



DIALOGUE, NOT MONOLOGUE

After attending a recent graduate recruitment event that ended with graduate recruiters giving tips to job seekers, Ben Marks, Managing Director, Opinionpanel Research - a company which represents the views of the UK's university applicants, students and graduates to researchers - questioned the process. Isn't recruitment supposed to be more of a conversation than a monologue? It prompted him and his colleague to ask members of The Graduate Panel for their opinions – and their advice to recruiters. They asked 500 graduates, 'What message, if any, would you give to graduate employers right now?' Ben explains the findings...



Our respondents were very open and shared their candid views. As the question was open-ended, the responses we analysed were both rich in detail and clearly voiced. Recent graduates (both with and without graduate jobs) told us they had four key priorities: for companies to keep recruiting, to widen their search, to offer more internships and to treat graduates fairly.

Of course, one might expect these answers – it would certainly be odd if graduates wanted companies to completely stop recruiting. Turkeys rarely vote for Xmas.

But it was the detail – the specific comments – that we found particularly illuminating.

Keep recruiting

Many of the respondents had a keen awareness of the need for companies to be ready for the upturn, and not abandon a whole generation of bright new graduates. "Don't forget about us! When the recession is over, the companies who took a risk and took and trained bright graduates will outshine those who did not," said a

female, combined graduate (University of Sussex, 2008).

“The future’s bright; invest in it,” said a male graduate of Law (University of Oxford, 2007).

Offer internships

Graduates were keen for companies to give internships and work experience opportunities. These were seen as offering a win-win: graduates get vital experience; employers get (cheaper) workers. Graduates just need more of these opportunities!

“We need opportunities to enter the job market and gain the experience. We are being told we are either too qualified or not qualified enough at the moment,” said a female, anthropology graduate (School of Oriental and African Studies, 2007).

“Advertise your internships and work experience placements more if you are unable to take in graduates who have not had experience in the field. Also, if there were such thing as a six month internship or work experience placement which was only open to graduates this would mean we could apply for the paid graduate schemes afterwards instead of ruling that field out altogether,” said a female European studies graduate (King’s College London, 2008).

Treat us fairly

While our respondents may not be aware of the term, ‘Employer Brand’, the need to connect with candidates throughout the recruitment process (and beyond) is key. They want to know what is going on in the process and have a road map for their first stage in a career if successful.

“Always give feedback and let grads know whether or not you have refused their application. Being left in the dark is very frustrating,” said a male music graduate (University of Hertfordshire, 2007).

Widen your search

While this was mentioned more often by those without a graduate job, many graduates fear that recruiters are too blinkered in their approach. While this could indicate their lack of awareness of the amount of application-shifting needed when recruiting for a graduate scheme and the practical needs that the volume generates, the essential truth of the need to recruit with diversity in mind is not lost on many graduates.

“There is a huge pool of potential employees. Try to look for less obvious, but key skills that are hard to analyse but make for very effective employees. Many obvious skills can be learnt, but others are much more difficult to spot and master. Things like effective problem analysis, breaking issues down into their constituent parts, and good research skills seem to be taking a backseat to more mundane and quantifiable skills such as specific IT knowledge,” said a male philosophy graduate (University of Sheffield, 2006).

“You should visit more universities than just the usual suspects - Oxbridge, Bristol, Bath, York, Manchester etc....there are plenty of very capable students elsewhere too!” said a male geography graduate (University of Wales Swansea, 2008).

So what does this all mean for recruiters and agencies involved in graduate recruitment? Well, there are no real solutions out there. The economy is in downturn and we all have to do our best to manage through. The real learning is in listening to, and appreciating the graduate voice and remembering that their observations are sharp and incisive – surely the attributes that most organisations crave.

Ceasing your graduate recruitment programme completely may create a ‘generation gap’ in your business and reduce your talent pool (and thereby reduce your ability to innovate your way out of this economic mess). And of course, it may leave you short-staffed for the upturn.

In requesting internships graduates are making a reasonable request for collaboration; surely a solid foundation from which to build. If you treat graduates fairly (keeping them informed) you protect your brand and, importantly, you’ll reduce any pre-start drop out problems.

Finally, widening your search often makes great business sense. The recent Accenture report ‘Strategies for Achieving High Performance in a Multi-Polar World’, points out that high performing companies are best at both introducing new innovations and sourcing talent ‘wherever it may exist’, including in ‘populations that may have been overlooked previously’. Maybe it’s time recruiters listened harder to graduates?

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Also see how Rolls Royce has continued recruiting through the downturn on page 10.

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