

# The Candidate Experience:

## What they *say* it is; What it *really* is; and, What it *can* be

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*Important Note: This first of a kind, virtual monograph, is a single, comprehensive treatment of the candidate experience. To achieve this ambitious goal, we will periodically (at least quarterly) revise this document with additional links to articles, blogs, company case studies, slide decks, tools and other reference material that our primary and contributing authors believe relevant. If you are reading this feel free to distribute as you see fit. Suggestions for content can be made by emailing [Gerry Crispin](#) or any of the other authors. The most recent updated version of this document will be kept in pdf format [here](#).*

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Recruiters, HR Leaders, Job Seekers, nearly everyone who has ever held a job, looked for a job or hired someone for a job has an opinion about “The Candidate Experience”. The irony is that there is no standard definition for the phrase “Candidate Experience” applied to recruiting. There is no Merriam-Webster definition, no Wikipedia definition and, even if there were, no agreement in the staffing world about what a candidate is let alone the experience he or she is supposed to be having.

There are however, at least 1 million opinions...just ask Google (1.4 million and counting). A quick search on one recruiting related site, ERE.net, returns 756 mentions of ‘candidate experience’ in the title of blogs and articles. SHRM.org in contrast has only 23 results for the phrase.

Unfortunately, among the 100,000 or so people claiming expertise about what the candidate experience is (literary license) the few common themes we have found have little substantive support for their conclusions.

It is our intention to change that.

## 1. A History of the Candidate Experience: A Magical Mystery Tour

### In the Beginning

In the dark ages (before the light of the Internet), when no one had any 'friends,' very little effort was made to understand the attitudes and behaviors of candidates let alone consider whether their attitudes toward the recruitment process were even relevant. They [candidates] were expected to line up, be screened, be selected and be ever-grateful for whatever interest was extended by the employer.

Professor [Peter Cappelli](#), the George W. Taylor Professor of Management at Wharton and a student of the history of HR, told one hard-to-forget story a few years ago that was, he said, "representative of the earliest day of recruiting – when immigrants were flooding into the US."

Peter described how the foreman of a railroad yard in Philadelphia, needing workers for each day, would appear early in morning where a mob (literally) of 'candidates' stood separated from the yard (and the 'hiring manager') by a tall and imposing steel fence. The foreman then threw oranges over the fence. As many oranges as men he would need that day. When he unlocked the fence, the men with the oranges came through and the candidate mob dispersed until the next day.

Source, Select, Onboard. Time to fill: 5 minutes. Cost-per-hire: Price of fruit. Story: Priceless.

We doubt whether the foreman or the candidates thought much about the candidate experience. One might argue that holding on to an orange until the gate opened was likely the key to finding a quality worker and probably served the foreman as a fair test given the environment and relationship between employer and worker.

The literature of that time held not a single mention of candidate reactions to recruiting and selection activities. One of the pioneering books on Personnel and Industrial Engineering (or for that matter Leadership) - [F.W. Taylor's](#) mechanistic but still relevant work, *The Principles of Scientific Management*, published in 1911 (100 years ago this year) is also void of any notion about candidates' concerns,

Behavior was viewed then as a knowable and predictable. A formula driven by rewards (mostly cash), physical limitations and chain of command feedback. Taylor's approach assumed people were rational and that candidate attitudes were irrelevant. And yet, Frederick Taylor observed that "quality talent from the executive level to the assembly line worker was never in more short supply." He wrote how he wrestled to understand why so many firms preferred to recruit workers for critical positions from someone else instead of drawing from a pool of their own employees and developing them internally.

His principles proposed that an employer systematically study a job and then "scientifically select, train, and develop each employee rather than passively leaving them to train themselves." This was revolutionary then...and still not a bad idea.

## Fast Forward

By the time Dustin Hoffman was advised to go into plastics and we raced for the moon, only superficial changes had occurred on the supply side of the staffing equation. Workers, including a growing cadre of college-educated professionals, were fodder for the U.S. post-WWII engine well into the 1980s.

Talent was a commodity. We recruited professionals from an unending, booming supply of quality candidates. We prized conformity, credentials and comparisons with normative behavior. Predictive performance testing was shaky at best. Backgrounds of the best and brightest correlated much more with old school, tie, gender and race than prior results or the outcomes of a behavioral-based interview.

Then Vietnam, Civil rights, Women's rights, Immigration, the 'Me Generation', Gay Rights and more blew our notions of 'fit' all to hell. Well, almost. One other factor competing with the cultural changes were the demographic shifts that guaranteed there would not be enough qualified, educated, experienced, skilled applicants to meet ALL of the needs of US firms. Enter emerging technology, the Internet, ATs, global integration and much, much more.

Suddenly the challenge to find, attract, screen, select and onboard became...interesting. Eliminate the halo bias and it wasn't so clear whether the candidates' values, attitudes and expectations were a match with our firm. Skills, knowledge and experience were no longer the only factors in play. Building a diverse slate of quality interested candidates required work.

## Ivory Tower Contributions

Meanwhile, the academic world was not offering much help in positioning the candidate experience. Academia's focus, even today, still concentrates on factors influencing employer selection rather than candidate decisions. Literature reviews we've conducted or reviewed are limited.

The most comprehensive text overview of recruiting theory, systems and practices (required in nearly all graduate level education), [Staffing Organizations](#), by Heneman and Judge, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., 2008, lacks even a basic definition for a 'candidate' but, the text does cite and summarize a few studies relevant to an applicant's experience worth mentioning here:

S.L.Rynes, "Recruitment, Job Choice, and Post-Hire Decisions," pp.399-444; J.P.Wanous, *Organizational Entry*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Reading, MA: Addison Wesley, 1992)

J.L. Scott, "Total Quality College Relations and Recruitment Programs: Student Benchmark Best Practices," *EMA Journal*, 1995 winter, pp.2-5.

S.L. Rynes, "Who's Selecting Whom? Effects of Selection Practices in Applicant Attitudes and Behaviors," in N. Schmitt, W. Borman, and associates (eds.), *Personnel Selection in Organizations* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1993), pp. 240-276.

S.L. Rynes, R.D. Bretz, and B. Gerhart, "The Importance of Recruitment and Job Choice: A Different Way of Looking," *Personnel Psychology*, 1991, 44, pp. 487-521

M.S. Taylor and T.J. Bergmann, "Organizational Recruitment Activities and Applicant Reactions to Different stages of the Recruiting Process," *Personnel Psychology*, 1988, 40, 00. 261-285.

A.M. Ryan, J.M. Sacco, L.A. McFarland, and S.D. Kriska, "Applicant Self-Selection: Correlates of Withdrawal from a Multiple Hurdle Process," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 2000, 85, pp. 163-179.

While these peer-reviewed and well-designed research studies are helpful, they are too easily overlooked and discounted as irrelevant if only because they pre-date the impact of emerging technologies during the last 20 years. They also tend to use big words and run on sentences and qualify every conclusion as tentative thereby ensuring they will bore even the most studious practitioners to tears...who then ignore them.

We shouldn't ignore them. Collectively, these studies offer strong documentation [proof] for the following conclusions:

- Applicant reactions (behavioral and attitudinal) are pivotal sources of information for recruitment systems. Ignoring them can impact conversion rates (failure to hire best candidate), restriction of range (early abandonment by quality candidates), employee engagement (correlated with company performance) and loss of sales (bottom line).
- Hiring managers influence the applicant more than recruiters.
- Recruiters influence the applicant's attitudes (more so than behaviors) but not as much as the characteristics of the job. The influence recruiters do have on an applicant's attitude correlates with a firm's employment brand and size of future applicant pools.
- Two characteristics recruiters exhibit to successfully generate more influence with applicants are: perceived 'warmth' (enthusiastic, personable, empathetic, and helpful) and knowledge about the job. Nothing else they (recruiters) do seems to matter much to applicants.
- Reactions to selection questions, tests and screens that are narrowly linked to the content of the job which has been shared with the applicant (face valid) are much more likely to be favorable ( i.e. if tests are not job-related, they are more likely to influence negative behaviors and attitudes).
- Delays at any stage of the recruitment process are almost guaranteed to negatively impact candidate reactions – and this is especially true of better quality candidates!
- Amount of money spent on the recruitment process does not correlate with candidate reactions – positive or negative. Amount spent on applicant's perception of the process as 'efficient and fair' does impact attitudes and behaviors.
- Whatever positive influence a recruiter will have on applicant attitudes and behavior is likely to occur early in the process. At later stages the aggregate information an applicant has impacts them more and can also impact

the credibility established earlier by the recruiter.

- Applicant attitudes and behaviors are influenced at selection stages of the recruitment by the presence or absence of detailed next steps and what will be required of them. Lack of quality information about selection steps and methodology leads to rapid abandonment.

Each of the findings above has ramifications for the design of recruiting systems and the importance of the candidate experience.

### **Moving Forward into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

In the last decade, anecdotal, conceptual and occasionally a few data-supported efforts have been publicly and privately published with notable (albeit sometimes arguable) results.

One of the earliest was the work of iLogos Research, then a division of Taleo. "[Perception vs. Reality: Jobseeker Behavior Online](#)" was published in 2001. [Yves Lermusiaux](#) and [Alice Snell](#) surveyed 1500 visitors to their clients' websites and asked them what content was most important. Among their findings, content like "how to apply online" and areas set aside for informing people about specific types of jobs (i.e. college grad/entry) were ranked high. Expectations about being acknowledged and a desire for information about salary range were also well-documented. Some of their findings are now commonly addressed – although salary is still verboten on most corporate sites.

The Corporate Executive Board's [Recruiting Roundtable](#) has produced some of the most visibly attractive and thought provoking reports touching on the candidate experience (liberally supplemented with member best-in-class examples) during the last decade. One such report, Best-in-Class Employment Web Site Features published in 2002, documented how best-in-class firms met candidate needs as their expectations grew by providing status, interview prep kits, interview process primers and other resources. These features are still relevant and, truth be told, still unmet by the majority of firms listed on the Fortune 500 that CareerXroads examines each year.

