



Don't forget the candidate

Whitepaper

blueArrow

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Naming the elephant

The page ‘candidate experience’ does not exist. You can ask for it to be created, but consider checking the search results below to see whether the topic is already covered.

They say you’ve really cracked it when you have your own Wikipedia page. Which must mean that ‘candidate experience’ hasn’t quite cracked it yet. That’s not to say it doesn’t exist - just that it isn’t widely recognised as a concept in its own right. This is pretty alarming when you consider candidate experience can have a significant impact on the way your business is perceived in the market and ultimately, how it performs.

Candidate experience is the corporate elephant in the room: it’s real and everyone knows it’s real, but they’re not sure what to do about it. In this whitepaper, we’ll define candidate experience, explain why it’s important and look at ways of better looking after your candidates.

Perhaps the lack of a formal definition is unsurprising when you consider many companies don’t pay particular attention to the way they treat their candidates. But with some research, we have come up with a definition:

“An individual’s candidate experience is what shapes their attitude towards a business, based on aspiring to work there or going through its recruitment process.”

In short, candidate experience describes everything a person goes through while looking to get a job with a particular employer. And that experience starts before any application.

Counting the candidate cost

Whether it's five or 15 or 24, there are many theories about how many people an unhappy customer will tell about a poor experience. But the common denominator is always that they'll tell considerably more people about a bad experience than they will a good experience. These days, they'll probably end up telling even more people than they intended.

In this age of smartphones, social media and instant feedback, a poor review is more accessible, more visible and more dangerous than ever. A bad experience at a restaurant can be shared with a world of would-be restaurant critics in a matter of minutes, destroying reputations, eroding business and costing money.

According to research conducted by Talent Board, a non-profit organisation dedicated to measuring and improving candidate experience, 33% of candidates will share their negative candidate experience publicly via their social networks - making their friends and their friends' friends immediately privy to the offending organisation. It's a dangerous multiplier effect.

And with Facebook accounting for 50% of mobile internet traffic in the UK, it can be initiated at the touch of a button.

In the same way, an unhappy candidate won't apply for other positions in the future and they won't recommend you to other desirable candidates. Not only that, but they'll actively resent your brand, steering clear of your products or services and encouraging others to avoid you too.

Talent Board has attempted to illustrate just how damaging a poor candidate experience can be: 41% of candidates who have had a poor overall candidate experience will take their alliance, product purchases and relationship elsewhere. Candidate experience doesn't just affect a few people's perception of your company. It can affect and even define the way you are viewed in the market.

PepsiCo carried out an analysis of how much money it was losing due to bad candidate experience. Taking into account the number of applicants they rejected for every hire, the number of hires they made each year, how much a customer was worth and how many of the rejected candidates had a bad experience, they concluded that bad candidate experience was costing them \$1.6 million per year. Virgin UK recently announced an even more frightening annual figure of £4.5m. The way you treat those candidates you don't hire for a job can have just as much, if not more, of an impact on your company than the one you did hire.

Constituents of candidate experience

Candidate experience is about more than just the way a jobseeker is treated after they apply for a role. It's an ongoing relationship of which the recruitment process is just a part. There are five key components of candidate experience.

Corporate baggage

Talent Board has found that 55% of candidates have had a past relationship with a prospective employer. And that relationship makes a significant difference to a candidate's experience. When asked to rate their candidate experience from one to five stars, 51% of one-star ratings came from candidates who didn't have a prior relationship with the employer, while 60% of the four and five-star ratings were from those who had a previous relationship. In this case, familiarity breeds anything but contempt.

Candidates are often connected with brands for several months before they are recruited. This means companies need to think about how to adjust their engagement strategy in order to appeal both to people who know them and those who don't. It also means the company's engagement will have to be about more than simply the roles they're offering. If you can build a positive relationship with a candidate long before they apply, the chance that they'll have a positive experience of the recruitment process will be much higher.

Rules of engagement

"They're the ones making the magic happen - so long as their needs are being met."

Chris Boyce, CEO, Virgin Pulse

Unfortunately, jobseekers are increasingly finding that their needs aren't being met. Candidates want engagement; they want to understand the nature of the job and the culture of the organisation.

But with companies increasingly combining jobs to save money when people leave, over two fifths of candidates find discrepancies between the job description and the job they actually end up doing.

Talent Board's research has revealed that above all else, candidates want to find out about the job straight from the horse's mouth - to speak to the person currently in the role. Introducing the candidate to the current jobholder over lunch or coffee really makes it personal.

Many businesses try to cover up their flaws, despite the fact that consumers embrace brands that are open about them. Companies need to invest in their employer brands and careers sites in order to provide all the information candidates need, supplementing the knowledge they'll gain from sites like Glassdoor.

