

Rejection machine – the last recruitment taboo?

By Michelle Boyde

Do you work in a recruitment team or a rejection team? It's possible that you have not considered your role in this light before. Many employers decline far more candidates than they ever hire. The world's most popular employers will always have to deal with declining large numbers of candidates. However, due to the impact of the global economic crisis, employers of all sizes, from small start-ups to multinational conglomerates are facing the issue of declining candidates in large numbers. Today's rejects are possible future lateral hires and potential customers or business partners – do your processes protect your employer brand against this threat?



Charles Macleod
*Head of Global Resourcing and Mobility,
 PricewaterhouseCoopers, London, UK*

PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP is present in 150 countries and provides industry-focused assurance, tax and advisory service.

Headquarters: London (UK)
Employees: 160,000

The phrase rejection machine was coined by Charles Macleod, head of global resourcing and mobility at PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC). This is a very fitting phrase as PwC receives 20,000 to 25,000 applications for 1,000 jobs in the UK – they certainly do much more ‘rejecting’ than ‘recruiting’. This expression prompted Universum Quarterly to take a look at an aspect of the recruitment process many employers are reticent to discuss.

Engagement minimises bad feelings from the rejected

“The vast majority (80 per cent) of candidates are rejected before they even have a face-to-face meeting,” Macleod said. “Any experienced recruiter knows that at least if they have met you, had a connection, they feel they have had a chance. You have a problem when they do not feel they have had a chance.”

However, meeting 25,000 applicants when you only need 1,000 is a costly and time consuming business, Macleod suggested two tactics for when you cannot meet everyone:

1. Influence individuals to deselect themselves.

Communicate a concise employer brand and communicate transparently about the role. Filter questions can also be employed to help applicants deselect themselves further. An example for a classic for retail role being: “Are you prepared to work on weekends?”

2. Increase engagement.

An example is providing a link to try a psychometric test which they would usually take, allowing them to prepare for a future recruitment process. An excellent example is the Employability Guide, created by PwC. “This [employability] is the biggest issue for UK graduates,” Macleod explained. “Students want to know how to make the link between education and work, how to take what you have learnt and articulate this into an application or interview.” The guide is a constructive take-away. Students give their time to apply and even if an employer cannot ‘give’ them a job, they can give them career guidance.

How do students perceive rejection from employers?

“Students do not mind rejection,” said Bérangère Pagès, executive director corporate relations at HEC Paris. “They know there is tough competition for the same employers.”

“The biggest problem is when they do not get an answer,” explained Florence Da Costa, head of student career centre, EDHEC Business School in Lille, France. “Students accept a no, but they need to understand the negative response and require an explanation to understand the context.”

“In France, employers do not reply all the time,” Da Costa continued. “The employers who are best at rejecting candidates tend to have the best branding on campus. Different sectors conduct this part of the recruitment process better than others. In France, the banks do it best – they have a well-structured process.”

The crucial element is the delivery and the content of the message.

Create a quality response

“We are all customers, students like it when they know where in the application process they are and they like to get responses quickly,” Da Costa explained.

However, automated replies are a no-no. “It is not nice when students get an email with no comments,” Pagès warned. “Emails need to be written for the specific student.”

Both Pagès and Da Costa agree that a phone call is the best way – it does not need to be long, but it does allow for a dialogue that written communication does not.

Da Costa explained that in France, Proctor & Gamble (P&G) are a very good example of a company that have a recruitment process that incorporates quality responses: “P&G are very well organised, students complete the application form and then they are contacted within one or two weeks. If they are successful, they are asked to come in for a day session. At the end of the day the candidate gets an answer. P&G call this ‘Challenging Recruitment’ – it is great because students get answers quickly, but they also get dialogue,” Da Costa concluded.



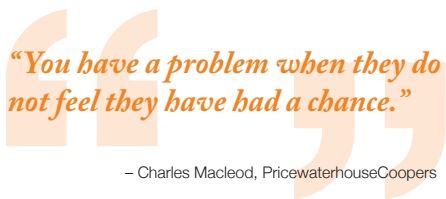


Rejection is a bitter pill

Students understand there is strong competition for positions at top employers; but it is successful employers who understand how to turn a negative response into a positive learning curve.

“At HEC, we really try to make students understand that being rejected is positive – its helps students, it’s not a failure, but an opportunity to improve – we really emphasis this,” Pagès concluded.

Engaging students and ensuring they have the opportunity to take something from the process is important. Equally, ensuring communication is personal and timely is also critical. If the interaction is wrong, it could impact future hiring at a lateral level and, as recruiters are all too acutely aware – students today share their experience at the click of a button.



“You have a problem when they do not feel they have had a chance.”

– Charles Macleod, PricewaterhouseCoopers

Is rejection taboo?

Despite the fact that employers do decline large numbers of candidates, discussing how this is done seems somewhat of a taboo. This article hoped to share best practices in this area; however, encouraging employers to discuss this in a public forum has proved difficult. If this is a topic you are interested in or your think your team has something to share in a follow-up story, please contact me on: michelle.boyde@universumeurope.com. ■

Florence Da Costa’s advice

- The more organised the recruitment process the better – it is ideal if applicants can follow their application online
- If the student does not make it past the first round an email is ok, but it must explain the reason why they have not progressed
- Once the candidate has had an interview you should decline them by phone
- Phone calls do not need to be long, just informative
- Automated emails are never received well
- Inform students of deadlines and make sure to respect them
- Sometimes it can be more important to have an answer, than a positive answer



Bérangère Pagès
Executive Director Corporate Relations, HEC Paris, Paris, France

HEC Paris is located in the heart of the thriving, diverse Paris business community, the school has earned international acclaim for its superior programmes, groundbreaking research and outstanding student body.

Number of students: Masters 2500 and MBA 200

Campuses: Lille, Nice and Paris, France

Macleod’s lessons learnt

1. *Open recruiters’ minds* – the people who have been engaged must be managed. Those who have made it to the wire, but do not get a job need to be well communicated with.
2. *Read applications* – if students take the time to fill them in, we need to take the time to read them, not scan them with a computer
3. *Take care of key performance indicators* – we are always keen to speed things up, but time delays are important, automated responses can be too quick
4. *Be honest about the criteria* – encourage candidates to rule themselves out by communicating the selection criteria transparently



Florence Da Costa
Head of Student Career Centre, EDHEC Business School, Lille, France

EDHEC Business School was created to meet the needs of Lille’s business community. Over the years, it has become a Grande École with national and, in the last ten years, international reach in the field of business management training.

Number of students: more than 5,000 across all programmes

Campuses: Lille, Nice and Paris, France