Another Recruiting Roundtable study published several years later (2006), Building Talent Pipelines, includes an entire section on 'building relationships over time' making the point that prospects and candidates go through several stages. [Jeff Hunter's](#) work while he was at Electronic Arts, was highlighted in the report and Jeff's subsequent public presentations on this subject emphasized a common language – leads, contacts, candidates thereby differentiating a 'candidate's experience' into several phases.

[Todd Raphael](#), editor of ERE's [Journal of Corporate Recruiting Leadership](#), has published many well written and thought-provoking articles by practitioners and consultants alike that add to our understanding of the Candidate Experience. Examples include:

- [Kristen Weirick](#), "Maximizing the Value of the Candidate Management Process," Volume 1, Issue 1, 2005  
As Whirlpool's Employment Brand Manager, Kristen Weirick (now at Cargill) saw candidate management as a three stage process: Initial Candidate Touch Point, Candidate Engagement and Candidate Closings. The creation of a positive candidate experience for each of them was the lynchpin of her recruiting system.

- [Michael R. Kannisto](#), "The 100 questions: A New Metaphor for Understanding the Purpose of Employment Branding," Volume 3, Issue 2, 2007  
While Global staffing director at Bausch & Lomb Michael (now at BASF) developed a taxonomy of 100 questions job seekers ask at different times ranging from the handshake type questions like "who are you?" to the nitty-gritty concerns about the hiring process. Under the guise of branding, Michael digs into candidate expectations about why they should come and stay and the realization that the presence (or absence) of answers will color the candidate's attitudes and behaviors no matter what the employer's decision is. Many of these questions go directly to our concept of transparency.
- "Employer and Employee Views on Why Employees Take or Leave Jobs," Volume 3 Issue 4, 2008. This Watson and Wyatt summary matrix contrasts differences between drivers for top employees and employees in general as well as what "employers thought employees would say." The immediate take-away is that the candidate experience can never be inferred from the observations of recruiters and hiring managers. Direct measurement is essential. It IS what they say it is.
- [Brian Kimball](#), & [Matt Lafata](#), "Evaluating Usability for Talent Acquisition Systems," Volume 4, Issue 1, 2008.  
Brian and Matt representing HRchitect, make a great case for why the medium is as important as the message. Their detailed overview of 'usability' shows us that how you navigate to the content is as important as having it. To impact the online experience the medium must position the content in the visitors perspective, be accessible and be chosen.
- [Russell Kronenburg](#), "A New Approach to Talent Management," Volume 5, Issue 3, 2010. Russell, formerly with Pacific Brands in Australia, draws on his own research of pioneering HR theorists and contemporary writers like Rosabeth Moss Kanter's *Super Corp* to develop three strategic and three operational drivers. He makes a compelling case for the candidate as one of the strategic drivers 'where a company focuses on adding value to candidates in the market, irrespective of whether the candidate is part of an external talent pool...' While this notion raises eyebrows as a 'do-good' diversion, it actually provides a business rationale for so many of the best-practice firms who invest in workforce planning and educational initiatives in the countries, regions and communities where their employees live and work.
- [Marvin Smith](#), "New Math" Volume 5, Issue 3, 2010. As a highly respected recruiter at Microsoft with experience in staffing spanning decades, Marvin contrasts old versus new forms of recruiting with a clarity of vision few can argue. He notes that 'control' over how a firm will be perceived (brand) is being lost, at least in part, to the customer/candidate. Embracing talent communities – pools of leads, prospects and candidates – to build relationships months and even years before they become candidates (if ever) is one way to engage, balance and share the 'control' of a brand.
- [Cindy Nicola](#) and Mathew Jeffery, "Engagement, the Candidate Journey and Social Media: The EA Story," Volume 5, Issue 4. Cindy and Jeffery extend the Electronic Arts story from the Corporate Roundtable study and Marvin Smith's description of "Talent Communities" by mapping and describing how social media is used to build the candidate's experience of their firm over significant time periods. It is self-evident that the attitudes developed while building a relationship are all about the candidate experience.

- [Karen Vilardo](#), “Key Bank’s Success With the “Virtual Job Tryout” Volume 5, Issue 4, 2010. Karen Vilardo at Key Bank working with an external partner, Shaker Consulting Group describes in detail the impact of adding online job simulations to the recruitment system on the attitudes and behaviors of candidates. Her article notes hard numbers in performance, changes in turnover and returns on the investment as well as related feedback driving that success from the candidates who experienced the simulation – “it’s nice to get a little taste of what the job would entail to determine eligibility, so as not to waste the time of the employer as well as myself, thank you!”

Today, we are at a tipping point with regards to the candidate experience. The tools are available and the interest is growing exponentially. Even the toughest member of our diverse professional industry, the PhD assessment fraternity, is beginning to share heretical commentary like that of Dr Charles Handler, in his January 14, 2011 ERE.net article [“A Pre-Employment Assessment Candidate Bill of Rights.”](#)

Charles offers a rationale, supported in part by literature we’ve already reviewed, that the candidate should expect from employers:

- A proper introduction to the assessment and why they are being asked to take it.
- An assessment experience that is of a reasonable length.
- To know where the assessment fits within the overall hiring process, and what they can expect next.
- A good user experience.
- Technical support, no matter when they are applying.
- Assessment content that appears job related.
- An enjoyable assessment experience.
- To know what to expect in terms of feedback from the assessment.

While we may question the rationale about ‘enjoyment’ for its own sake, it is this level of specificity we can and should test in the field.

### **2011: Looking in the Mirror – The Networked Conversation**

Hundreds of conversations, mostly online, are connecting into a network. An example of one of the better conversations can be found at [Matt Charney’s](#) Feb 15, 2011 blog, [Employer Black Holes and the Candidate Experience](#). (Note: this was also a feed into a lively Twitter chat later the same day, #Tchat, co-hosted by [Kevin Grossman](#).)

Commenting on a story in which a job seeker encountered a negative experience, Matt says,

*“Grossman’s experience, and frustration (in a job search), echoes the experience of countless others, but he points to two of the almost universal expectations candidates have when applying for a position: acknowledgment and closure.”*

What makes this conversation 'typical' is that comments like these, believable as they are, present opinion as fact. What is 'countless' exactly? Are 'almost universal' expectations 99.9%...or something else? Are acknowledgement and closure really important or just 'top of mind' when they don't happen?

What makes this conversation exceptional, is Matt's effort to create a network of related connections on the topic ranging from linking to an HD video stream conversation from the 2010 RecruitFest conference (where [Gerry Crispin](#), CareerXroads; [Jason Lauritsen](#), Union Bank and Trust; [Charlie Judy](#), Navigant Consulting [Chris Hoyt](#), PepsiCo; and, [Mike Ramer](#), Ramer Search Consultants waxed poetic on about the [Candidate Bill of Rights](#)) to a basketful of articles Matt deemed useful to addressing key questions about aspects of the Candidate experience:

- [Candidate Experience Isn't About Pleasing Everyone](#) by [Claudia Faust](#)
- [When Potential New Hires Are Searching for YOU](#) by [Emily Bennington](#)
- [Candidate Experience and Common Sense](#) by [Tim Sackett](#)
- [Candidate Experience: A Question of Values](#) by [Howard Adamsky](#)
- [Candidate vs. Customer Experience](#) by [Gerry Crispin](#)
- [How to Get an Employer's Attention in 20 Seconds](#) by [Jessica Holbrook Hernandez](#)
- [The Employment/Applicant Transaction: Acknowledgment and Closure](#) by [Kevin W. Grossman](#)
- [Eliminate the Black Hole](#) by [Colin Kingsbury](#)

While we agree with many of the notions put forth in the videos and articles, it is also evident that the stated opinions are too often unsubstantiated. We simply believe a more comprehensive dive into candidate experience research is essential to create a supportable context for future conversations, and to build a foundation of what constitutes best-practices (and expected results should you employ them).

In June of 2010 we (CareerXroads), asked 70 large well-resourced, highly-competitive firms to share just how well they researched aspects of the candidates journey. They told us:

- Only 5% ever, Ever, EVER surveyed a representative sample of ALL candidates i.e. prospects who have completed an application for a specific job and may (or may not) be qualified or have been screened or have been finalists interviewed.
- 7% claimed to have hired a mystery shopping analyst to secretly apply and go through the recruiting process to audit it from the 'inside'.
- 59% conduct focus groups of new hires about their experience.
- 69% survey Finalists.

We asked recruiters if they tried to put themselves in the candidates' shoes.

- 86% check their online job postings.
- 42% go further and apply to their own jobs.

We also asked recruiting leaders if they directly observe their staff or their clients (hiring managers) influencing candidate behaviors and attitudes.

- 62% claim they periodically observe recruiter interviews.
- 42.4% claim to observe hiring manager interviews.

### **Digging out data**

Clearly there are some firms actively engaged in learning what they must do to compete for a new generation of candidates whose attitudes and behaviors are as important in the recruiting process as the employer's protocols. It is these efforts we hope to dig out and present here in the future as well as the opinions, questions and hypotheses our colleagues raise for us all to ponder.

One attempt to get at some of the 'evidence' for the candidate experience was made by [Elaine Orlor](#) and Gerry Crispin who staged a formal debate at the [HR Technology Conference](#) in Chicago (September, 2010). Countering Gerry's tongue-in-cheek position that we are as likely to find a quality candidate experience as we were a unicorn, Elaine presented data from several sources in this [podcast](#) interview by Peter Clayton of Total Picture Radio about the debate. During the debate, Elaine drew on her slide deck, [Improving the Candidate Experience](#), to present a cogent, well- thought out argument about why we need to take the candidate experience to the next level.

This monograph represents a new effort to find contributors and we hope to expand it over time.

## 2. Toward A Working Definition of the Candidate Experience: The Moment They Know It

During 2010 we asked every audience we could to describe the exact moment when a person became a candidate for a job. Hundreds of recruiters and staffing leaders participated by answering the question in dozens of meetings. We never got a standard answer although statements like “anyone I ever considered,” “everyone qualified,” “whoever I could find,” “all the people in my talent community” and “all the folks who interview with the hiring manager” were common.

We need some discipline in our language.

The term candidate derives from the Latin word, '*candidatus*' or clothed in white. It refers to the white toga worn by candidates for office in ancient Rome. (Perhaps we could ask anyone interested in working for us to wear white so we avoid any confusion. On second thought, maybe not.)

