

OPINION

Just What the Doctor Ordered

Philip Carrigan
Partner, Optia Partners
philip@optiapartners.com

An American pharma company had spent many months and millions of yen retaining one of the world's leading recruitment firms to search for a medical doctor with a background in vaccines. The company was about to launch a potential blockbuster and needed medical specialists to help.

As 2007 rolled by we were referred to an MD with a background in public health. At this point we were not aware of the US pharma company's current search for an MD. We met the candidate and discussed her interests and ambitions. She was unsure about the exact career path an MD had at a pharmaceutical company but made it clear she did have a strong interest in public health. The woman made a positive impression and obviously had pharma industry potential.

We spoke with the candidate in general terms about the industry and explained that the executive search market in Japan was candidate driven.

There is a limited supply of executives who have expert medical knowledge, skills and abilities to operate in an international environment. We assured her that people with her skills were in demand.

We approached three of our clients regarding our new candidate, including the American pharma company, which was launching the vaccine.

The first company was not interested, and although it had a vaccine, senior management did not have the need for an MD without business experience.

The second company was looking for an MD who could operate within its medical affairs team. This company's pipeline did not include vaccines, but it did have an executive who knew how to close a deal.

The first meeting with the second company was less than impressive. The MD was left waiting in the lobby while the Human Resources department fumbled to find an appropriate room. Once the interviews were underway, the company representatives were under prepared and failed to sell their company with passion and conviction.

The candidate departed feeling uneasy and reluctantly agreed to a second meeting three weeks later with the foreign marketing director. Her interest was renewed. The MD discovered she would be involved in work she enjoyed and would gain

business experience.

An offer was given at the third meeting. The salary and conditions were competitive but there was no deadline or a sense of urgency. She had the impression the company would wait forever. "Did they really want me?" she asked herself.

I have noticed that pharma companies sometimes forget that candidates have options. They fail to sell themselves and show prospective employees they are wanted, needed and respected.

Our candidate also met with a third American pharma company. She met with an MD at this company and immediately felt she had a promising future with this organization. The US company's representatives demonstrated they respected her qualifications. They also empathized with the fact she had spent a number of years in public health and was now entering the business world. It would be a learning curve, and senior management were prepared to take a chance.

The meetings were held quickly, one after the other, and the company's MD followed up with emails. The company's medical doctor even went the extra mile and spent a relaxed evening over dinner discussing issues surrounding the pharma industry. The candidate appreciated this thoughtful gesture.

Once the company had decided it was ready to make an offer it was delivered quickly and a deadline was given.

The candidate accepted the offer and even though the area of therapeutic services was not her ideal choice, in the end, this was not the only issue. The MD was also looking for a cultural and environmental fit.

In short, the third company made the candidate feel she was valued. The senior management wanted to hire her but were not prepared to wait forever, the offer had an expiry date.

Like most of us, the MD had a strong desire to be wanted and to feel valued.

Most candidates join new companies not because of the products, the potential business or even the salary.

They simply join because of the people and how they make them feel.