Application stations

Too many recruitment processes are clunky, confused and drawn-out. 79% of candidates have to take over 16 minutes to complete a company's online application process. 31% have to invest 31-60 minutes. 47% of job applicants have even left an application because it was too lengthy or complicated. Quite often, the effort's in vain: 88% of employers allow applicants to complete an application even when they've failed the screening questions. It all suggests that too many companies have no particular approach when it comes to hiring new people.

Alarmingly, 74% of the data companies collect on their candidates is not even used in the selection process - which makes you wonder what the point is. And despite all the hassle, only 25% of candidates are ever suitable for the job. Businesses are wasting their own and their candidates' time. They need to streamline their application and interview processes, giving their candidates: the ability to demonstrate their qualifications in a relevant way; progress updates during the application; the number of people who have applied already; the opportunity to provide feedback; and information on next steps.

Organisations should always be as prepared for interviews as their candidates. They're an opportunity not just to find out more about a person's credentials to do the job, but also to increase engagement - to answer their questions, to find out whether there's anything else about them you need to know that you haven't found out already. And the entire process needs to be underpinned by communication and clarity over each stage.

Acceptance in rejection

75% of rejected candidates don't receive any feedback. After investing a great deal of time, thought and emotion into an application process, only to have their hopes dashed by a lazy, generic rejection, it's hardly surprising that many feel resentful. Companies need to think about how rejected candidates can have an even greater impact on their business than the ones they actually hire.

It seems like a huge contradiction, but rejection is actually a very good opportunity to build engagement with candidates.

A clear rejection is always better than a fake promise. You can offset their disappointment with a clear explanation on why their skills weren't entirely suitable for the role, how they can use those skills to find another role and what other skills they need to add to their repertoire in order to get where they want to go. In this way, candidates will view their application not as a failure but as another step on the ladder, something that actually gave them experience of the application and interview process. They'll appreciate your honesty and support and will probably end up viewing your company positively.

Aftersales service

Once a candidate gets the job, the engagement process doesn't just end. They need a detailed induction and ongoing support from day one. In fact, from before day one. This includes a tour of the office, introductions to the rest of the team and an induction pack. Yet only 37% of offered candidates hear from their manager before starting. They go through the recruitment process, they accept the role and then they sit through radio silence until their start date. The impression isn't helped if they're not welcomed by their manager or introduced to anyone on their first day, or find that their computer isn't set up or their new desk is still littered with the previous occupant's belongings.

In an increasingly competitive job market, candidates have a choice. 42% of job offers are rejected. 37% of candidates who turn down job offers do so because they've accepted a job elsewhere.

First class experience

With a little empathy and tactical thinking, you can make your candidate experience a huge positive - not just in hiring but also PR terms. And when public perception of your business is positive, that can only make you a more attractive employer. Here are a few tips for making your candidate experience as good as possible.

Put yourself in their shoes

Would you be happy with the amount of information you've given your candidates? Give them an accurate and detailed job description so they know exactly what they're doing from day one. Enable candidates to select and deselect themselves by providing them with all the information they need to make an informed choice. Candidates will assume that the way you treat them while trying to attract them to the company is the way you'll treat them when they actually work for you. So make the experience as good as you can.

Don't be a stranger

Thoroughly engage with your candidates before, during and after the hiring process, whether you employ them or not. You need to understand how unsuccessful candidates perceive your recruitment process and what would make it more positive. Give an appropriate amount of feedback and offer an honest explanation on why they didn't get the job.

Project positively

Keep tabs on how you are represented externally, across every touch-point.

Constantly monitor your company's accounts on social media and sites like Glassdoor so that you can immediately discover - and address - any negative perceptions of your company. Better still, invite the feedback via your own website, it's a great place for customer service.

Keep your ears open

Ask candidates what they think and act on their feedback. After all, it's their experience you need to be concerned about. Don't be afraid to run a quick survey after an online application process, possibly offering entry into a prize draw in exchange for their feedback.

If in doubt, cut it out

Look at ways you can refine and simplify your recruitment process. Remove any unnecessary stages that just prolong the process and risk your best candidates either losing interest or being picked up by competitors. If you find a great candidate, get them on board; you don't have time to meet the entire market before offering someone the job.

Be you, warts and all

Don't try and project the image of a flawless utopian corporate if that's not what you are. Be real and true to yourself as a company - and be honest and transparent about your faults. Candidates will be far more respectful of an organisation that recognises where it needs to develop and has a plan in place to do so, rather than one that makes disingenuous (and entirely unrealistic) claims of perfection.

Conclusion

The way a business treats its stakeholders, whether they're internal or external, is of paramount importance. Too often, companies forget that those stakeholders include their candidates. Not only does a favourable candidate experience help you bring in the best people for your company, but it also helps you to project and perpetuate a positive image to the wider market.