Now, the primary definition in [Merriam-Webster](#) is still the reference to political candidates, the term is defined as “One that aspires to...an office, membership, or award.” A candidate could also be someone who is ‘nominated’ or ‘qualified’ for office – but it is sufficient to ‘aspire.’

Some examples:

**A Lead:** someone whose name and contact information is known to you but little else ( i.e. someone who may be on a list of attendees at a conference that attracts professionals you seek)... cannot be a candidate. You simply have no idea whether they even know the name of your company. You may want them to become a candidate but, for now, they are a lead.

**A Prospect:** someone you’ve been in touch with but who, at this time, has stated they have no interest in working for your company... cannot be a candidate. They don’t ‘aspire’ but they may change their mind or be willing to have another kind of relationship such as referring prospects who are interested in becoming candidates. They certainly may be worth engaging with, but they are not a candidate.

**A Prospect:** someone you’ve been in touch with or someone sourced by others or someone who has just responded to your employer brand in some way AND who ‘aspires’ to work for you... is a candidate. They know they are. You don’t until they hit the submit button on your application or, perhaps, state on your talent community form that they want to apply eventually when a specific position appears or when they determine they have the qualifications that allow them to better compete.

Everyone who completes an application or submits interest in a job may not be an applicant according to your rules but they ARE a candidate. They know it. You know it.

**An Applicant:** a term with an already fixed legal definition (declaration of interest, qualified, considered, etc.), clearly falls under the definition of a candidate but, is a specific subset of the candidate population.

**A slate of candidates or finalists** in the job seeking journey who have not been screened out and are coming in for interviews with the hiring manager would also be appropriately termed as candidates – but this is a very small subset indeed.

**A New Hire:** someone who has accepted an offer of employment but is not yet signed as a full employee receiving benefits and a paycheck is still a candidate - the smallest subset but arguably the most important. Any loss here including the loss of this new hire's engagement drives directly to the heart of the candidate experience.

Our discussion from this point will consistently use the definitions above when referencing Leads, Prospects, Candidates, Applicants, Finalists and New Hires.

### **We propose to define the Candidate Experience as**

*“The attitudes and behaviors of individuals who aspire to work for a firm about the recruiting process, the stakeholders in the process, the work and the company itself as a place to work.” – Gerry Crispin, sphr*

It then makes sense to characterize the experience from the moment the candidate believes they have officially let the employer know their interest. That moment generally is when they have hit the 'submit' button sending in their application.

The applicant that has expressed interest, is qualified and is considered by the employer is also a candidate... just a smaller 'subset' of the candidate pool. The slate being interviewed on-site in final competition and the new hire that just accepted but hasn't yet started are also candidates. Every phase is important but the language we use should be precise so we can differentiate the expectations and experiences each requires.

### **3. Building a Business Rationale for the Candidate Experience: Why Oh Why Should We Care!**

The controversy among staffing professionals isn't about whether a candidate experience exists but why it is so important now when, in the past, employers could generally ignore it at will. The shift in demographics may account for some of the explanation but surely not all.

#### **The Candidate Experience as an Outgrowth of the Experience Economy**

[Joseph Murphy](#), Shaker Consulting Group, recently connected us to Futurist [Jim Gilmore](#) (video link) co-author of the [Experience Economy](#). This well-researched and well-received but still somewhat controversial book published by the Harvard Business Press in 1999 may well be the one vehicle to examine why the candidate experience is important and indeed may become critical to future businesses.

[Wikipedia has an excellent summary](#) of the Experience Economy for those unlikely to delve further into the details. The authors make a compelling case that the Experience Economy is the natural progression from the Service Economy and is replacing it i.e. we went from an agrarian age to an Industrial age to the service economy and, now, to the experience economy.

The Wiki article notes:

*“Pine and Gilmore argue that businesses must orchestrate memorable events for their customers, and that memory itself becomes the product - the "experience." More advanced experience businesses can begin charging for the value of the "transformation" that an experience offers, e.g. as education offerings might do if they were able to participate in the value that is created by the educated individual. This, they argue, is a natural progression in the value added by the business over and above its inputs.”*

If this seems a stretch at first blush, you may find it less so after watching and listening to the arguments made by Joseph Pine on [TED speaking about What Customers Want](#). In his discussion he includes this slide which hypothesizes that the core driver of an Experience Economy is to ‘render authenticity.’

Figure 1 – Economic Outputs of Stages of Society – Joseph Pine at TED

<i>Economic Output</i>	<i>Business Imperative</i>	<i>Consumer Sensibility</i>
Experiences	Render	Authenticity
Services	Improve	Quality
Goods	Control	Costs
Commodities	Supply	Availability

This was a light bulb moment for us along several dimensions about how we might adapt some of the authors’ concepts to Staffing.

Joseph Murphy’s blog, [Pre-employment Testing in the Experience Economy](#), has begun to do just that by contrasting the type of interaction a candidate is offered (Interface) with the degree of the candidate’s engagement (Immersion).

The resulting 2-dimensional JoHari window offers insight into the quality of the candidate experience by describing four types of experiences – Educated, Entertained, Enthused and Engaged.

Figure 2 – Candidate Experience Evaluation Matrix



We believe adding a 3<sup>rd</sup> dimension describing the degree to which any of these experiences is ‘authentic’ will complete the link to the employer and enhance our ability to measure the impact of the candidate experience on the hiring process.

Two elements to a dimension of Authenticity (opines Pine in his TED presentation) are the extent that the employer actually believes what they say is real and, whether the customers [candidates] believe the claim (regardless whether it is true or not). In other words, have I created a real or fake employment brand... and will the candidates buy it?

### 3. Mapping The Gap Between Candidate Expectations And Reality: The Black Hole

The gap between what leaders in a company believe is important to their employees and, what their employees say is important has long been noted in business journals. Might there also be a gap between what recruiting professionals think is important to candidates and what candidates say is important?

**Surveying the Candidates**

We think there is a large gap. One we can get at by systematically collecting responses about candidate expectations. We examined a survey of 300 jobseekers conducted by an intern working with Joseph Murphy at Shaker Consulting group that may or may not reflect the same concerns about the candidate experience of visitors to every site but offers a helpful starting point.

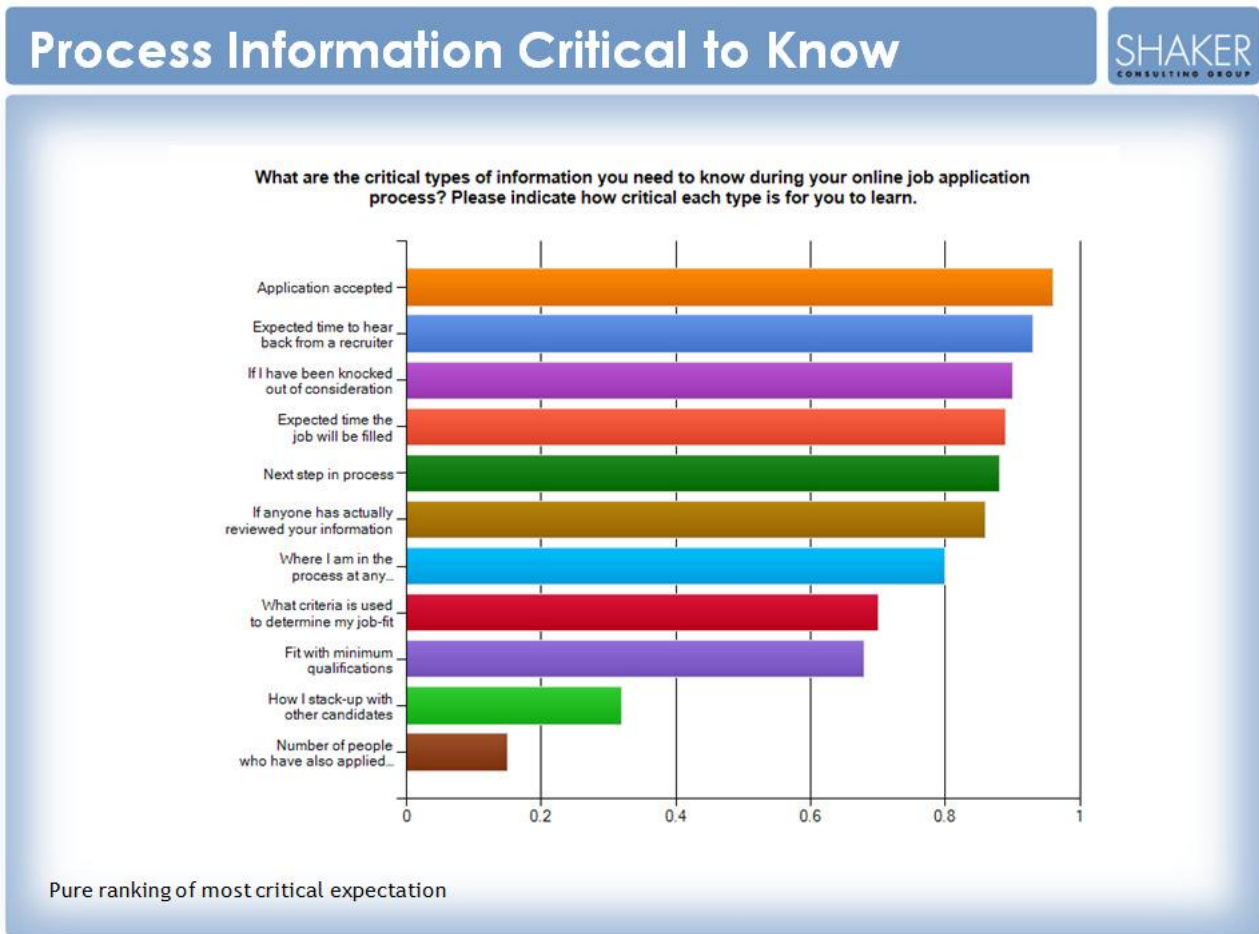
These next few slides tell a most interesting story. So much so that we would suggest employers conduct exercises within their own firms by first asking recruiters and hiring managers to prioritize the lists in terms of what they think their candidates ‘expect to happen.’ (Of course, asking the candidates as they apply to your firm about what they expect next would be an ideal supplement to this design.)

