – reduce the total number of interviews and coordinate all meetings through a single point of contact. If possible, pre-approve an offer for your top candidate ahead of their final interview.

4 – Create alignment

Is everyone on the same page?

It's critical that each person involved in recruitment and selection is aligned and working toward the same goal. Do you see competing interests bubble-up or simply hear that your voices are out of harmony?

Smart candidates will sense disorganization, while any amount of dissension may cause them to think twice about accepting an offer – achieving success in a new role is difficult enough without company politics.

Take proactive steps to encourage alignment within your team. You shouldn't attempt to control everything, but thoughtfulness and proactivity will go a long way toward creating a better experience for your candidates.

TLG Tips – brief the team on why you're hiring, the qualifications you're seeking, and what they need to assess. If possible, prepare your interviewers in advance with a written candidate summary (or get one from your search consultant). Your interviewers will perform better and provide a better experience for your candidates.

5 – Respect confidentiality

The best candidates will require confidentiality. Every candidate deserves it.

Confidentiality is an overlooked but important aspect of the candidate experience. Most candidates will trust that their interest in you is confidential without voicing concern. However, we can tell you it's still on their mind.

Set them at ease – communicate to each candidate that their involvement is treated confidentially. It's a simple step, but it may differentiate you from your competitors.

Lastly, make-good on your promise by requiring confidentiality internally. Interviewers should know that any break in candidate confidentiality will have severe consequences for your brand and ability to land top talent.

TLG Tips – affirm confidentiality with each candidate and require it from each interviewer. Offer a mutual NDA for sensitive or mission-critical hires.

6 – Set expectations

Set expectations to keep your candidates engaged and deliver a positive experience.

You won't always be able to control the timing or course of your interviews. Identifying bottlenecks and aligning your team is a great way to start, but you must set (and re-set) expectations with your candidates as interviews progress – we recommend keeping it conservative.

Over 16 years, we've found that communicating a conservative timeline allows our clients to meet and usually beat expectations while avoiding major disappointments. More than anything else, candidates are simply seeking communication. By setting expectations, you'll be rewarded with higher levels of interest and engagement.

TLG Tips – communicate conservative expectations for timeline and process, then solicit direct feedback from your short-list of candidates. Compress your timeline or process if need be.

7 – Use one voice

From the pitch you take to the marketplace to the point of offering your top candidate, your messaging must be clear – use one voice to deliver it.

Who is delivering your message to the market? Are your contingent recruiters invested in getting it right? How many people are contacting your candidates as interviews progress? Who has their pulse and is best suited to closing their offer? Make every effort to deliver a consistent message and do so from a single, trusted point of contact – the hiring manager, Talent Acquisition/HR, or your executive search consultant.

TLG Tips – if possible, reduce external communication to a single, trusted point of contact. Avoid sending mixed messages to the market – retain or otherwise partner with executive search consultants exclusively.

8 – Deliver feedback (swiftly)

Make a commitment to gathering and delivering feedback to your candidates – as swiftly as possible.

If the greatest source of candidate dissatisfaction is lack of communication, its most frequent gripe is slow, limited, or absent feedback. According to The Talent Board, 53.5% of candidates receive no feedback after interviewing, while 77.3% of those who received feedback found it to be unhelpful*. Don't frustrate your candidates – create a culture of swift feedback.

First, develop a mechanism to easily collect feedback from your interviewers (leverage your ATS or HCM solution). Second, persuade your colleagues that tangible, swift feedback will help the company hire better. 52% of candidates who receive feedback will re-apply or refer a colleague*. Expecting swift feedback will reduce a key bottleneck, speed your interview process along, and improve your reputation in the market.

TLG Tips – make collecting feedback easy via your ATS/HCM solution. Track feedback-time as a recruitment metric, identify bottlenecks, and set goals to reduce feedback time as you improve.

9 – Ask for feedback

How are we doing? Make feedback a two-way street.

As your organizations grows, you'll meet hundreds if not thousands of candidates. Don't let those opportunities to improve go to waste – ask for feedback.