Candidate experience is an indication of how you deal with people: how you understand their needs, how you appreciate their challenges and how you support their endeavours. It's a projection of your identity and the way you interact with others. Companies therefore need to treat their candidates as they would their most valued customers. Providing you get your candidate experience right, those you employ will strengthen and enrich your workforce. Those you don't employ will give you some of the best free marketing you could ever wish for. And that's not a bad second place.

Interested in learning more?

This whitepaper is based on a seminar delivered by Russell Beck, Head of Consulting at the Impellam Group. Russell regularly creates and leads seminars on the most pressing recruitment issues. Russell is currently delivering this seminar to businesses all over the UK, but it can be privately booked and tailored to suit the specific needs and traits of your business.

Contact us to book a seminar or for further information on how Blue Arrow can help meet your staffing requirements:



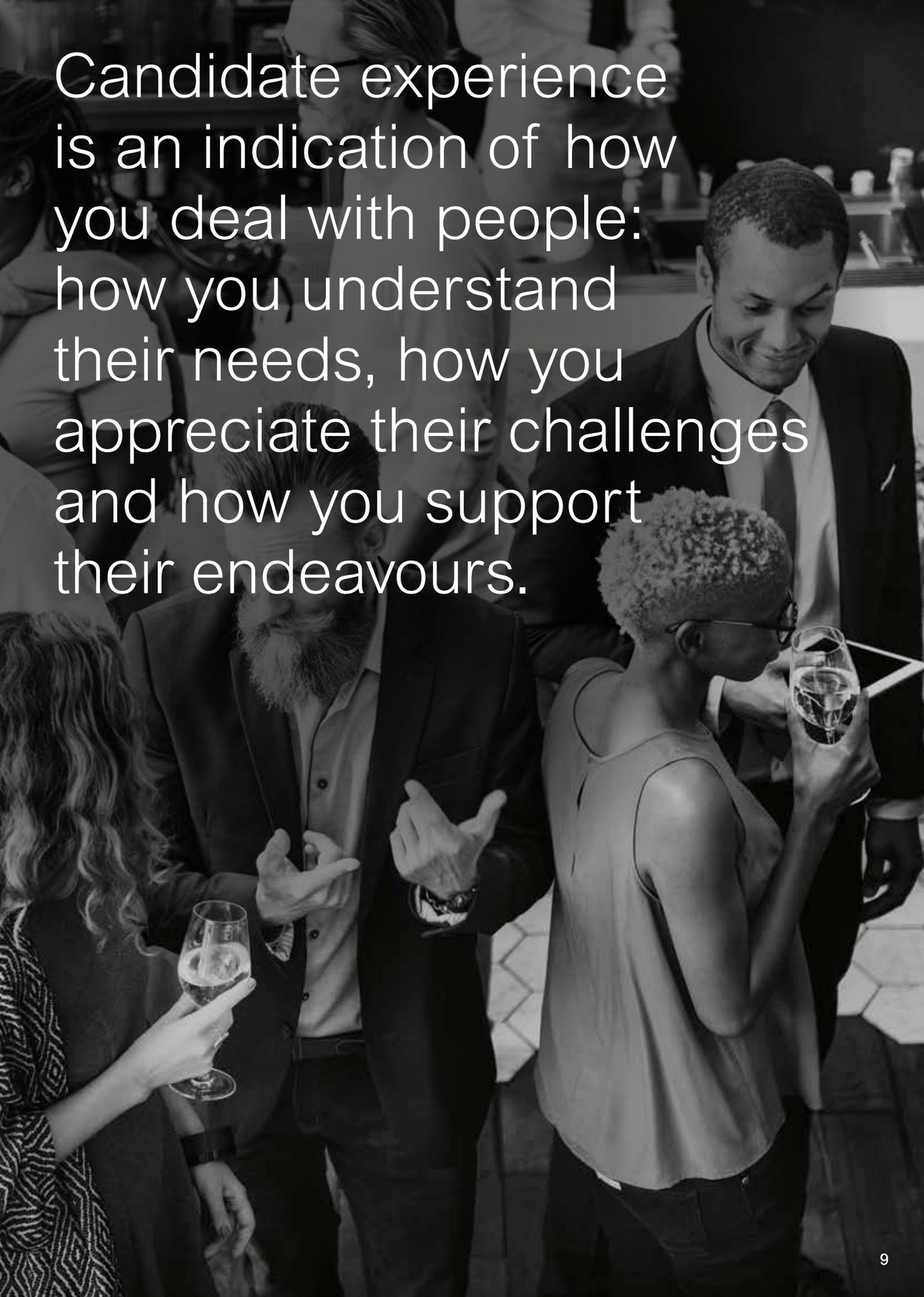
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