*Figure 3 – Candidate Expectations about Company Career Sites*



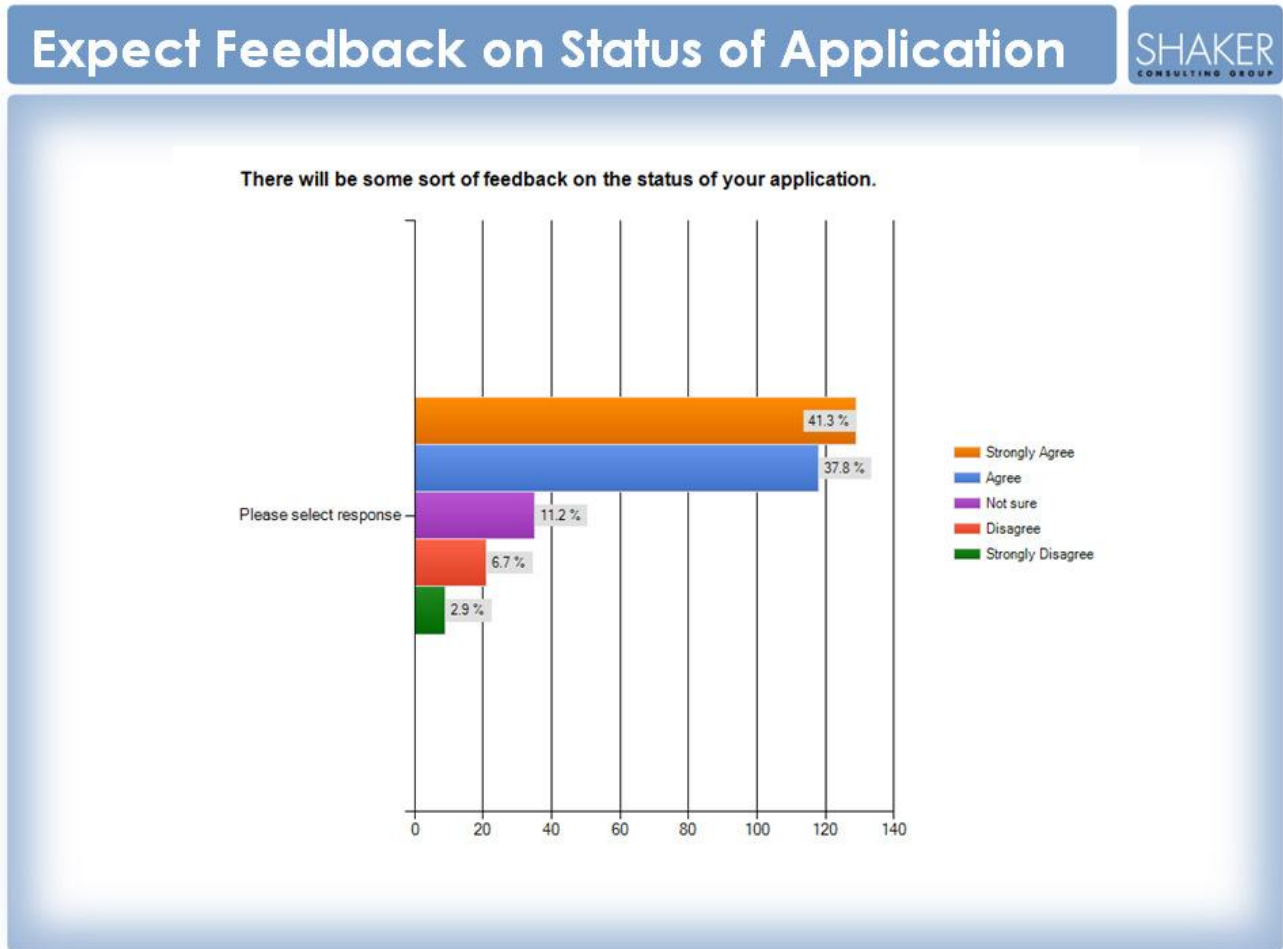
If they are unlikely to ‘expect’ to find something, will they find it?

Figure 4 – Expectations Once You Have Applied



High expectations for acknowledgement status and closure seem real.

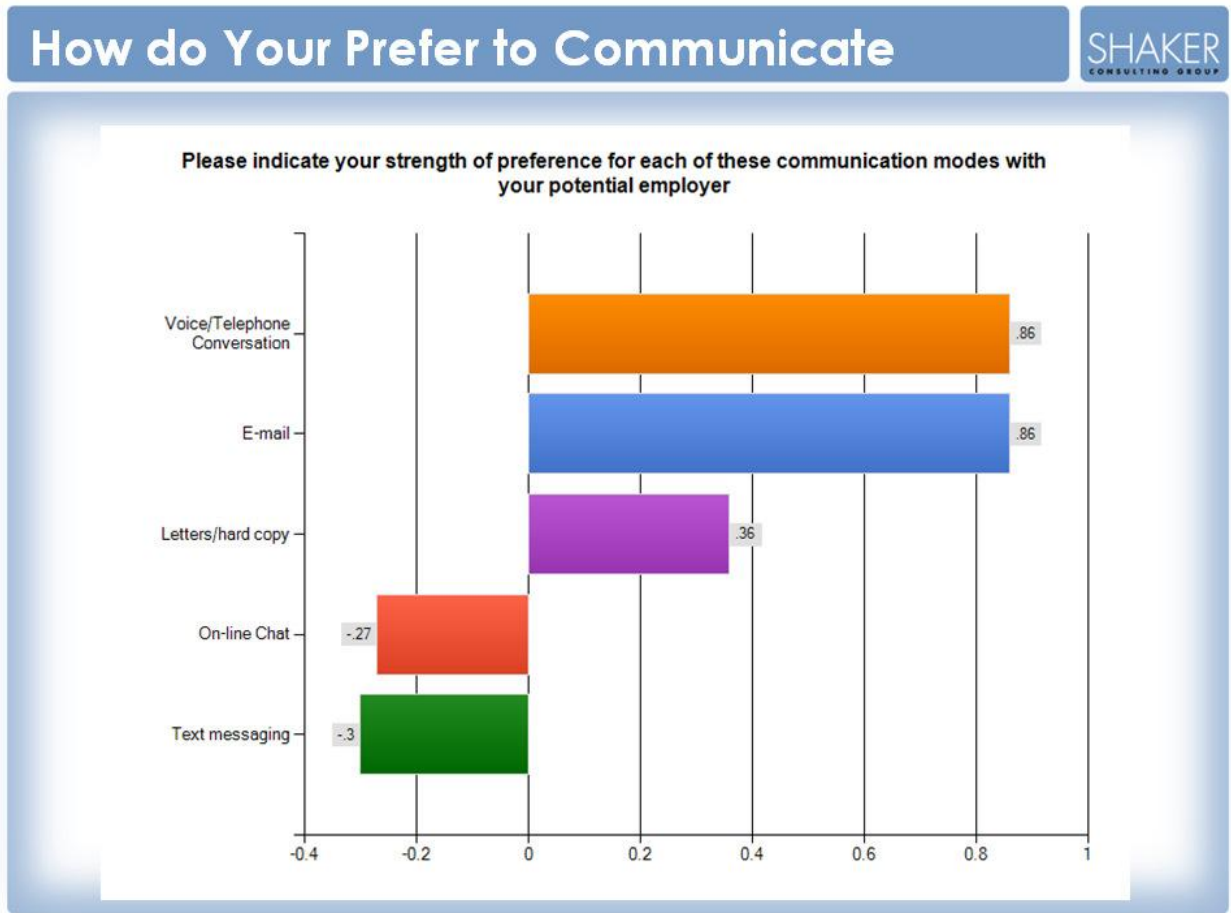
Figure 5 – Strength of Expectations about Feedback



At least candidates don't have to sit by the phone any longer.

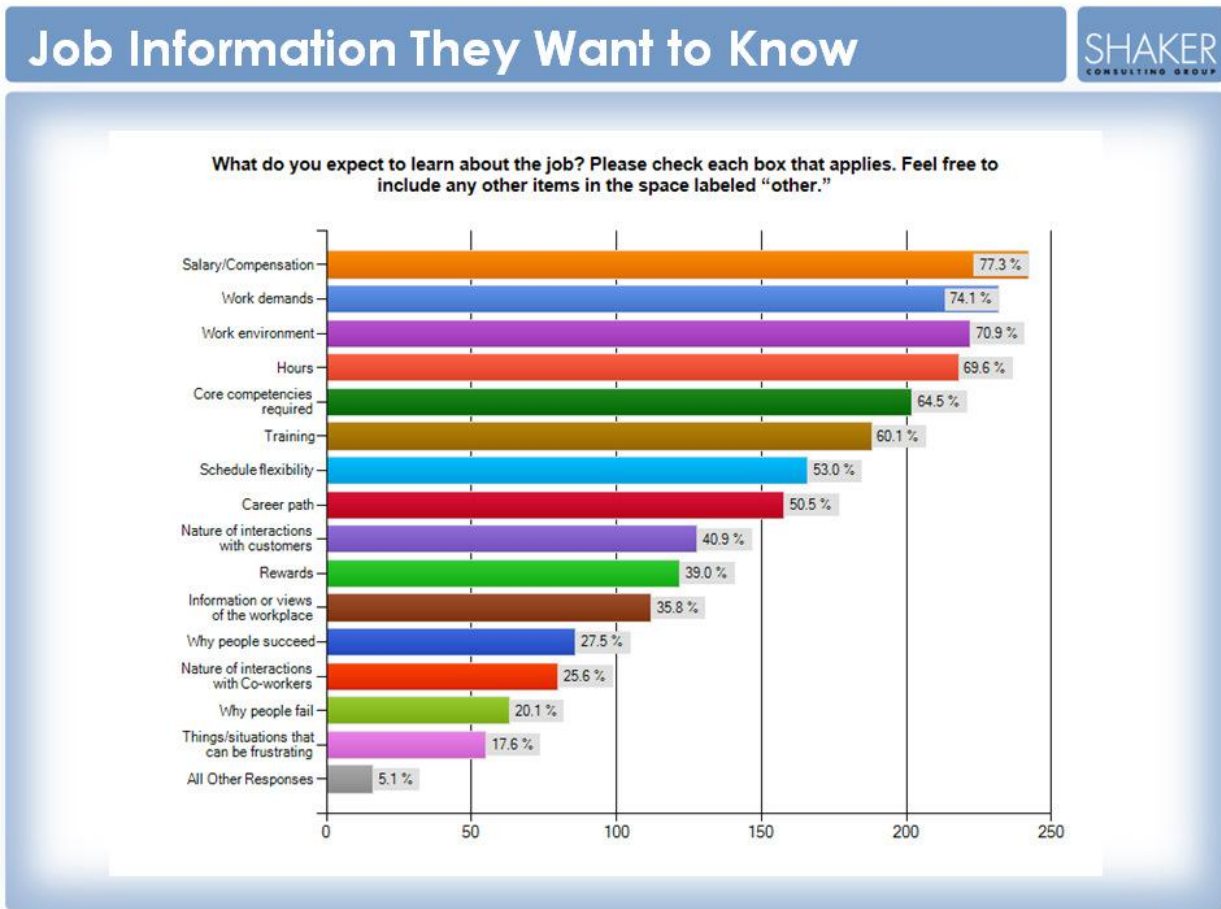
Maybe a special app ringtone for when the status info comes in?

