

'Companies grow by hiring quality talent'

Gauri Kohli

How do you spot and attract talent?

Attracting talent is a continuous process of employer and talent branding. At senior leadership we place a lot of emphasis on references, whether through internal leaders with a track record for high performance or even from industry references. As a sales organisation, the bulk of our hires at frontline sales and supervisory levels are also recruited through internal references. Given the immense activity in social media, it is not very difficult to stay connected with good talent and also continuously communicate with them by using media to sustain visibility in the hiring space. Our pedigree as an employer of choice is also reflected in our parentage and in our growth story, especially in a challenging industry environment.

The best way to retain and nurture stars?

I believe that this starts with building a sustainable business story. High performers enjoy an environment that is challenging, and where the vision is clearly articulated in the form of measurable milestones. Our leadership hi-pot programme was initiated through a structured development centre approach which helped us identify talent and develop specific individual development plans. We employ specific fast-track career drivers for our sales organisation which gives career recognition and provides financial growth for our top performers as soon as it falls due. We also recognise the need for and support higher education for our frontline sales in their growth journey with SUD Life.

What kind of a workplace environment do you strive to create?

We invest heavily in ensuring that our business vision is continuously communicated right down to the junior-most resource. The CEO and the rest of the management team ensures that the continuous communication engagements within the

INCORPORATING LESSONS FROM POP CULTURE

Anil D'souza is head – HR with Star Union Dai-ichi [SUD Life] and has 20 years of experience in the field of HR. Having worked predominantly in the BFSI sector, he co-founded a boutique HR consulting practice which he led for a couple of years before joining SUD Life. He is an avid student of Indian philosophy and enjoys exploring and applying cultural

change interventions gleaned from his study of Buddhism. An avid interest in theatre, literature and cinema influenced and informed some of his experimental learning interventions. SUD Life was awarded Best HR Technology implementation by Banking Frontiers in association with Deloitte Partners in 2014



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organisation are structured such that our progress reports and future milestones are understood and internalised by all. Enabling a performance-oriented culture requires us to ensure that our reward and recognition programmes not just focus on the achiever but also gives visibility to all aspirants across the organisational pyramid through regular employee connect programmes. We pledge ourselves to our future growth story – we have ritualised this as a practice that speaks to each of us as our personal commitment to one other.

What specific attributes / values do you look for in candidates being interviewed?

The will to succeed is an imperative. To me, the right attitude is what makes up my mind on a candidate far more than the transactional achievements on a resume. The right attitude is reflected in the candidate's ability to articulate a perspective that is forward looking and innovative in the approach to problem solving. I also respect a leadership candidate who is brave and willing to share failure experiences from which any learnings derived are honest and not sensationalised. Most importantly I am looking for individual in for the long haul who are willing to listen to suggestions and open to collaboration.

What skillsets are you looking for when you are hiring for your company?

At leadership and supervisory levels, a hallmark of success to me is the candidate's ability to understand the organisational culture and explore the size of opportunity within the ambit of the existing culture. This also means that a prospective leader has to know which boundary lines can be challenged and stretched further so that the culture evolves organically and is future proofed without losing sight of the inherent strengths that the existing cultural framework provides. This sensitivity towards managing cultural transition is important for a leadership aspirant.

Do you check a candidate's social media profile when hiring and are you using social media for hiring?

While we do not do this formally today, our background check programme focuses on assessing past credentials in the workplace besides education checks and cross-referencing within the industry. We are not very overtly concerned with how our employees choose to lead their personal lives.

What is unique about the appraisal system you use to evaluate your employees?

The challenge with any appraisal mecha-

nism is to be able to create a framework that recognises the high performers and steady contributors while enabling these contributors to lean towards their potential as they progress towards the next assessment period. This year we chose to make our preparations by engaging with our supervisors using an assessment and development centre approach. We, for the first time, worked with the 360 format for our senior leaders. We find the 9 Box Grid very useful in simplifying our people assessments and have used the grid to good effect.

Are you hiring at the moment?

Yes. As a growing organisation we are continuously looking for good talent across levels. There is never a bad time for a good hiring decision. There are never enough great people in any company. Anytime is a good time for a great candidate. The challenge is the huge gap between the good and the great that requires a keen eye to sift through.

Positions most difficult to fill?

In insurance, actuarial and investment skills are hot skills. Equally important, leadership and supervisory positions across functions are always challenging and require greater lead time to find candidates who are not real compromises but the 'right ones for job demands'.

Best facilities in your organisation?

In addition to our fast-track career programmes, employees are encouraged to study further. We also offer a structured cash rewards for completion of various papers right up to the fellowship level. Sabbaticals for promising talent is equally encouraged. The company provides a library facility with literature and video material of different genres besides a well-equipped gymnasium at the corporate office. Being a life insurance company, we consider health care benefits such as life cover and hospitalisation benefits to be basic requirements for a healthy people practice.