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The perfect present

Apodi's Jan Cox discusses four vital stages to ensure your next job provides everything you could have wished for this Christmas.

For the employer and employee alike, stability can be a dangerous illusion, particularly in the current economic climate. It is inevitable that markets and organisations will change and adapt in response to the economic, commercial and political pressures that exist – and this will impact on both the recruiting organisation and the candidate.

In my previous article, *Stability: a dangerous illusion?*, I stressed that: “For a lot of people, the pharmaceutical industry has provided a stable career over many years. For example, there are many sales representatives who have had a successful career fundamentally doing the same job in the same way and often for the same employer. Whilst there will always be a need for sales representatives within the industry, the number has fallen and will continue to fall. And for many, the role itself will change and demand the acquisition of new skills and knowledge.

Some companies are addressing the need to change rather quicker than others. Those that are slow to act may be creating a situation where some employees still feel they are operating in a relatively stable environment. This may be a dangerous illusion because it is almost guaranteed that the changing environment within the industry will impact on most employees – and probably sooner rather than later.”

From my experience I believe there are four key stages for employees to build a successful career and secure the RIGHT job in such a dynamic marketplace.

STAGE 1: Assessing what companies want

World class organisations understand the importance of the recruitment process and the need to find the right people. Jack Welch, one of the most famous business leaders of the 20th century, stated: “nothing matters

more in winning than getting the right people in the field. All the clever strategies and advanced technologies are nowhere near as effective without great people to put them to work.” His company, General Electric, had an extensive recruitment process which tested for integrity, intelligence and maturity. Its hiring framework focused on finding people who had positive energy, the ability to energise others, the courage to make tough ‘yes or no decisions’, the ability to execute and get the job done and finally passion.

Conversely, McKinsey, the world renowned consulting organisation, looks for people who:

- Are of above average intelligence
- Possess a record of achievement at a good university and business school
- Show evidence of achievement in all previous jobs
- Demonstrate extraordinary analytical ability

Clearly there are different themes running through the recruitment requirements of these two companies, and naturally so, given the differing nature of the services they deliver. However, it is possible to find differences even when looking at the recruitment process for similar roles in competing companies in the same industry sector.

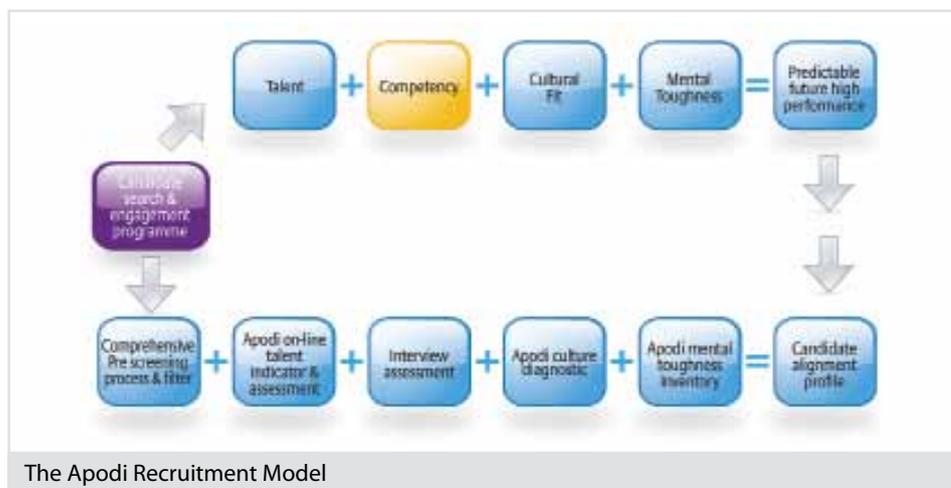
For example, pharmaceutical companies often look for different attributes when recruiting for sales representatives. A typical job advert may stress the need for the following from applicants:

- Experienced sales representative with at least two years’ experience in similar roles
- University degree
- Sales to be delivered through the company’s selling process/model

Interestingly, the Gallup Organisation has



The ‘head in a box’ trick was always a hit, especially at Christmas



The Apodi Recruitment Model

found in extensive studies that education has often little, if any, influence on an individual's ability to sell; the learning curve in most sales jobs is relatively short and only rarely is there a correlation between experience and results; and that the most successful sales people sell in different ways using different strengths – following a strict sales process/model is more likely to hinder top performers than to help them.

Therefore, many companies are looking for more innovative and different assessment criteria when recruiting for sales roles. It was for this reason that my own company, Apodi, developed the recruitment model above. This model primarily focuses on a candidate's:

- Talents/strengths
- Competencies
- Cultural fit
- Mental toughness

It is clear that companies are often looking for different things even when recruiting for similar roles. In some cases, even the most sophisticated companies will be looking for attributes that don't, in fact, have a significant influence on a person's ability to perform the job effectively. However, at this stage of the process, all applicants can at least find out what really is important in each company's assessment criteria before they apply. This can be done by contacting the agency involved or the company itself. Also, in this age of networking and social media it should not be too difficult to contact people who are current employees of that company.

STAGE 2: Preparing for success

In this rapidly changing marketplace all employees should understand that planning

for success and finding the best career does not start simply a month before the decision to find a new job. Building a successful sales career depends on a long-term view of career development and should include the following:

- Find out what your underlying strengths are. For long-term career success these are much more relevant than your education or experience. The Gallup Organisation identified 34 different strengths – each one of which may play an important part in a sales process depending on the role itself. The key for each individual is to understand what those strengths are and which selling roles will best suit them
- Take charge of your own personal development. Most companies now ask representatives to have a sound knowledge of the changing NHS and how that impacts commercially on the pharmaceutical industry
- Prepare a CV that stresses the following:
 - Your key strengths and why this has ensured success in the past
 - Your knowledge of the changing NHS
 - Experience, education etc – whilst these are not necessarily predictors of success, employers often still stress the need for them
- Undertake market research. Research which companies are most suited to you. It would not be too unfair to suggest that the world of the pharmaceutical sales representative is quite incestuous and most representatives are prepared to give their opinion and information on current and past employers

STAGE 3: Sourcing the appropriate job

Most prospective applicants are well versed in the various methods of sourcing jobs. These include registering with agencies, searching through job sections in newspapers and magazines, online searches and approaching companies directly. A direct, personal approach can be very powerful. One of the greatest leaders in American sport, basketball coach, John Wooden, gave the following advice to organisations: "When hiring, be diligent in discerning what the individual's motives are. Be alert for those who express a strong desire to join and contribute to your team and have some understanding of who and what your organisation is all about. Recruiting should be a two way street."

STAGE 4: Choosing the right opportunity

Hopefully, the above process ensures that an applicant has a number of choices when deciding on their next career move. Typically, the final decision will involve factors such as remuneration, benefits, training and development, and promotion opportunities. There are also some other considerations that are often overlooked.

Many companies' mission statements and credos state something along the lines of: 'The company wishes to attract, develop, motivate and retain exceptional people.' Despite this, the rigour companies apply to the recruitment process differs significantly from one business to the next. Consider choosing the company that takes recruitment seriously – it almost certainly reflects the fact that they really stand by the mission statement, rather than just talk about it.

Also, judge the company by the manager you are going to be working for. Managers have a huge influence on your career, your motivation and your ability to do the job – a good one will take you to the stars, a bad one will stifle you.

Finding a job is tough; but finding the right job is even tougher. If you are focused on developing a successful career you must give it the attention and energy it deserves. Judge the role on how it fits with your talents/strengths and assess the company's ability to let you utilise these to maximum effect.

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