Figure 6 – Communication Preference



RT [employer] Dear @[candidate]. We hired someone else. Sorry. Keep you on file 1 year in case.

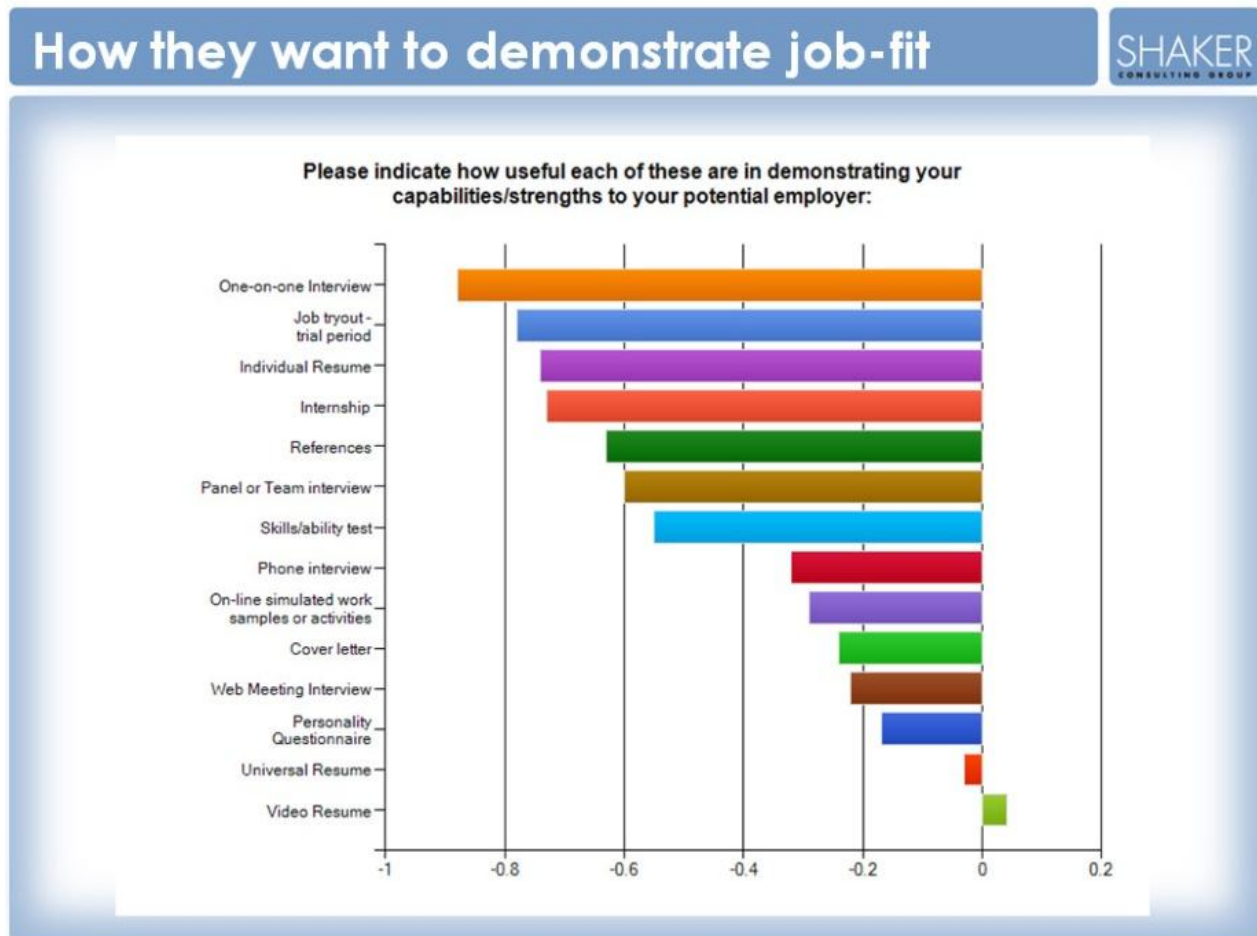
Figure 7 – Job Info They Want to Know



[Question] Candidate, "What salary might I expect?"

[Answer] Employer, "How much do you make now?"

Figure 8 – Job Fit Expectations



At least we agree that video resumes suck.

(There is more to this survey and, when J. Murphy has a public deck or publication available, we'll link to it here.)

### Documenting the Playing Fields Where Candidates and Employers Meet

For nearly a decade CareerXroads has reviewed the career pages on the websites of the firms on the Fortune 500 list. All 500. Our most recent whitepaper, [“The Candidate Experience: Black Hole or North Star?”](#), published in 2006, examined the content and interactions offered by 500 large public employers who, we have often said, “should know better.”

By documenting the experience we imagine job seekers encounter every day in their efforts to secure a job (similar to what is described in Shaker Consulting Group’s survey data) we hope to show year-over-year how employers adopt candidate experience and highlight best practices.

We supplement our reviews each year with a Mystery Shopping exercise. We apply to ALL 100 firms receiving Fortune Magazine’s *Best Companies in America to Work For* award. Our whitepaper, [Mystery Job Seeker Experience: the Jim Knee Cricket Story](#), published in 2008 is typical.

During 2010 we once again applied to more than 100 companies (this time under the guise of Jack Coostow, an Environmental Technician) and, in February 2011 we completed our annual study of the Fortune 500 websites looking for evidence that employers can:

**Target** quality candidates by segmenting their key prospects, welcoming them and offering them customized content,

**Engage** all visitors with clear messages about why candidates should join and why employees stay,

**Inform** candidates with detailed information and interactions that support their employment brand messages, and

**Respect** candidates needs for privacy, security, acknowledgement, status and feedback.

A brief summary of our 2011 review includes:

- Social networks and video have emerged (as expected) as the dominant feature on career sites. In no small part, the rapid improvement year-over-year is due to firms integrating Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube and other social media tools with their career pages.

In many instances these tools are now coalescing into ‘talent communities’ where two-way conversation is possible. Improvements in the number, quality and diversity of videos are also evident. In the best-in-class sites these features are more sophisticated, more authentic and better organized. Figure [9] and examples (some of which have been pulled from sites not in the Fortune 500) below are self-explanatory.

