

Competing for Top Talent in Today's Market

The competition for top talent has never been greater. Low unemployment, the need for highly skilled labor, a shortage of qualified candidates, and the openness towards relocation have all contributed to the increased difficulty to attract and retain top talent. The old way of recruiting does not work anymore. Talent Acquisition & Hiring Managers continue to rely on the philosophy that the candidate must sell them on why they want the job. I don't disagree with this, but in today's job market, a company must also focus on why and how they offer a great place to work. Qualified candidates have multiple options and are analyzing your business as much as you are evaluating them.

Here are four things to consider when competing for top talent:

- Hiring Process – It's amazing to me how many companies don't focus on having a quality hiring process. Companies that are successful in hiring top talent have streamlined their process to ensure that it is competitive in today's market. This includes being efficient and active with the candidates. Three areas to consider when assessing hiring process include:
 - Candidate Touch Points - I've seen many companies go 4-5 business days or longer without talking to a candidate that they have interest in. They rely on technology and automated systems to communicate to a potential hire, losing the ability to connect on a personal level. Remember, if you have a good candidate in process, there is a good chance another company is also pursuing them. Are they connecting with them on a personal level? Are they telling them why their company is a great place to work? My recommendation is to have frequent live touch points with the candidate and do not go more than a day without someone contacting them via a call, email (not automated) or text. This could make the difference in getting the hire you want!

- Length of Hiring Process – I've talked with a few companies recently that have an average hiring process of 6 weeks or longer. Should it really take almost two months to decide if someone can be a Maintenance Technician, Sales Rep or Leader at your company? Our data shows that your success rate drops dramatically after a candidate has been in process for 2 weeks for non-exempt, and 4 weeks for exempt roles. While I'm not recommending that you remove critical steps in your process that could result in a poor decision, you should focus on making hiring a priority. Be efficient and prepared to make a decision once you bring the candidates in for an interview.
- Number of Steps – When it comes to the length of the hiring process, I've seen it all. Recorded interviews, technical testing, personality profiling, gamification, group exercises, onsite hands-on tests, in-person presentations, and many more. At times, I have wondered how anyone can successfully navigate the gauntlet of interviews and tests that some companies have in place. But that's a different topic for a different day. I'm not trying to argue the merits of how effective these tools are, because they all can be effective if applied properly. However, it is possible to have too many of these in your hiring process. I spoke with a company recently that has four automated steps in their interview process before anyone speaks with the individual live. I cannot imagine how many good candidates are lost during that time. My recommendation is to use these resources wisely. Ask the question: what do we gain / lose by adding this step to our process? As mentioned before, you want your process to result in a good hire, but not at the cost of losing a lot of potential great ones.
- Compensation / Benefits – On the surface, this is straightforward, but I am continually surprised by the gap that exists between the market value of a candidate (based on their skillset) versus the target pay range. I recommend doing some research on

average pay for the role and the cost of living for that region to ensure you are competitive. Are you looking for someone whose market value is \$80,000 and you are only paying \$65,000? If so, you may need to adjust the type of candidate you are targeting. You can overcome a small pay gap by focusing on culture, career progression, hiring process, etc., but ultimately an individual's income is still a key factor in their decision to join your company.

- Interviewers / Hiring Managers – The individuals who conduct interviews represent your company culture. According to our surveys with candidates, the #1 cause for declined offers is a negative perception of the interviewer or hiring manager based on the candidate's experience throughout the hiring process. Many interviewers still feel they must be “tough” with candidates. Remember, candidates in this market have additional options, so being tough most likely will result in losing the hire. My advice is to hold training with anyone that is active in your interview process. Create a consistent message and culture that you would like the entire team to exhibit during interviews. I would start with the theme “focus on selling” – as in everyone should be selling the candidate on why your company is a great place to work.
- Career Progression – Candidates are switching companies and jobs faster than ever. It is very hard to keep an employee for 5 years, let alone 20-30 years. I have a client that has bucked this trend. If you walk through their office, you'll talk to people all over that have been with the organization for their entire career. Why? Most people would guess pay, but it's actually due to the company putting a focus on the employee's career. This company starts outlining opportunities to advance during the interview process and they follow up with it after they hire. The problem usually lies with the hiring manager because it's hard for them to talk about the “next job” with the candidate because they are focused on getting somebody qualified into the job that is open today. In reality, the two things go hand in hand. You will get the best qualified person today if you also put a focus on their future.

If you are a Hiring Manager or in Talent Acquisition at your company, I challenge you to review your process. Evaluate it to determine if you are competitive for the top candidates in today's market. Are you losing good candidates due to a lengthy process? Are you actively communicating with candidates? Do you have too many steps that become confusing and frustrating? Are your interviewers selling potential hires on the business?

The goal should be to have effective and efficient systems that ensure you attract and compete for the top talent in today's market. Remember, there is a shortage on good talent and they are most likely talking with other companies. To win, you must be better and faster!



Tim Sweeney

Director, Strategic Programs

Tim Sweeney is from Norfolk, VA, and studied Computer Science at the United States Naval Academy, graduating in 2002. As a Navy Surface Warfare Officer, Tim was attached to the USS Tarawa in San Diego. In 2003, he deployed for seven months with the Tarawa Amphibious Ready Group and Amphibious Squadron Seven, in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Following his service in the Navy, Tim joined Orion's Virginia Beach Office as an Account Executive in 2005. Tim was instrumental in the growth and expansion of the Virginia Beach office and has been a key contributor in developing Orion's Military Talent Programs (MTP) and RPO business. Tim was promoted to Director, Strategic Programs in 2016, and obtained Senior Partner status within the company in 2017.

Tim currently lives in Norfolk, VA, with his wife, Erin, and their four daughters, Kayla, Ashlin, Madison, and Riley.

200 Golden Oak Court
Suite 300
Virginia Beach, VA 23452
Office: (757) 998-8536
Cell: (757) 469-3011
tsweeney@orientalent.com



About Orion

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Orion Talent is a company known to break new ground in order to give businesses and job seekers more of what they need: opportunities and resources to excel at work. That is who we have been from the start when we were founded in 1991 with the mission to bring the energy, skills, and commitment abundant in military candidates to the greater marketplace.