Request feedback from each candidate you interview, focusing on two elements: 1) their considerations – level of interest, questions, timeline, etc. – and 2) their interview experience. Regarding their experience, what are you doing successfully? What are the pain points? How can you improve?

Showing care for candidates' interview experience—whether they are successful or not—will leave a lasting impression, enhance your brand, and allow you to adapt.

TLG Tips – track feedback by multiple factors, including candidate source, success (progression and conclusion), EEO status (if available). Use that feedback to adapt and improve.

10 – Adapt

Finally, don't be afraid to adapt.

The best companies assess their recruitment process, the candidates experience, and seek to adept.

Changes can be immediate – our clients have saved candidates by acting on feedback mid-stream. Many more have incorporated feedback to take a candidate's experience from good to great, putting them in primary position to hire.

If you are conscious of your candidates' experience, communicate early and often, and solicit feedback from them, you'll be in position adapt and provide an excellent experience.

TLG Tips – ask recent hires how you can improve your interview experience. Incorporating their suggestions will increase their engagement after hire.

Bonus Tips from TLG

1. Candidate research – make a good impression as early as possible.

Candidates research prospective employers online before applying – their experience starts during this phase. Examine your web and social media presence – will it create a positive impression? Is there helpful content? Candidates trust employee referrals and related "stories" (long-form content) more than any other factor, so make sure to elevate them online.

2. The application experience – keep it simple.

Candidates are happiest when the formal application experience is simple. Our recommendation is to get candidates in the door and collect more detail as you progress. Ask for basic information upfront – name, contact information, resume (LinkedIn does a great job of this with their "Easy Apply" feature). Bonus tip – optimize your application for mobile. (Literal) rule of thumb – could you submit your resume and apply with your thumb?

3. Job descriptions – include your values, culture, and show a career path.

Job descriptions have value and candidates still want to see duties, skills, and know what a successful candidate profile looks like, but they're more likely to take interest in employers who describe their company values and culture. Pro tip: illustrate a career path to the new hire – what role(s) would they perform if they earn a promotion? Are there multiple pathways? Doing so will help candidates to visualize longevity in your organization and create more confidence in the immediate opportunity.

4. Prepare your candidates to interview.

Above we recommended that you prepare your interviewers in basic ways – take simple steps to prepare your candidates as well. Sharing an interview agenda as well as interviewer names and bios makes for a professional experience.

5. Dedicated candidate Q&A time makes for a better interview experience.

Just as feedback should be a two-way street, so should interview Q&A. Candidates who say they are given time to ask questions during interviews report higher levels of engagement. It's not always possible, but let interviewers know they should dedicate 5 - 10 minutes of their time to candidate questions.

6. Learn from your competitors when competing for top talent.

Top candidates will have multiple suitors if they choose to interview actively. Ask them about their timeline, considerations, and other experiences – it's a fantastic opportunity to learn from your competitors. How are other companies behaving as they recruit the same person? What experience(s) are they providing? Can you learn from them?

Bonus Tips from TLG

7. **Include an interviewer who shares a past employer with your candidate.**
Candidates show higher levels of engagement and trust when given the opportunity to connect with a former colleague or employee who shared a past employer. Include them in the interview process if possible.
8. **Get them involved – involve new hires in recruitment as early as possible.**
Candidates want to hear from recent hires. Including recent hires as interviewers gives candidates the opportunity to ask about culture and form authentic bonds, leading to a more satisfying interview experience. On the other hand, giving new hires ownership in recruitment will increase their engagement during their first year of work and make them more likely to refer new candidates for hire.
9. **Feedback – make it personal.**
While most candidates receive poor or no feedback, the majority of those who do are still receiving it from an automated system. Only 21% receive a personal email from their recruiter, HR, or the hiring manager*. 7.4% receive a phone call. Stand-out from your competitors by personalizing your feedback.
10. **Hiring managers – maintain a dialogue with new hires before they start.**
Only 39% of new hires receive a phone call from their hiring manager after accepting an offer and before their start date*. Maintain a dialogue with new hires – it will get them excited and reduce risks associated with counteroffers from competing suitors or the old employer.

**2018 Talent Board North American Candidate Experience Research Report.*