Figure 9 – Dominant Features: Fortune 500

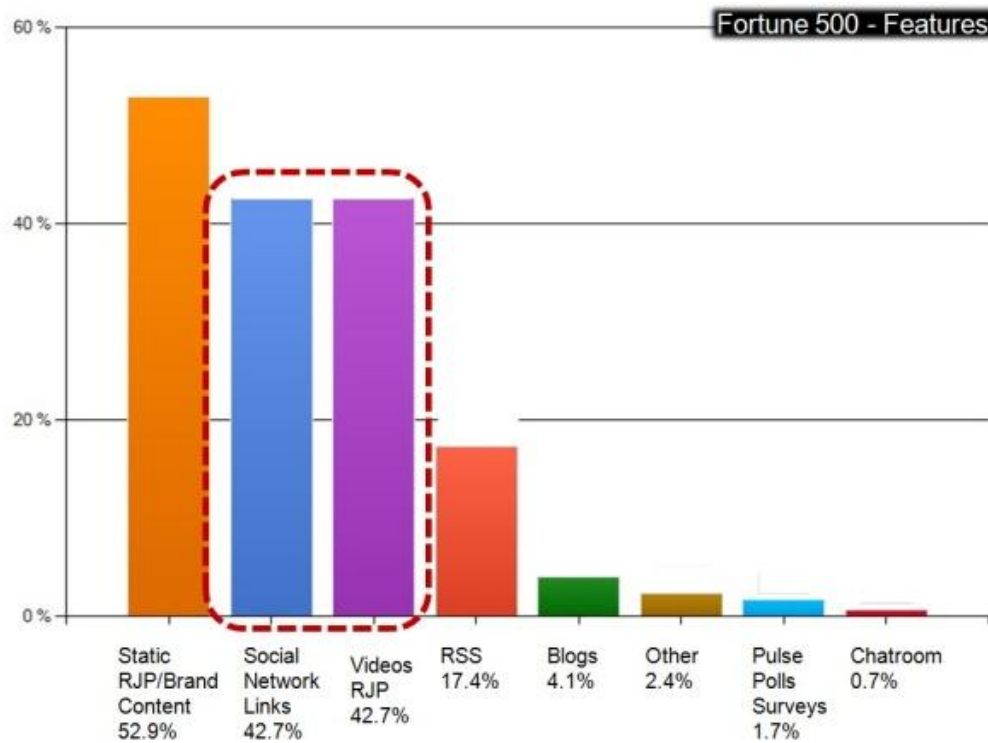


Figure 9.1 – Fluor videos of their people

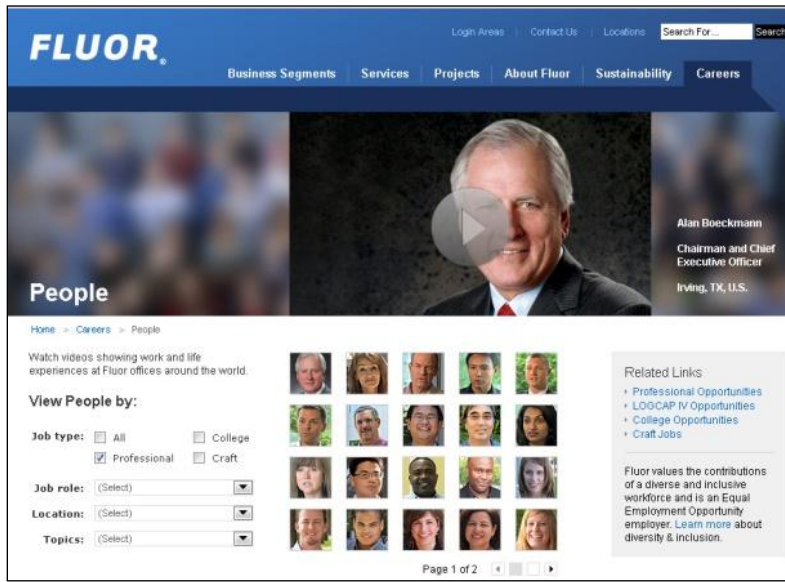


Figure 9.2 – ATT Videos about their company

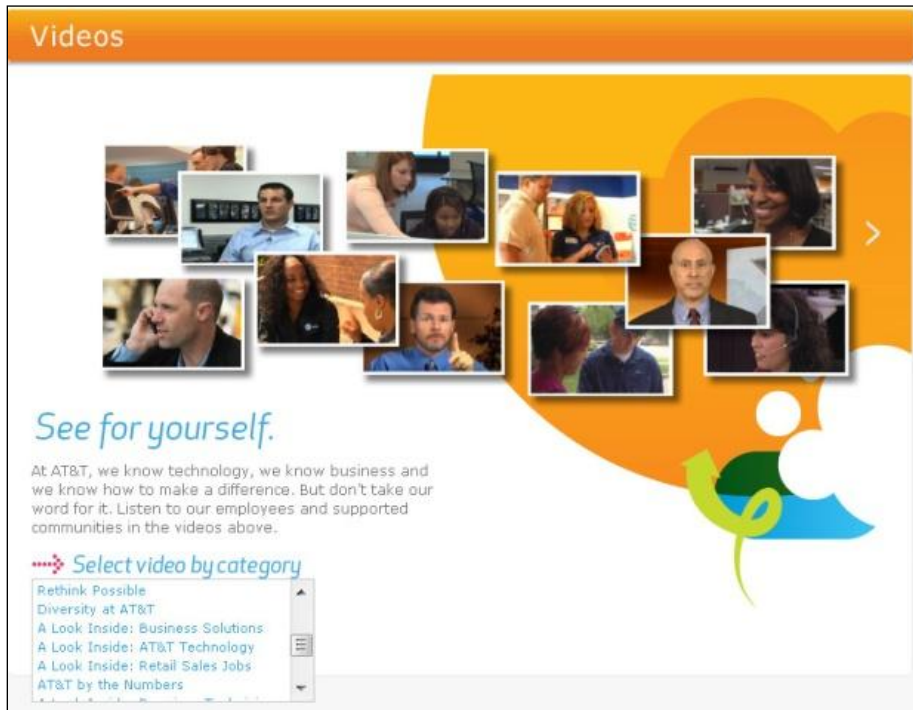


Figure 9.3 – Intel Talent Community

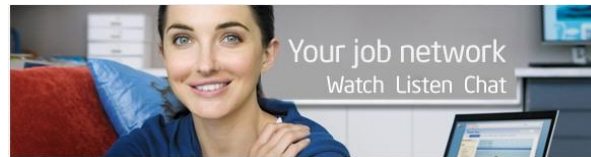


Figure 9.4 – Eaton Talent Network



- A growing number of firms are now engaging in SEO/SEM campaigns with extensive media distribution, mobile phone and social media tie-ins. These campaigns are often tied to tracking capabilities along with customized landing pages so candidates won't be dropped into a general site. We expect to see a rapid growth of talent communities in the future but caution that the effort requires significant planning, execution, and data analysis in mapping the movement of the various pools of candidates. Better navigation designs within and without are critical as is a clear understanding of communication preferences.
- For example, while mobile phones may be in the hands of more than 90% of the population and smart-phones/tablets are definitely on the horizon, recruiting applications are still lagging. Driving candidates to a career site from social media sites they may be perusing with their mobile phone won't be much help if the medium isn't working on the career site.

Figure 10 – Current Uses of Mobile in Recruiting  
(data from a CareerXroads survey)

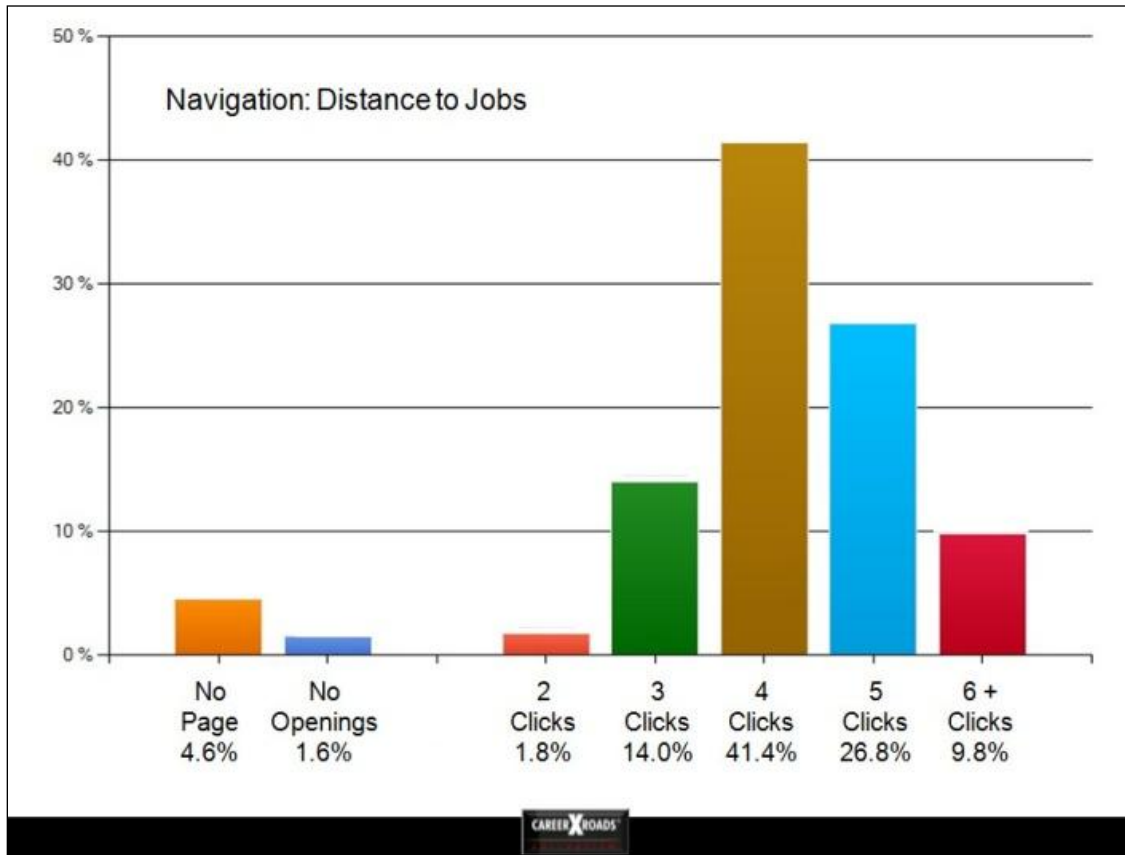


- Navigation within the career site is as critical to the prospect and candidate experience as getting to the site. If the content is there, and the candidate can't get to it, its impact on the candidate experience is as if it doesn't exist. We see a significant gap between the 5-10% best-in-class firms and everyone else. Amateurish approaches to navigating and positioning content still predominate but there are at least some improvements in one simple indicator we document – the link from the company's home page to the career home page.

The territory on the home page leading to the career site has expanded in the last year. 51.4% of the Fortune 500 now include a "careers" link on the major navigation bar of their home page. An additional 13.8% present a best practice pull down menu when the visitor scrolls over the link. On the down side, 18.9% still insist on a 4pt type eyestrain at the bottom of the company home page while 15% of the largest public firms in the US have no direct link (or nothing at all).

Best practice firms are distinctly different in the number of 'clicks' it takes to get to the most critical content – the job description.

Figure 11 – Clicks to a Job Description



- Arguably the most important message – the core of an employment brand – is answering *why* a candidate should come and stay. Best-in-class firms easily outdistance others in their skill at formulating and presenting their employment brand but the ‘proof’ they offer is still a mile wide and an inch deep for all but a handful of companies.

Figure 12 – Evidence of an Employer Brand

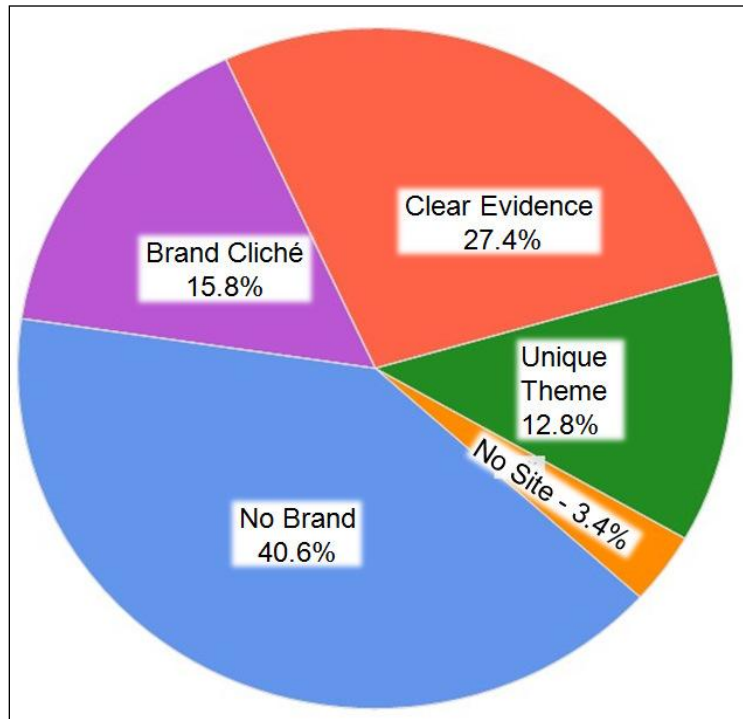
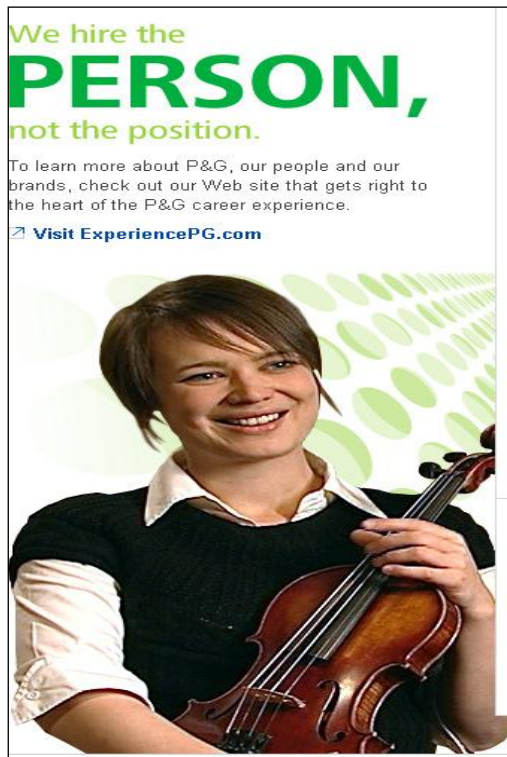


Figure 12.1 – Pepsico Brand Message



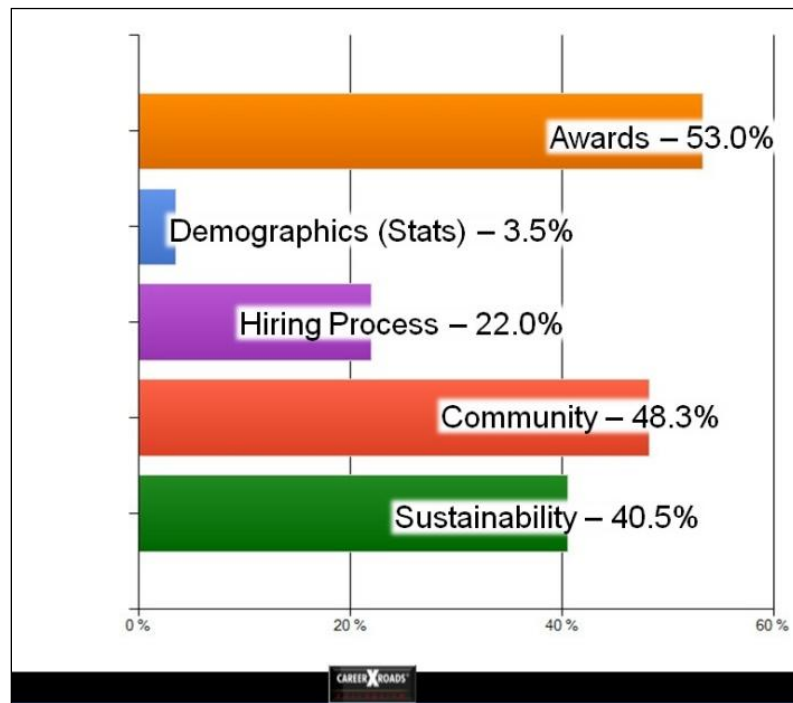
Figure 12.2 – P&G Brand Message



- Content supporting the employer brand (other than videos of their people) which is evident but not always found when and where a candidate might find it most useful. We are particularly critical of a lack of demographic data (statistics) about the employee population.

As one example, a candidate may eventually want to know how many people of their race or gender or college or professional association etc. fill the jobs they are interested in (or were promoted in the last year or so). EEO data may be better than nothing but it isn't as helpful as the few employers who share it think it is.

Figure 13 – Content Supporting the Employer Brand



- In lieu of 'proof' firms do offer pictures, video and customized content for a growing number of targeted populations. The differences between firms who provide specialized content for military in transition or for those who are disabled is immediately noticeable to any visitor with those demographics. On the positive side many firms at least prominently display disability accommodation offerings on their application page. Specialized college content is nearly universal.

Figure 14 – Content Customized for Targeted Populations

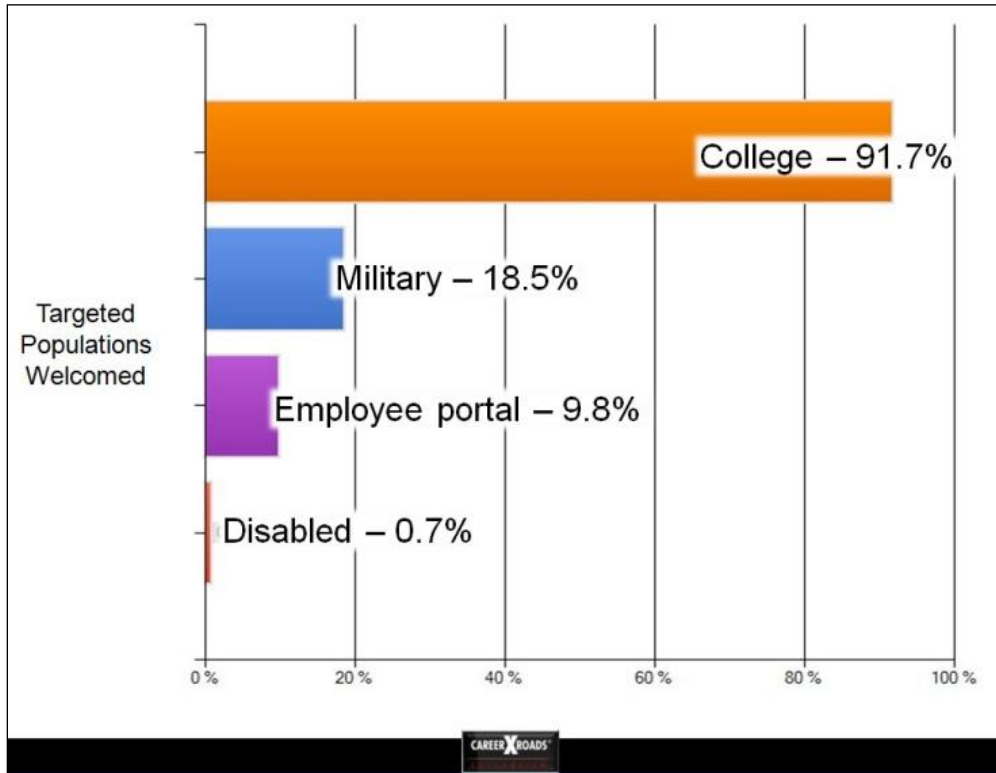


Figure 14.1 – Capital One, Accommodation Notice

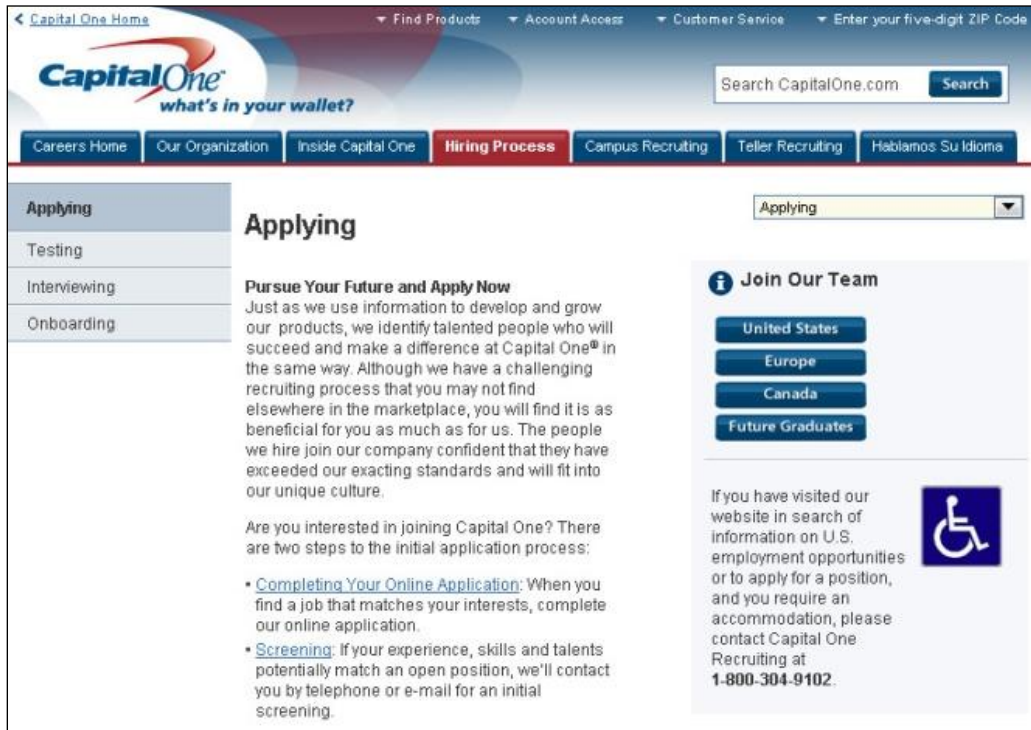


Figure 14.2 – Raytheon, Military Transition

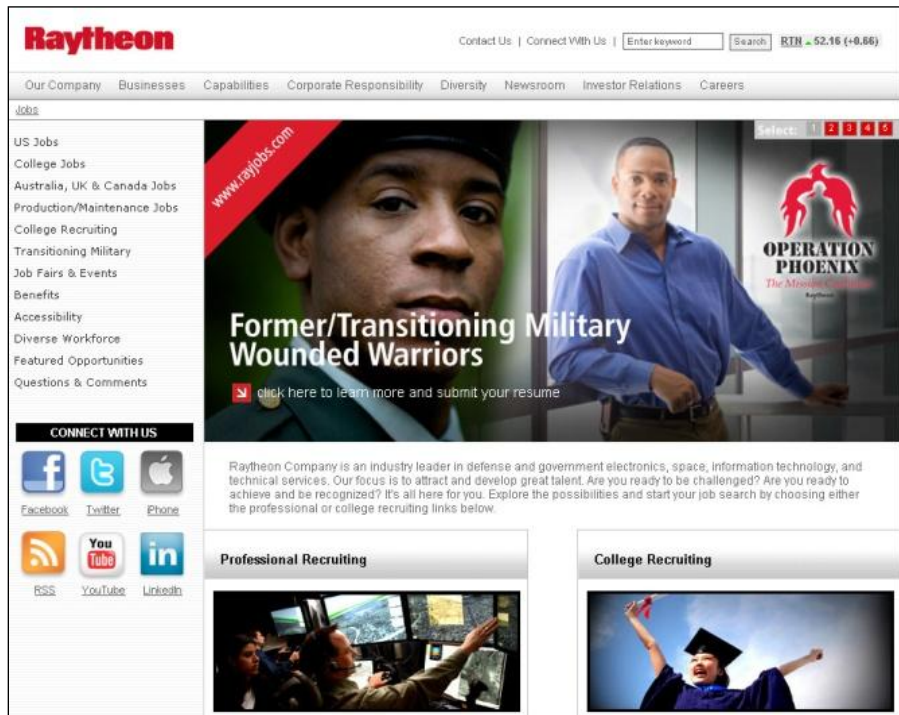


Figure 14.3 Startek, Disability/Diversity (not a Fortune 500 firm)



- One of the most surprising and welcome changes in 2011 was the number of firms sharing contact information. We have been concerned about this issue for years and, perhaps as a result of social media this is rapidly changing. Some firms such as Microsoft and Enterprise (not a Fortune 500 firm) have pioneered this area for years.

Figure 15.1 – Microsoft, to a professional recruiter

<b>Recruiter Marvin Smith</b> Meet Microsoft E&D Recruiter Marvin Smith and view his open positions below.	
<b>Marvin Smith</b> 	<b>Positions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Hardware Engineers</li><li>■ Reliability Engineers</li><li>■ Surface Computing Jobs</li></ul>
<b>Have a question?</b> Click here to chat! <b>CURRENTLY ONLINE</b>	<b>Follow Me:</b> <a href="#">View my profile on <b>LinkedIn</b></a> <a href="#">facebook</a> <a href="#">twitter</a>

Figure 15.2 – Eaton, to campus coordinators

Sign In | Contact Us USA | Worldwide Sites All of Eaton Search 109.12+0.12 02:10 PM ET 02-04-2011


**EATON**  
Powering Business Worldwide

Home > Our Company > Careers > North America > Campus Connection > Campus Managers


Products & Services Customer Support Sustainability Our Company

OUR COMPANY  
CAREERS  
NORTH AMERICA  
CAMPUS CONNECTION  
▶ CAMPUS MANAGERS


### Campus Managers

  
Nicole Crews  
Nicole is responsible for driving key campus initiatives at Eaton's targeted engineering and human resources/MBA universities to ensure appropriate corporate branding and strong talent acquisitions. She manages and provides corporate engagement opportunities that develop and implement partnerships with faculty, staff, and students' groups thereby increasing top talent recruiting for engineering technical sales and HR positions. Nicole joined Eaton from the University of Minnesota after she spent that last two years building the Eaton Corporate brand from the Universities' perspective.

[View my profile on LinkedIn](#)

  
Antonio Hairston  
Antonio is responsible for the relationship building at Eaton's target engineering universities. He manages the relationship development at key universities, organizing the efforts of on-campus recruiting, building partnerships with key faculty and staff and increasing Eaton's presence on campus within the Engineering student population. Antonio originally joined Eaton in 2004 as an intern participant in the Eaton Multicultural Summer Program and has been working in the University Relations department since 2009.

[View my profile on LinkedIn](#)

  
Judy Johnson  
Judy is responsible for the relationship building at Eaton's target finance, information technology, supply chain, and environment, health and safety (EHS) universities. She manages the relationship development at key universities, organizing the efforts of on-campus recruiting, building partnerships with key faculty and staff and increasing Eaton's presence on campus within the finance, information technology, supply chain and EHS student population. After working in operations for Aerospace for several years, Judy joined the Eaton World Headquarters Human Resources team as a Leadership Development Program Manager for Engineers in 2000. Subsequently, she assumed the responsibilities for the Global Leadership Development Program Manager, and she has been in University Relations since 2005.

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Figure 15.3 – Conagra, Links to Affinity Group leaders

### Diversity and Inclusion

We are committed to creating a culture that attracts, retains and engages employees from all walks of life. These employees subsequently help us forge stronger relationships in the community, in the marketplace and with our stakeholders. One significant enabler is the Diversity and Inclusion Leadership Council, a group of senior executives who provide guidance, support and sponsorship of diversity initiatives.

Our Employee Resource Networks (ERNs) are one way employees share their experiences and impart career advice. The insights and opinions of ERN members are integral when it comes to product innovation, recruiting and professional development. Currently, we have six ERN groups and encourage the development of new groups.

#### Employee Resource Networks

If you'd like to learn more about ConAgra Foods, please e-mail one of the ERN contacts below.

- Young Professionals Network, **Natalie S.**
- ConAgra Asian Network, **Trish D.**
- ConAgra Black Employee Network, **Christopher T.**
- ConAgra Latino Network, **Angela B.**
- Women's Leadership Council, **Debbie A.**
- Illuminations — GLBT employees and allies, **Jason H.**



“ The ERN groups are important because they provide members with a connection to people in similar circumstances facing similar challenges. They also create a forum to meet people outside your immediate work circle, so you can be more efficient in your own job.”

— Deb, Research, Quality & Innovation

15.4 – Lockheed Martin, to Military Recruiters


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### TRANSITIONING MILITARY

MILITARY RELATIONS MANAGERS



**MILITARY RELATIONS MANAGERS: EASING THE TRANSITION OF MILITARY JOB CANDIDATES**

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**Connect with someone who knows what you are going through.**  
 Each of our Military Relations Managers possesses a first-hand knowledge of our country's Armed Services, because each has a distinguished military career and service record. They know what you've experienced, the knowledge you've gained, the specialized job skills you've acquired in the service, and everything about your transition to a private sector career.

**SUBSCRIBE TO RECEIVE CAREER UPDATES**

First Name:

Last Name:

Email:

- What we haven't seen is a significant increase among firms willing to a) make a commitment to the candidate in advance about how they will be treated, b) audit their claim that they acknowledge each and every applicant, c) provide privacy guarantees rather than legal qualifications d) allow candidates to find status e) offer salary information f) provide feedback (other than the final slate) or g) offer demographic details about the number and other competitive details about the job itself. There are a few exceptions of course like this one below which we do see more of on best-in-class sites.

Figure 16 – Entergy, Status

The screenshot shows the Entergy website's 'How to Check Your Application Status' page. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for 'Residential Customers' and 'Business Customers'. Below that is a secondary navigation bar with links for 'About Us', 'Investor Relations', 'Environment', 'Our Community', 'Operations Information', 'Energy Education', and 'Entergy Companies'. The main content area has a heading 'How to Check Your Application Status' and a sub-heading 'Status Definitions:'. Below this is a table with two columns: the status name and its definition. To the right of the table is a list of links for 'Diversity and Inclusion', 'Values & Ethics', 'Company Awards and Recognition', 'EntergyFACTS', 'Employee Volunteer Program', 'Annual Review', 'Entergy Videos', and 'More about Entergy'. At the bottom of the page, there is a footer with a copyright notice for 1999-2011 Entergy Corporation.

Status Definitions:	
Application Received	Application has been received
Hiring Manager Review	Application was sent to Hiring Mgr for review
To be Interviewed	Candidate has been included in potential interview pool
Offer extended	Verbal offer has been extended
Hold	Hiring Mgr is currently not moving forward
Not Selected	Candidate was not selected for the position

- Obviously some firms execute better than others on the items we mentioned above.

**The 500 firms we reviewed and ranked fell into the following categories:**

**Best-in-class:** About 8% are consistently welcoming a range of specifically targeted candidates, providing brand, content and communication that reflects today's realities and suggests that they are listening to the candidates.

**Solid:** Another 25.4% have essential content but have limited 2-way communication.

**Undistinguished:** 54.4% we characterize as having jobs and basic content. Barely a brochure, an application and job search capability.

**Flawed:** Another 8% are seriously flawed with minimal content.

**Non-Existent:** 4.2% just don't exist, or can't be found despite our best efforts. We would actively recommend to candidates that they avoid working at these firms.

The [25] 5% Fortune 500 firms in 2011 with career websites that offer a best-in-class experience for prospects and which we believe are excellent benchmarks are

Altria Group,  
AT&T,  
Best Buy,  
Capital One,  
Eaton,  
EMC ,  
FedEx ,  
Fluor ,  
GE ,

General Motors,  
Google,  
Home Depot ,  
Intel,  
Lockheed Martin,  
Morgan Stanley ,  
Pepsico ,  
Proctor & Gamble ,  
PSE&G,

Raytheon,  
The Southern Company,  
State Farm Insurance,  
Stryker,  
Target,  
Whirlpool,  
Yahoo

Other very good career pages we considered when deciding which companies were among the very best include:

Bristol Myers Squibb, ConAgra Foods, Cisco Systems, IBM, Macys , Microsoft, Progress Energy, Southwest Airlines, Walgreens, Walmart, Washington Post, Wells Fargo, and Yum Brands

There are certainly many public and private US and International companies not on the Fortune 500 list with outstanding career pages. We hope to see many of those firms in the next two sections along with the ones we have reviewed.

#### **4. Corporate Case Studies: Who is Making a Difference and Reaping the Rewards**

*[Placeholder for future contributions to continue the growth of this living document.]*

#### **5. Metrics and Tools and Toys, Oh My! Resources For Stakeholders To Enhance or Leverage The Candidate Experience**

*[Placeholder for future contributions to continue the growth of this living document.]*

Questions or comments about this document and our  
research can be directed to the primary authors:

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732-821-6652

[mmc@careerxroads.com](mailto:mmc@careerxroads.com)